



The Power of Mentor/Touchstone Texts:

Raising the Quality of Student Writing in a Writer's Workshop

Presented by Sarah Cordova and Ilene Cohn

Learning to Write from Writers: Using Mentor/Touchstone Texts

Schoolwide Inc. 2008

What are mentor/touchstone texts?

“Literature that is used by a writing community to study craft, genre, or another aspect of writing.”

“Pieces of literature that we can return to again and again as we help our young writers learn how to do what they may not be able to do on their own.”

“Texts that help students envision the kind of writer they can become; they help teachers move the writer, rather than each piece of individual writing, forward.”

“They help writers notice things about an author’s work that is not like anything they may have done before, and empower them to try something new.”

“They help students and teachers continually reinvent themselves as writers.”

“Mentor texts become our coaches and partners as we bring the joy of writing to our students.”

“Texts that serve to show, not just tell, students how to write well.”

Writing Workshop Structure

Sarah Cordova, 2009

Minilesson

(5-15 minutes)

- Whole class minilesson
- **One** teaching point each day; connected to the ongoing unit of study
- Includes modeling, using a mentor/touchstone text
- Includes “Engagement” where students “try it out” in a scaffolded environment before they head to their independent work
- Reiterates the strategy that students will be working on for the day

Independent Time

(20-30 minutes)

- Students **WRITE** on their own to practice the strategy taught in the minilesson (writer’s notebook, draft, final copy)
- Students make decisions about their own writing
- Partners work together to act as “the reader”
- Teacher confers with students (one on one, strategy writing lessons)

Share

(5-10 minutes)

- Teacher highlights great examples of the day’s strategy used in student writing (observations/conferences)
- Reiterate teaching point of the day
- Connect to tomorrow’s work- the writing process

Books Lead the Way

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Variety of Authors:	Children should be familiar with different authors from different backgrounds with different styles. Find for old and new favorites.
Variety of Language:	Does the writer have a way with words? Do the words create images or bring out the author's voice?
Variety of Topics/Ideas	Are the topics the author(s) chose to write about ones that my students will connect with or learn from or find intriguing? Do the author's ideas show how writers are inspired by what they see, hear, think, experience or care about?
Variety of Structure (Organization)	Is the story a narrative, a single event, a descriptive list? How are the text and illustrations presented? Does the book use multiple frames? Close ups, scenes...? What type of writing is this text? Are features of the genre evident? Can my students find this type of writing in their world?
Books as models:	Is the text accessible to the students? Will the students be inspired and think, "I can write like that."
Neat Features:	Does the book have an interesting Author's Note, Dedication, Engaging illustrations?

Look for texts that have something in them or about them that can add to your students' knowledge base of how to write well. These books are meant to show your students what is possible!

The Stages of the Writing Process

"Here's the secret of writing: there is no secret. But there is a process."

-Ralph Fletcher

We want to teach student and teachers to value the process, not the product.

Generating Ideas: The time to “brainstorm” lots of possible ideas for topics. Various strategies are used to gather seeds which might has the potential to turn into a published piece

Selecting an Idea: The time to encourage students to find subjects that matter and are relevant to their purpose and intention; Writers think about what more they have to say, the impact on a potential reader and if the topic is important to them

Collecting: The time to provide students with strategies for developing and researching their ideas. This stage is where students will collect more information to add to their draft.

Drafting: Help students envision, plan, and organize finished text. This is the time for organization and making meaning for the reader.

Revision: Guide students to effectively craft their writing to fit genre, purpose, and meet the needs of their intended audience. ‘Re-seeing’ their work. Thinking about a potential reader and making the writing interesting and engaging for them.

Editing: Provide “skill” (spelling, punctuation, grammar) instruction directly related to student texts.

Publishing: Celebrate and authenticate students’ writing by preparing writing for an audience of readers.

Reading Like a Writer:

Thinking about the writer behind the words, noticing author's craft, imagining the teaching possibilities.

Sarah Cordova, 2009

Here are some things to think about as you “Post-it” your mentor texts to use them during Immersion and throughout your unit. Always ask yourself, “WHY did the author/illustrator add this? How does it affect the way I read, see, experience this text, as a reader?”

