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Introduction to the Second Edition

Welcome to the new edition of *Mentor Texts: Teaching Writing Through Children's Literature, K–6*. During the past decade, we have continued to develop our thinking, revisiting the work of our tried-and-true mentors and learning from new mentors as well. These mentors include both children's and professional authors, teachers, and students. We have closely followed the work of Peter Johnston (2012) and Carol Dweck (2008), whose thinking provides new energy for writing workshop regardless of grade level. Like Peter Johnston, we see a writing community as a giant think tank. The rich discussions that center around the use of mentor texts and the attention to writing process engineer a growth mind-set built on hard work, persistence, and ongoing reflection. When students are willing to take risks and seek feedback, they can continue to grow as writers through practice and effort.

We have also read extensively about the importance of close reading from the work of Lehman and Roberts (2013) and Fisher and Frey (2014). Close reading occurs in writing workshop, too. As a student examines a mentor text, he chooses what he would like to lift and imitate in his own writing. Eventually, he revises in ways to make this craft, convention, or organizational structure something he will use again and again. Close reads in writing workshop provide the gentle nudges to move our students forward as writers so they may grow. By studying mentor texts and mentor authors, students become increasingly more sophisticated and better equipped to write in different forms and genres. They learn to vary their sentence lengths and patterns and produce texts that are largely satisfying for their target audiences.

What's New in This Edition

New Titles

In our first edition, we clearly defined what we mean by a *mentor text*. Although some teachers use the term *touchstone texts* to describe books that serve as models for students, we take a slightly different view. A touchstone can be a word such as *dog* to help a reader remember the sound of *d*. It can be a phrase such as “furrow followed free” from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* to remember alliteration. It can be a book that uses one word to organize a story such as *Suddenly!* by Colin McNaughton (1998). To us, a touchstone text is remembered for a specific purpose. Throughout this book, you will find many titles that can be used to teach a particular skill or strategy. Some books may be touchstone texts, but you will discover other titles that are used over and over. These books serve as our mentor texts—books that we know well and love deeply. In this edition, we have included new titles within the chapters and in the updated Treasure Chest. Just as a librarian examines her collection at the end of a school year to remove titles that have lost their appeal or are simply outdated, classroom teachers examine their set of mentor texts to determine whether new titles may serve their students in a better way. Sometimes this is a random discovery—you may realize you are returning to a new read-aloud in student conferences for several different purposes. We offer many titles for you to explore in the hopes that you will make your own decisions about which mentor texts will best serve the needs and purposes of you and your students. We have tried to include new titles that will help students find themselves in the characters, settings, and problems. We believe it is important for students to clearly identify with the texts we return to again and again.

New Sections Within Chapters

In every chapter, we've added new thinking to the discussions of the big ideas. But in some chapters we have added whole new sections. Here's a quick reference:

- Chapter 1—The Student as Writer
- Chapter 3—Using Classroom Conversations to Discover the Inside Story
- Chapter 4—Dipping into Dialogue; Moving from Here to There
- Chapter 5—Transitioning to the Middle; Building a Narrative
- Chapter 6—Alphabet, Numbers, Colors, and More!
- Chapter 8—Sentence Fluency: The Ebb and Flow of Language
- Chapter 9—Improving Sentences with Participial Phrases
- Chapter 10—A Journey Through a Mentor Text

New Your Turn Lessons

Each chapter contains additional Your Turn Lessons to provide practice for both teacher and student. The lessons are a good fit for the study of mentor texts, always linking with quality literature and moving to the production of student text through the gradual release of responsibility model. They are teacher friendly and student tested, helping teachers develop young writers who are both problem solvers and decision makers.

Think About It—Talk About It—Write About It

At the end of each chapter, we have provided questions that can engage you in self-reflection and conversations about writing with trusted colleagues. We hope some of this thinking finds its way into writer's notebooks, professional development opportunities, and thinking that occurs before, during, and after conferences with students. It is through our study of writing, our reading of professional books, our close reading of mentor texts, and our conferences with students that we begin to internalize what we have learned. Through reflection and conversations with others about writing, we discover what works in our classrooms and what we might try. It's the teacher that makes the difference. There is no scripted program that can meet the needs of every student in the classroom. It is up to us to take charge of our writing workshop—to be writers ourselves and to be the biggest cheerleaders for our young writers. We invite you to imagine the possibilities!

What Are Mentor Texts?

Patricia and Emily MacLachlan's book *Painting the Wind* tells the story of a young boy who loves to paint the water and sky and special places on his island home. But one thing he has never been able to do is paint the wind. The boy eagerly awaits the long days of summer when his friends, the painters, will return. They are his mentors—his teachers who willingly share their craft. The boy sets his easel alongside each one and learns how to paint flowers and faces and still lifes. One day he accompanies the landscape artist to the beach. The artist paints his dog, Meatball, running along the beach with his ears flying in the wind. The boy, feeling the wind on his face, begins to paint the bent trees. Later, the two view their paintings as they hang side by side, and the artist points out to the boy that he has accomplished what he has longed to do—he has painted the wind. The boy responds, “He is right. On my island, surrounded by water and light, I have done what I could not do before. I have painted the wind.”

