

A Teacher's Guide to

# Mentor

# Texts

grades  
K-5

★ Carl Anderson ★

Heinemann  
Portsmouth, NH

## Heinemann

145 Maplewood Avenue, Suite 300  
Portsmouth, NH 03801  
[www.heinemann.com](http://www.heinemann.com)

© 2022 by Carl Anderson

All rights reserved, including but not limited to the right to reproduce this book, or portions thereof, in any form or by any means whatsoever, without written permission from the publisher. For information on permission for reproductions or subsidiary rights licensing, please contact Heinemann at [permissions@heinemann.com](mailto:permissions@heinemann.com).

*Heinemann's authors have devoted their entire careers to developing the unique content in their works, and their written expression is protected by copyright law. We respectfully ask that you do not adapt, reuse, or copy anything on third-party (whether for-profit or not-for-profit) lesson-sharing websites.*

—Heinemann Publishers

“Dedicated to Teachers” is a trademark of Greenwood Publishing Group, LLC

The author and publisher wish to thank those who have generously given permission to reprint borrowed material:

“What do we mean by . . .” tweet by @FletcherRalph on February 18, 2022. Reprinted by permission Ralph Fletcher.

“Students need to read as . . .” tweet by @Tom\_Newkirk on December 5, 2021. Reprinted by permission of Tom Newkirk.

Excerpts from *Finding the Heart of Nonfiction: Teaching 7 Essential Craft Tools with Mentor Texts* by Georgia Heard. Copyright © 2013 by Georgia Heard. Published by Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH. Reprinted by permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

*JABARI JUMPS*. Copyright © 2017 by Gaia Cornwall. Reproduced by permission of the publisher, Candlewick Press, Somerville, MA.

“Surprising Saturn” by Liz Huyck, *Ask*, November 2019 © by Cricket Media, Inc. Reproduced with permission. All Cricket Media material is copyrighted by Cricket Media and/or various authors and illustrators.

Any commercial use or distribution of material without permission is strictly prohibited. Please visit <https://cricketmedia.com/childrens-content-licensingfor> for licensing and <http://www.cricketmedia.com> for subscriptions.

“Summer Homework Should Be Banned” by Nancy Kalish. From *TIME for Kids*. © 2009 TIME USA LLC. All rights reserved. Used under license.

p. 60, online resources: 6–7 NASA/JPL/Space Science Institute; p. 61, online resources: 6–7 NASA/JPL/Space Science Institute; 7 (RB) NASA/JPL–Caltech; 7 (RT) ©Peter Hermes Furian/Shutterstock; 7 (RT-2) © Macrovector/Shutterstock; p. 63, online resources: 8 (BC) NASA/JPL–Caltech/SSI; 8 (LT) NASA/JPL–Caltech; 8 (RB) NASA/JPL–Caltech/Space Science Institute/Hampton University; 8 (RC) NASA/JPL–Caltech/SSI/Cornell; 8 (RT-2) © Imfoto/Shutterstock; 8–11 © M. Aurelius/Shutterstock; 10 (LB) NASA/JPL–Caltech/Space Science Institute; 10 (LT) NASA/JPL–Caltech/Space Science Institute; 10 (RB) NASA, ESA, JPL, SSI, and Cassini Imaging Team; 10 (RT) NASA/JPL–Caltech/Space Science Institute; online resources: 8–11 © M. Aurelius/Shutterstock; 9 (LB) NASA/JPL–Caltech/Space Science Institute; 9 (RB) NASA/JPL–Caltech/Space Science Institute/Hampton University; 11 (BC) NASA/JPL–Caltech.

*credits continue on page 127*

**Library of Congress Control Number: 2022941884**

978-0-325-13281-5

**Editor:** Heather Anderson

**Production:** Patty Adams

**Cover and interior designs:** Vita Lane

**Videography:** Paul Tomasyan, Dennis Doyle, and Sherry Day

**Typesetting:** Vita Lane and Gina Poirier Design

**Manufacturing:** Val Cooper

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

1 2 3 4 5 MP 26 25 24 23 22 PO#34942



# Book Map

## 1 → What Is a Mentor Text?

### 6 Why Is It So Important to Teach with Mentor Texts?

- 6 1. Creative people study the work of mentors.
- 8 2. Students learn that writing and reading are interconnected.
- 9 3. Mentor texts help students navigate each stage of the writing process.
- 10 4. Mentor texts enable you to teach writing descriptively.
- 12 5. Mentor texts help students teach themselves about writing.

### 14 You Can Teach with Mentor Texts in Many Ways

### 16 Examples of How Mentor Texts Help Children Write Well

- 16 Danya's Book, Grade 1
- 21 Excerpts from Alyssa's Feature Article, Grade 4

### 23 What Will You Learn About How to Use Mentor Texts in This Book?

## 24 → Reading Like a Writer

### 29 Three Ways to "Read Like a Writer"

- 29 1. Writers read like a writer as part of their reading lives.
- 30 2. Writers read like a writer to build a craft repertoire.
- 32 3. Writers read like a writer to study a specific craft technique.

### 35 Teaching Implications

### 36 Try Reading Like a Writer Yourself







38 **3** → **Step 1:  
Find Your Own  
Mentor Texts**

- 39 **What Texts Will You Need?**
- 40 **How Many Texts Will You Need?**
- 41 **Choosing Mentor Texts**
- 44 **Finding Good Mentor Texts**
- 46 **Organizing Your Collection  
of Mentor Texts**
- 47 **Take It to Your Classroom**
- 47 **If You're Starting a Collection of Mentor Texts**
- 48 **If You're Assessing an Already Existing Collection  
of Mentor Texts**



50 **4** → **Step 2: Get to  
Know Your  
Mentor Texts**

- 51 **Analyze a Text for Multiple  
Teaching Points**
- 53 **Analyzing a Text for Focus**
- 54 **Analyzing a Text for Structure**
- 55 **Analyzing a Text for Detail**
- 56 **Analyzing a Text for Voice**
- 57 **Analyzing a Text for Conventions**
- 58 **Analyzing *Jabari Jumps* for  
Multiple Teaching Points**
- 62 **Analyzing "Surprising Saturn"  
for Multiple Teaching Points**
- 66 **Analyzing "Summer Homework Should  
Be Banned" for Multiple Teaching Points**
- 68 **How Can You Do This Kind  
of Analysis Yourself?**



70

## 5 → Step 3: Immerse Students in Mentor Texts

### 72 Students Should Have an Immersion Experience for Several Reasons

- 72 Reading mentor texts gets students excited about writing in a unit.
- 72 Students start learning about craft when they hear texts read aloud.
- 73 Students start learning about craft when they see the texts.
- 73 Students start talking about how the texts are crafted.

### 74 Methods for Immersing Students in Mentor Texts

- 74 1. The first way to familiarize students with mentor texts is by reading them aloud to your students.
- 77 2. Another way to immerse students in mentor texts is to have students read some themselves.

### 79 End Immersion by Nudging Students to Respond to the Mentor Texts as Writers

- 79 1. The first way you can invite your students to talk about the mentor texts as writers is in a whole-class discussion.
- 81 2. You can also have students respond to the mentor texts as writers in small groups, which has several advantages.

### 82 Planning the Immersion Phase of a Unit

84

## 6 → Step 4: Lead Whole-Class Text Study

### 87 How to Do Whole-Class Text Study: Five Steps

- 89 Step 1: Reread the mentor text.
- 91 Step 2: Students share what they noticed.
- 91 Step 3: Select which parts to discuss.
- 92 Step 4: Discuss several craft techniques.
- 98 Step 5: Invite students to try out the craft techniques.



102

## 7 → Step 5: Teach with Mentor Texts

### 104 Two Types of Lessons

104 1: Direct Instruction

106 2: Inquiry

### 108 Mini-Lessons

### 110 Small-Group Lessons

### 113 Writing Conferences

### 113 How Does a Craft or Conventions Conference Go?

114 Part 1: Discover what kind of work a student  
is doing as a writer.

117 Part 2: Assess the work the student is doing,  
and decide what to teach.

117 Part 3: Teach the student how to do what they're  
doing better.

### 123 Try It Yourself: Improve Your Teaching

124 References





# About the Online Resources and Videos in This Book



**The online resources for *A Teacher's Guide to Mentor Texts K-5*** include student writing and mentor texts that are discussed in the book, as well as forms, charts, and table tents that will help you as you teach with mentor texts.

Online Resource 1.1	Student Writing: Danya's "Goofy Gorilla" book
Online Resource 1.2	Student Writing: Alyssa's "Skateboarding! For beginners"
Online Resource 3.1	Mentor Text Planning Form
Online Resource 4.1	Link to "Surprising Saturn"
Online Resource 4.2	Link to "Summer Homework Should Be Banned"
Online Resource 4.3	Guide to Analyzing a Mentor Text
Online Resource 5.1	Table Tent: Whole-Class Immersion
Online Resource 5.2	Blank Form: Small-Group Immersion: Responding as Readers
Online Resource 5.3	Blank Form: Small-Group Immersion: Responding as Writers
Online Resource 6.1	Blank Version of Whole-Class Text Study Chart
Online Resource 6.2	Table Tent: Whole-Class Text Study
Online Resource 7.1	Table Tent: Mini-Lesson (Direct Instruction)
Online Resource 7.2	Table Tent: Mini-Lesson (Inquiry)
Online Resource 7.3	Table Tent: Small-Group Lesson (Direct Instruction)
Online Resource 7.4	Table Tent: Small-Group Lesson (Inquiry)
Online Resource 7.5	Table Tent: Writing Conference (Direct Instruction)
Online Resource 7.6	Table Tent: Writing Conference (Inquiry)
Online Resource 7.7	10 Tips for Conferring with Student Writers Online



**You'll also find a welcome video,** and 23 videos of Carl teaching that will help you envision the work you're reading about at various points in the book. Along with these videos, you'll find commentary from Carl that will help you better understand the teaching you see.

Video 1.1	Welcome Reader
Video 5.1	Immersion with Primary Students
Video 5.2	Immersion with Upper-Grade Students
Video 6.1	Whole-Class Text Study with Primary Students
Video 6.2	Whole-Class Text Study with Upper-Grade Students
Video 7.1	Direct Instruction Mini-lesson—Primary Grades
Video 7.2	Inquiry Mini-lesson—Primary Grades
Video 7.3	Direct Instruction Mini-lesson—Upper Grades
Video 7.4	Inquiry Mini-lesson—Upper Grades
Video 7.5	Small-Group Lesson—Primary Grades
Video 7.6	Small-Group Lesson—Upper Grades
Videos 7.7–7.13	Writing Conferences—Primary Grades
Videos 7.14–7.19	Writing Conferences—Upper Grades



CHAPTER

1

What is  
a Mentor  
Text?





**I**n Beverly Cleary’s book *Ramona Quimby, Age 8*, Ramona’s teacher, Mrs. Whaley, assigns her class a book report. She tells her students she wants them to “sell the book” to their classmates.

Ramona is anxious about the assignment. She wants her report about her book, *Left-Behind Cat*, to be interesting, unlike the boring ones that her sister Beezus says kids write that end with platitudes like “If you want to know what happens next, read the book.”

To help sell her book, Ramona uses what she learns from watching . . . a cat food commercial! As she writes her report, Ramona incorporates what she noticed about how the writers of the commercial gave it rhythm and cadence to get viewers to take notice and, hopefully, buy their product:

**Kids who have tried *Left-Behind Cat* are all smiles, smiles, smiles. *Left-Behind Cat* is the book kids ask for by name. Kids can read it every day and thrive on it. The happiest kids read *Left-Behind Cat* . . .**

For decades, readers have loved reading about the ever-resourceful Ramona who, in this story, reads a *mentor text* like a writer to help her figure out how to craft her writing. How can you help your students be like Ramona?



• WORDS FROM TEACHING MENTORS •

*“Mentor texts enable student writers to become connected to the dynamic world of professional writers.”*

**Allison Marchetti and  
Rebekah O’Dell (2015)**

• WORDS FROM A TEACHING MENTOR •

*“Mentor texts are words that writers wish they had written themselves.”*

**Georgia Heard (2013)**

The answer is to put mentor texts at the center of how you teach writing. By doing so, you’ll be able to show your students how to learn from them like Ramona does. When you use mentor texts to teach writing, you’re doing one of the most important things you can to help students learn to write well.

A *mentor text* is a well-written text you show students to help them see how they can craft their own writing and also how to use writing conventions effectively. Mentor texts can be published texts by well-known authors, texts you’ve written yourself, or texts written by your students.

The word *mentor* is a reference to the ancient Greek epic poem, *The Odyssey* (Heard 2013; Panagiotakopoulos 2019). You may remember from your high school English class that when Odysseus left home for the Trojan War, he left his son Telemachus in the care of a guardian named Mentor. Later in the story, the goddess Athena disguised herself as Mentor and gave Telemachus advice on how to deal with his personal dilemmas. Just like Telemachus learned from Mentor/Athena, your students will learn about writing from the authors of mentor texts. And although you won’t have to disguise yourself as a Greek god, you’ll similarly guide students as they learn from these texts.

 **Video 1.1** *Welcome Reader*





# Q & A

## What do we mean by *craft* and *conventions*?

When we write, we have to decide *what* a piece will be about. And we have to decide *how* we are going to write the piece. When we talk about the craft of writing and writing conventions, we're talking about *how* a piece is written.

Experienced writers know a great deal about the craft of writing. When they write a text, they draw upon their knowledge of the ways introductions and endings can go, the kinds of transitions writers use to move readers from part to part, the types of details they can include in a section, the ways sentences can be structured, and much more.

The terms *craft technique*, *crafting technique*, and *craft move* are synonyms that refer to the specific aspects of craft writers decide to use in a piece of writing. For example, when writers decide to start a nonfiction piece with a question lead, they are using a craft technique, as is the decision to begin a narrative scene with a time transition. Likewise, when writers decide to use various types of detail, such as dialogue and character actions and feelings, they're using crafting techniques. And when writers write a list of adjectives, they are making a craft move.

Experienced writers also know a great deal about writing *conventions*, the commonly accepted ways to make texts clear and understandable to readers. Conventions include punctuation, capitalization, grammar, and paragraphing.

When writers write well—that is, they use crafting techniques and conventions successfully—we say their writing has the *qualities of good writing* (focus, structure, detail, voice, and conventions). For example, when a writer includes action and descriptive facts in their nonfiction writing, we say their writing is *detailed*. Or when a writer skillfully uses the craft moves of speaking directly to the reader, or writing bold or italicized words, we say that their writing has *voice*.

It's important to note the illustrations in texts are crafted, and illustrators make numerous craft moves, too. For example, illustrators use the craft technique of zooming in to their subject (as well as zooming out to show an entire scene). And they use the crafting technique of motion lines to indicate movement.



Over the course of the year, you will use mentor texts to teach lessons about every quality of writing. Some of these lessons include:

## Quality of Writing

## Teaching Points

### Focus

Ways writers focus texts (on a single topic or part of a topic or by developing an idea about a topic)

Ways of focusing illustrations (wide-angle view, zooming into a part of a scene or topic)

### Structure

Component parts of genres (narrative scenes, nonfiction sections, etc.)  
Ways writers organize the parts of their texts

Leads and endings  
Ways of transitioning readers from part to part in a text

### Detail

Kinds of genre-specific details  
Ways writers write details with precision  
Word choice

Detail-to-detail transitions  
Internal text structures (how details are organized in sections)  
Ways of adding details to illustrations

### Voice

Ways writers use punctuation to create voice  
Kinds of sentence structures that give writing voice

Creating voice with word choice

### Conventions

Punctuation  
Capitalization

Paragraphing  
Grammar

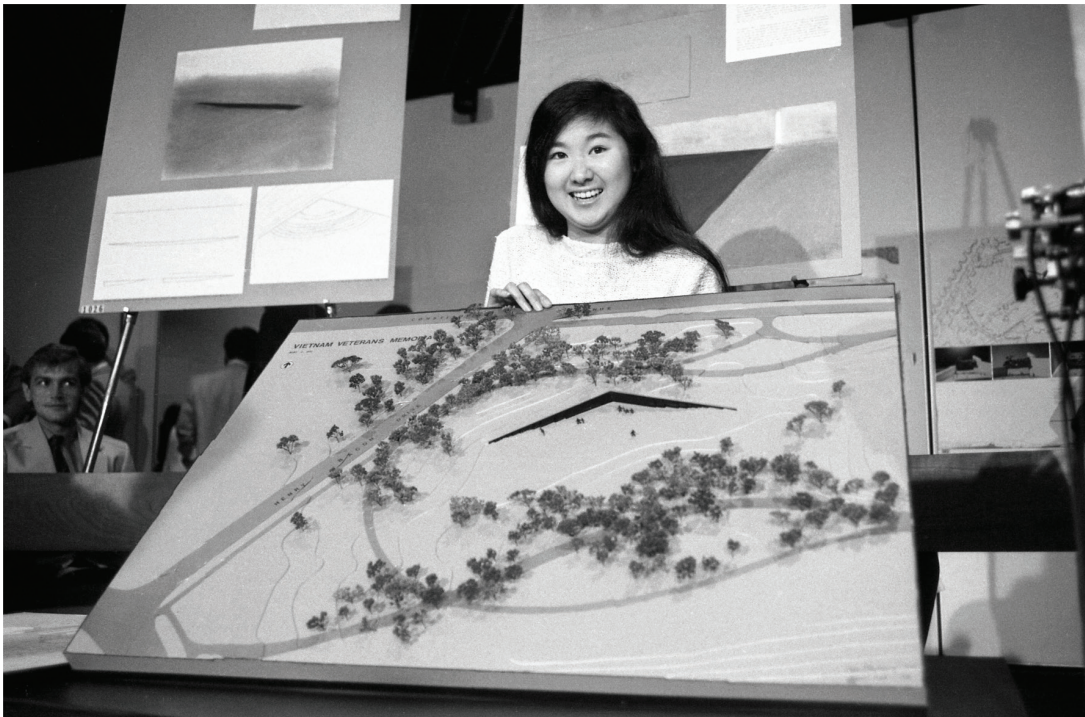


# Why Is It So Important to Teach with Mentor Texts?

When you use mentor texts in these ways, you are doing big work that will help your students grow as writers. Here's why.

## 1. Creative people study the work of mentors.

When you read about creative people, such as designers, painters, and musicians, you'll find they learn how to craft their work from studying the work of exemplary people in their fields and others that inspire them:



← Maya Lin, the designer of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC, was influenced by East Asian design ideas such as simplicity and sensitivity to landscape, as well as by studying the Memorial Rotunda at Yale University, where she was a student when she came up with her design for the Vietnam Memorial (Klein 2020; Park 2020).

Painter Jacob Lawrence, whose many works include *The Migration Series*, a group of sixty paintings that depict the Great Migration of Black Americans from the South to the North in the first part of the twentieth century, studied the paintings of Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco. Lawrence incorporated what he learned about structure and color from Orozco into his own work (The Whitney Museum 2020–21).



When the rock group The Beatles went into the studio to record new songs, they often played songs by their favorite musicians, such as Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and Buddy Holly, and then used some of the musical “moves” they heard in these songs in their own compositions (Jackson 2021).





→ Recently, educators have written about combining writing and reading workshop into what they call *literacy studio* (Keene 2022) or *literacy workshop* (Walther and Biggs-Tucker 2020). In these models, students can readily see the connections between writing and reading.

## 2. Students learn that writing and reading are interconnected.

When you read profiles of authors, you'll find they read the writing of other writers and learn from them ways to write their own texts, just like other kinds of creative people do when they study the work of their mentors. There is a special term that we use for this kind of reading—*reading like a writer*.

Students often consider writing and reading to be separate subjects in school, which makes sense considering they often have writing and reading workshops scheduled at different times each day. When you teach with mentor texts and help students learn to read like writers, you are showing them that writing and reading are not separate activities, but are actually linked closely together. Realizing that they'll become better writers by doing a lot of reading is one of the most important insights that your students will learn in your writing workshop!

### • WORDS FROM A TEACHING MENTOR •

*“Not all readers are writers,  
but all writers are readers.”*

**Ralph Fletcher (2013)**





### 3. Mentor texts help students navigate each stage of the writing process.

As students move through the stages of the writing process—rehearsal, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing—what they learn from reading mentor texts helps them navigate each stage:

#### Rehearsal

As part of the *rehearsal* stage of the writing process, writers envision how a draft will go before they start to write it, often by touching each page of a book before they start drafting, or by making a flowchart, web, or outline. To do this work well, writers think about mentor texts they've read and what they've noticed about the way the authors organized them, and then writers use what they've learned to help them structure their own writing.

#### Drafting

When writers are in the *drafting* stage of the writing process, they envision each part of the draft before they write it—how they'll write the lead, what kind of details they'll use to compose each section, which punctuation marks they'll use to give sentences cadence and voice, how they'll end the text. As they make these decisions during the drafting process, writers think about how the authors of the mentor texts they've read use these craft techniques, and then they try them out in their drafts.

#### Revising

Next writers *revise*, or make changes to their draft to make it a better piece of writing. There are hundreds of kinds of revisions that writers make, from reworking a lead, reorganizing the sections, adding detail to a section, or shortening a sentence. One way writers decide what changes to make is by comparing what they've done to what they've seen other writers do in mentor texts that they've read.

#### Editing

Once revisions are complete, writers *edit* their writing for errors. They bring to the editing process a visual memory of how sentences are written and punctuated in the mentor texts they've read.

#### Publishing

Finally, writers *publish* their writing, that is, make it public by sharing it with readers. Today, the publishing process often involves making decisions about layout and graphics, decisions that writers are able to make with more panache if they've seen how other writers and illustrators made these decisions in similar texts.



## 4. Mentor texts enable you to teach writing descriptively.

Students aren't the only ones who benefit from mentor texts—you'll also benefit as a teacher from using them in your writing workshop.

One of the challenges you face in your teaching is figuring out how to explain with precision something that writers do in texts. When you use mentor texts in your teaching, you have concrete examples at your fingertips. You can describe them for your students in mini-lessons, small groups, and writing conferences. This is enormously helpful for students, as they both *see* the example from a mentor text and *hear* you describe what the writer has done.

Using mentor texts to explain with precision how writers craft their texts is a very different approach to teaching writing. Traditionally, teachers have taught writing *prescriptively*. That is, they have told students what to do when they write in ways that are too general to be of use to students.

Here are a few things teachers typically say about writing to students. Contrast these with the excerpts from texts that show what writers actually do when they craft their writing—and with how you could describe with precision what writers actually do when they compose texts:

### • WORDS FROM A TEACHING MENTOR •

*“What do we mean by craft in writing? I think of the writer’s craft as the intentional use of language to create the effect you want. All writers must decide WHAT to write about, but that’s just the first step. Craft involves HOW you write about your subject.”*

**Ralph Fletcher (2022)**

Instead of prescriptively  
telling students what  
to do as writers . . .

"Write an introduction that hooks  
your readers."

Show them a  
mentor text . . .

"Evelyn Del Rey is my mejor amiga,  
my número uno best friend."  
(From *Evelyn Del Rey Is Moving  
Away*, by Meg Medina)

That will allow you to  
describe precisely what  
writers do.

"There are lots of ways to begin  
stories, and Meg Medina uses a  
really powerful one in *Evelyn Del  
Rey Is Moving Away*. She starts  
by giving readers an important  
background detail—that Evelyn  
is the best friend of the narrator,  
Daniela. By revealing this detail  
at the very beginning of the story,  
Meg Medina helps us understand  
immediately how big a deal it is  
that Evelyn is moving away."

"Add lots of detail to your writing."

"Lurking below the water's surface,  
a croc lies in wait for its prey.  
When an unsuspecting animal  
passes by, the 1,000-pound beast  
explodes out of the water, grabs  
its victim, and drags it under the  
water to drown. Yikes!" (From  
*Deadliest Animals*, by Melissa  
Stewart)

"In this section, Melissa Stewart  
elaborates by writing several  
action facts—in this case, things  
that crocodiles do with their  
bodies. We learn what crocodiles  
do with their whole bodies—the  
1,000-pound beast explodes out of  
the water—and also a part of its  
body, its claws—'grabs its victim'  
and 'drags it under the water to  
drown.'"



## 5. Mentor texts help students teach themselves about writing.



It's important you realize that no matter how good a writing teacher you are, you can't possibly teach your students everything they need to become good writers. There is just too much to learn about writing and not enough time for you to teach all of it, either in a unit of study, across a school year, or even during many years of writing instruction. Writes educator Frank Smith (1983), "[W]riting requires an enormous fund of specialized knowledge which cannot be acquired from lectures, textbooks, drill, trial and error, or even from the exercise of writing itself."

How, then, will students manage to learn all they need to become good writers? Or continue to learn about writing even after they leave your writing workshop? The answer is to surround them with mentor texts!

Just by hearing mentor texts read aloud, reading mentor texts to themselves, and looking at mentor texts that you project via a document camera or SMART Board, your students will learn about aspects of writing you haven't explicitly taught, as they continually read texts like a writer.

And, with your guidance, students will get better at reading like a writer during the time they spend in your writing workshop. They'll bring their improved ability to read like a writer into the future and will continue to learn about writing, even when they're not in a writing workshop—by finding and studying their own mentor texts.







# You Can Teach with Mentor Texts in Many Ways:

You'll teach with mentor texts in writing workshop, when students are composing pieces of writing, and with instruction from you, are becoming better writers. Each day of writing workshop is part of a multi-week unit of study, during which you'll teach your class about an aspect of craft or process.

## Mini-lesson (10–12 minutes)

A mini-lesson is a whole-class lesson about a writing strategy, craft technique, or language convention. When mini-lessons focus on craft or conventions, you'll teach with mentor texts.



## Independent writing (25–30 minutes)

Students work on their writing. As students write, you'll have 1:1 writing conferences with several of them, and also lead small-group lessons. When conferences and small-group lessons are about craft or conventions, you'll teach with mentor texts.



## Share session (5–10 minutes)

The class reconvenes to discuss how writing went that day, either to highlight student work, or to give feedback to a few students about their drafts-in-process.





On some days of units, you'll suspend the usual structure of writing workshop:



### Immersion

During the first few days of a craft unit of study, you'll *immerse* your students in the mentor texts you'll be teaching within the unit. You'll do this by reading the texts aloud, and by having students read some of them themselves.

### Whole-class text study

Also in craft studies, you'll devote one or several days to *whole-class text study*, in which you'll guide your class as they study mentor texts from the current unit, and discuss with their classmates what they notice about them.



There are several books that give an overview of writing workshop: Katherine Bomer and Corrine Aren's *A Teacher's Guide to Writing Workshop Essentials* (2020), Ralph Fletcher's *Writing Workshop: The Essential Guide* (2001), and Stacy Shubitz and Lynne Dorfman's *Welcome to Writing Workshop* (2019).

#### • WORDS FROM A TEACHING MENTOR •

*"I can't help students write well by myself. I need lots of help doing this teaching work, and I have found that help on the shelves of my library."*

Katie Wood Ray, 1999