Writer's Craft

- How is the poem organized? (sequential order, list, small moment, snapshots, leads and endings, shape poem)
- What do you notice about the way the sentences are structured (paragraphs, short vs. long sentences, etc.)?
- What interesting language/writer's craft do you notice (literary devices, beautiful language, etc.)?

Illustrations/Photographs

- How do the illustrations and/or photographs help you, the reader, to understand the writing in a deeper way? How do the illustrations/photographs keep you engaged (connect to your emotions)?
- What do you notice about how the writing is structured/organized in relationship to the illustrations (text on top/bottom, bordered, left/right, on top of illustrations, etc.)?

Author's Purpose/Inspiration

- What do you think inspired the author to write this?
- Can you tell anything about the writer from the dedication or author blurb?
- What is the writer's purpose? (to entertain, instruct, persuade, to evoke an emotional response, to provide another point of view, to record an experience, etc.)
- Who is the audience?

Purposeful Punctuation

- What do you notice about the use of punctuation (ellipses, exclamation points, colons, em dashes, etc.)?
- What kind of techniques (white space, line breaks, bold or different print), caps does the poet use to show you how the poem should be read?
- Always ask yourself, “WHY did the author/illustrator add this? How does it affect the way I read, see, experience this text, as a reader?”

Keep in mind that you will only share a FEW examples of your Post-its; the ones that you feel like your students will say, “I could do that in my own writing!”

The Architecture of a Minilesson

Sarah Cordova, 2009

INFORM- Connection/Direct Instruction/“Listen Up” Phase

- Lasts no longer than a minute
- Put today’s mini-lesson in the context of ongoing class work
- “Today writers, we’re going to be thinking about/working on/looking at . . . because . . .”
- Connects to rationale

PRESENT- Demonstration/Teach/“Let me show you”

- Teaching the students something they’ll use often as they write
- Name the strategy and show how and when they will use it
- Model (demonstrate, explain and show an example of a mentor text)
- This strategy will be something they may use today as they write in class and/or something that they will be able to use in the future.
- This strategy can be stored in their “Reader’s Tool Box” for later use.

ENGAGE “Try it Out” phase

- This is an opportunity to let the students try what you have taught in a scaffolded environment.
- They practice the strategy right in front of you/on “the rug” and try out what they have learned.
- This could be a guided practice or the students can talk to a partner about what they saw and what they plan to do.
- This phase allows you to assess understanding quickly and quietly BEFORE students go out “on their own” to use the strategy.
- Sometimes classmates can “remediate” the misunderstanding before you even have to step in to help.

** If you find students who do not understand the strategy at this point in the minilesson, you have 2 options:

- ◆ Remediate right then and there on the rug and try to “catch” the misunderstanding before students work independently
- ◆ If this does not work, you can group the few students who are still missing the strategy and work with them when students go off to write independently.

REITERATE- The Send Off

- Link the mini-lesson to the ongoing work of today’s workshop
- Some students may use the strategy right away, some may not. There may be times you want everyone to incorporate it into their writing.
- Dismiss children to their writing spot to work independently.
- Brings the lesson full circle back to the inform portion

- A reminder of what we're doing today in Writer's Workshop and why.

OPTIONAL:

Mid-Workshop Teaching Point

- Halfway through independent writing time you speak to the entire group.
- You draw attention to something you saw during observations, conferencing, an example of good writing or an issue with which you see students struggling

SHARE- After the Workshop "Share"/Reinforcement

- At the end of workshop, students gather back on the rug for a share session.
- This is an opportunity to reinforce the strategy taught by exemplifying some student work.
- You can highlight the work of 2-3 students who used the strategy very well or students who struggled at the start of the independent writing time but then had an "AHA" moment and are now using it correctly.
- Students *can* share during this time but watch your time as you want to make sure this is short and always reinforcing the strategy taught or something positive that came of today's work
- You can remind students what to do for homework that evening and repeat the strategy once again for further clarification.

**Questions or comments?
Please feel free to contact us. We look
forward to hearing from you.**

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