We all need mentors in our lives—those knowledgeable others who help us learn how to be teachers, mothers, musicians, artists, athletes—who help us do what we could not do before on our own. So, too, do our young writers need mentors. Although it is impossible to have our students open their notebooks and write alongside Cynthia Rylant or Jane Yolen just as the boy was able to paint alongside the island artists, we can bring the literature of those authors and many others into our classroom communities to serve as mentors. Writing mentors are for everyone—teachers as well as students. Katie Wood Ray (2002) describes the importance of feeling the presence of authors in our classrooms as we go about our daily teaching of writing:

I often think that when I watch a really good teacher of writing, it's almost like there are life-size cardboard cutouts of authors all around the room. Jane Yolen is standing up by the chalkboard and Eloise Greenfield is just by the door to welcome students as they enter . . . With a room full of authors to help us, teaching writing doesn't have to be so lonely. (150)

Mentor texts are 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 yet be able to do on their own. We believe a mentor text is a book that offers myriad possibilities for our students and for ourselves as writers. Katie Wood Ray (2002) tells us, “As we develop teaching relationships with authors and their work, we will find that certain texts seem to surface as very important to teaching. These are texts that are just full of curriculum potential” (147). Mentor texts are books that are well loved by the teacher and known inside and out, backward and forward. Sometimes they have been used so often that they can be rendered almost without looking at the pages. They have been revisited many times to help stu-

dents examine an unusual sentence structure, find the poetry in prose, connect with their own memories, think about how a setting creates a mood, or find the places where an author shows instead of tells. In other words, they become our coaches and our partners as we bring the joy of writing to our students. And we, as teachers of writing, will never be alone again if we have mentor texts stored in our classrooms. Mentor texts serve as snapshots into the future. They help students envision the kind of writer they can become; they help teachers move the whole writer, rather than each individual piece of writing, forward. Writers can imitate the mentor text and continue to find new ways to grow. In other words, mentor texts help students and teachers continually reinvent themselves as writers.

The “fingerprints” of the authors’ craft found in mentor texts often become our own. Mentor texts are as comfortable as a worn pair of blue jeans. Their familiarity allows us to concentrate on writing skills and strategies—we know the text that well. They ignite the writer’s imagination and determination to create high-quality text that mirrors the mentor text in many ways. Mentor texts help writers notice things about an author’s work that is not like anything they might have done before and empower them to try something new.

Often students, and sometimes even teachers, think that it is not okay—that it is almost cheating—to borrow an idea from or imitate the writing style of an author. But this is how we learn to walk, to talk, to do almost anything: we imitate what we see others doing. The important thing to remember here is to find stellar literature that will inspire students to “copy” the author’s style, focus, or organization. Mary Oliver talks about how we learn everything by imitation. She advises us that on our writing journey, imitation should be encouraged in order to learn something well instead of “partially and haphazardly” (1994, 13). Peter J. Lancia (1997) calls this imitation *literary borrowing*. He goes on to say that literature was a most effective model for writing in his classroom.

The literature-rich environment in combination with an interactive workshop enabled this mentorship to blossom. The children made natural connections between their reading and writing through their daily interactions with books as well as their conversations with fellow authors. (475)

Mentor texts serve to show, not just tell, students how to write well. They, along with the teacher, provide wonderful examples that help students grow into successful writers through supportive partnerships. Allison Marchetti and Rebekah O’Dell (2015), authors of *Writing with Mentors: How to Reach Every Writer in the Room Using Current, Engaging Mentor Texts*, explain:

Mentor texts . . . have become the single most important element of our writing instruction. We used mentor texts sparingly in the beginning—mainly to introduce students to a new genre of writing or to illustrate a

specific skill—but our dalliance with these texts and the authors behind them quickly turned into a full-on love affair when we realized all that they enable . . . Mentor texts enable all of us—teachers and students alike—to do far more than we could ever do on our own. (3)

We couldn't agree more!

Choosing a Mentor Text

How do you go about choosing a mentor text? The first criterion is that you must connect with the book and love it. You might be drawn to the subject matter, the author, the illustrations, or the genre. Then you'll want to look through the book to find examples of author's craft such as powerful language, effective repetition, predictable patterns, use of imagery, or rhythm and rhyme. Next, think about how the book serves your students' needs and connects with your curriculum. Is this a book that your students could relate to and/or read alone or with a partner? Does it provide examples of the kind of writing you want from your students? Can it be revisited often for multiple purposes, providing opportunities for lessons across the traits of writing? In choosing mentor texts, it is always good to have a balance of genres such as fiction, nonfiction, memoir, and poetry. Wordless picture books and graphic novels can help today's young writers move forward, too. In addition, teachers should choose some texts for cultural diversity, for high engagement, and for demonstrating lessons for living in a social world. Choosing a mentor text is in many ways a personal decision.

Any piece of writing can serve as a mentor whether it is found in a book, a newspaper, a magazine, or a teacher's notebook. As Matt Glover (2014) explains, "Teachers can also act as mentors by sharing their own writing. Additionally, students can become the mentor when teachers, or the students themselves, share student writing" (57). It is our hope that the titles and the teacher and student samples we offer as mentor texts will provide a foundation for you to build on. For a more detailed look at choosing a mentor text, see the introduction to Chapter 10.

Introducing Mentor Texts

We firmly believe that young writers should be introduced to mentor texts first as readers. They need to hear and appreciate the story and characters as well as the rhythms, words, and message. Only then can they return to a well-loved book and examine it through the eyes of a writer. We teach students to read like writers when we use mentor texts in our classrooms. When teachers bring literature to serve as mentor texts into the writing workshop, they demonstrate the power of the reading-writing connection. Shelley Harwayne (2005) reminds us of how that works: