HOW CAN MENTOR TEXTS BE USED IN A SECOND GRADE CLASSROOM?

by

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To answer the question, *How Can Mentor Texts Be Used in a Second Grade Classroom?*, I explored what the experts on mentor texts had to say. I found an incredible amount of valuable information, with many of the experts agreeing on not only the definition of mentor texts, but how to go about selecting them. Mentors are people whom we can look to for guidance and advice. They help us grow and learn. There are many ways to identify the term mentor texts. Most often the term is used in the context of teaching writing. Shubitz (2016) describes mentor texts being “samples of exemplary writing we can study during writing workshops” (p. 3). Dorfman and Cappelli (2017) have an excellent section in their book, *Mentor Texts, Teaching Writing Through Children’s Literature, K-6* describing mentor texts as, “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” (p. 6). Fountas and Pinnell (2017) define mentor texts as “books or other texts that serve as examples of excellent writing. Mentor texts are read and reread to provide models for literature discussion and student writing” (p. 655). Hoyt (2007) considers mentor texts “exemplary children’s classics and strong nonfiction texts” (p. 3). In *Poetry Mentor Texts*, Dorfman and Cappelli (2012) define mentor texts as “a piece of writing...that you can return to many time in the course of a year and for many reasons” (p. 8). Hence, for this project, mentor texts are defined as texts that a teacher can return to time and time again.

Because this project is focusing on mentor text use in an elementary classroom, the primary audience would be elementary teachers. However, middle and high school teachers could benefit from the idea of implementing mentor texts into their classroom instruction. Although this project was focused on selecting mentor texts and lessons to teach in a second grade classroom, ultimately, one of the goals was not only to change how I use mentor texts in
my classroom, but also influence how other teachers think about and use mentor texts in their own classrooms. Thus, the results of the project were shared via a blog.

The following chart shows which texts were selected as mentor texts to use for this project, which lessons were featured as blog posts, and other lessons that could be taught using these books. The blog posts follow the chart, and the website address is:

https://learningwithliterarymentors.blogspot.com/.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor Text</th>
<th>Teaching Purpose</th>
<th>Other Teaching Purposes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Chrysanthemum</em> by Kevin Henkes</td>
<td>quotation marks</td>
<td>*beginning of the year community building (words have power/kindness)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>*vocabulary</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*mentor sentence (grammar focus: plural nouns)</td>
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<tr>
<td>fiction</td>
<td></td>
<td>*craft: dialogue</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*craft: character details</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*story structure: beginning/middle/end; problem/solution</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*inferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Day the Crayons Quit</em> by</td>
<td>point of view</td>
<td>*mentor sentence (grammar focus: plural nouns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew Daywalt</td>
<td></td>
<td>*text structure: friendly letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fiction</td>
<td></td>
<td>*craft: character details</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*craft: voice</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*craft: illustrations</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*figurative language: personification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>What If You Had Animal Teeth?</em></td>
<td>nonfiction text</td>
<td>*mentor sentence (grammar focus: contractions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Sandra Markle</td>
<td>features (headings, sidebars, photographs &amp; illustrations)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonfiction</td>
<td></td>
<td>*craft: organization/text structure--how the information and illustrations are laid out on a page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*craft/text structure: asking a question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*craft: types of print (font)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Diary of A Worm,</em> by Doreen</td>
<td>speech &amp; thinking</td>
<td>*perspective in illustrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronin</td>
<td>bubbles</td>
<td>*mentor sentence (grammar focus: compound words)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fiction</td>
<td></td>
<td>*text structure: diary format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*figurative language: personification</td>
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</tbody>
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Blog Post #1

So What Truly Is A Mentor Text?

You see lists for mentor texts all over these days--lists of books to teach this strategy or that concept are all over Pinterest. You get a list of mentor texts to teach each skill included in that awesome new TPT bundle you purchased. So, what truly is a mentor text?

Well, it depends upon the context. Most of the time, the term 'mentor text' is used in the context of writing. Stacey Shubitz (2016) describes mentor texts as "samples of exemplary writing we can study during writing workshops" in her book Craft Moves. Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell (2017) define the term as "books or other texts that serves as examples of excellent writing." Lynn Dorfman has a great interview on National Writing Project Radio where she defines mentor texts as "pieces of literature you--both teacher and student--can return to and reread for many purposes. They are texts to be studied and imitated...Mentor texts help students take risks and be different writers tomorrow than they are today. It helps them to try out new strategies and formats." If we use the dictionary definition of mentor, it says that they are "an experienced and trusted advisor."

Taking into account all of this information, I think we need to focus on certain aspects of the various definitions. Experienced, exemplary, excellent. Mentor texts are all of these things--and more. They are texts that we should (as Dorfman says) study and imitate. We should return to them and reread them for more than one purpose. Another thing to remember about mentor texts is that they are not just books. They could be poems, letters, songs--really anything that you return to many times in your teaching.
So, back to those lists of books that you got with your latest TPT purchase. Those books could easily be used as anchor texts. Anchor texts 'anchor' your lesson. These books are valuable and important, but they are not the books that are "as comfortable as a worn pair of blue jeans" as Dorfman and Cappelli refer to mentor texts (2017). Anchor texts are texts you might use once or twice to teach a lesson or concept. But mentor texts are texts you come back to time and time again--you use these books for a variety of teaching purposes. As a good teacher, you will likely have a big stack of anchor texts--I know I do! But your mentor text pile, well, that one holds your old favorites--the books you absolutely love to share with your students. These books will be your best friends to help teach writing craft, reading concepts, and likely even social skills, science, or social studies concepts.

In my next post, we'll dig deeper into mentor texts and explore the ways in which you can choose those texts. In the meantime, interested in checking out some of the authors I mentioned? The links are below.

I'd love to hear your thoughts on mentor texts or answer any questions in upcoming blog posts, so leave your 2c below.

Happy Reading!!

~Carrie

Blog Post #2

How Do I Choose Mentor Texts?
You've heard the term 'mentor text' and you think it's a great idea, but how do you actually choose what texts will be your mentors? I think this process is a highly personal one. It is true that you can get tons of suggestions of titles from experts and friends on which books are great for teaching whatever concept or skill you're working on. But the books you call your mentor texts--the books you come back to time and time again--cannot be selected by others. They need to be picked by you. You see, you are the only one who can decide which books will be loved and used time and time again in your classroom.

I am still on this journey myself--I cannot say for certain which texts will ultimately be my mentor texts this year. I am (hopefully like you) still evolving in my teaching; with each year bringing new learning and growth to my classroom. This year I have new ELA resources our district is using, and some of the books that I love to use to teach with might have to be set aside this year. But next year, I might add those favorites back in. I certainly have a stack of books that I do consider to be mentors to me and my students.

Before we get into what the experts say, keep in mind these experts are all talking about writing. Their focus and use of the term mentor text is all about those texts being used to teach the craft of writing. I don't get too worked up about this for a few reasons. Number one is that based on conversation with colleagues, teaching writing is one of the biggest things that many teachers struggle with. So by digging into the use of mentor texts, our writing instruction will only become stronger. Secondly, using literature to teach reading strategies or concepts comes very naturally. Students read a text, and depending upon what standard you're focusing on, you can probably tie it in somehow. The third reason I'm not concerned about the focus on writing is that as you go through the process of thinking about how each text could be used, you will
naturally focus on both reading and writing concepts and strategies you need to teach. The key here is that you will study the text to determine in what ways it can be a mentor to you and your students, and you will get to know the text (and the author) like an old friend. A friend you can turn to over and over again.

So let's explore what some of the experts suggest as a path to select mentor texts.

The first step that Laminack, Shubitz, Wood Ray, and Dorfman & Cappelli all agree upon is that a book should be a book that you (the teacher) love and enjoy. You must connect to it in some way—whether it's the language, illustrations, or message. It doesn't really matter, but you need to have joy and pleasure while reading the book. You have enjoyed the book as a reader.

The next step is to read the text like a writer. Look at the text structure, language, and voice. Will your students connect with the text somehow? Does the book connect with your teaching requirements? Laminack and Dorfman & Cappelli suggest starting with books you already love. Dig into these texts and explore how you can use them in your classroom.

Introducing the text to your students follows a similar path—first, there is enjoyment as a read aloud. Then, when you revisit it, you can use it to teach a concept: word choice, text structure, voice, illustrations, perspective—the list goes on. The thing to remember with these teaching opportunities is that you don't have to re-read the entire text. You can just use part of it for your teaching point. Mentor texts are not books that need to be re-read in their entirety—they are books you use for teaching many ideas. To me, this is the beauty of mentor texts—how easy it is to revisit a beloved read aloud to teach text structure. I often find myself saying "Remember when we read ______? When the author used ________?"
Dorfman and Cappelli's books are excellent guides to using mentor texts in your classroom. Their second edition of Mentor Texts: Teaching Writing Through Children's Literature, K-6 has a wealth of examples and a solid introduction into the use of mentor texts. There are "your turn" lessons at the end of each chapter to help guide you in sharing writing experiences with your students. They also have books focused on nonfiction and poetry mentor texts. Those three titles are linked at the bottom of this post.

Stacey Shubitz has a very detailed method for finding lessons in a mentor text in Craft Moves: Lesson Sets for Teaching Writing With Mentor Texts. In her book she reminds us that children need to be able to identify with the texts we choose, so being mindful of race, religion, and sexual orientation represented in the books we expose our students to is important. Shubitz's book is fairly new, and an excellent read. She chooses her mentor texts very intentionally and methodically. She identifies "power craft moves" that she looks for in her mentor texts.

Katie Wood Ray identifies five parts to 'reading like a writer.' She outlines them in her 1999 book, Wondrous Words. When I switched to a workshop model for teaching writing, I used Ray's About The Authors as my guide. Both books are excellent resources for teachers and give you guidance on units of study and changing the way you teach writing in your classroom.

The books I've mentioned are the ones I have found to be most beneficial to me as a teacher in the primary grades. There are many others (including Laminack and Fletcher) that have great books for teachers of writing in the upper grades. If you are really interested in mentor texts and becoming a better teacher of writing in your classroom, I highly recommend picking up one of these books. Any one will change your thinking, and hopefully get you excited about both mentor texts and teaching writing.
If you're on a budget though (and I know many teachers are), join me in my mentor text journey. I will share which books I am using as my mentor texts this year, and the lessons I am teaching with each text. So for now, dig into your read aloud stash, pull out your favorites, and start thinking about what teaching concepts and writer's craft lessons you could use that book for. And then, when it's time to teach those things, take out those beloved books. Start small. After all, Rome wasn't built in a day.

Happy Reading!

~Carrie

Blog Post #3

Nonfiction Text Features, Part I

One of the most important second grade reading standards is related to nonfiction texts. Reading nonfiction texts (as well as writing nonfiction) require a different approach than we take with fiction books. The numerous nonfiction text features that kids need to learn how to use to ensure they understand the text--headings, sidebars, captions, diagrams, maps, charts/graphs, glossaries, table of contents, and the index. Kids need to learn about these features so they know what value they bring to the text--not only to help read nonfiction text but also to help them write nonfiction text.

One of my favorite books to use at the beginning of the year to help students learn about these features is What If You Had Animal Teeth? by Sandra Markle and illustrated by Howard McWilliam. There is actually an entire What If You Had series, and they are all structured the same. Each page has a heading with the animal's name, text about it the body part (teeth in this case), a sidebar with a fact about the animal, and then a little blurb about if you had that animal's
teeth. There is also a photograph of the animal, as well as an illustration of a human with the animal's teeth.

The What If You Had series is perfect for teaching nonfiction text features at the beginning of the year because they are very high-interest books (who wouldn't love to see what walrus teeth would look like on human?) but they have limited text features. The main two text features I focus on with these books are the headings and the sidebar featured on each page. The other really cool thing about this book is the mixture of photographs and illustrations. The majority of nonfiction texts have photographs, so sometimes kids get confused if nonfiction texts have illustrations. Since this book has both, it is an excellent example of how both illustrations and photographs can be used in nonfiction text.

The only downside (which is fairly minor) is that these books can take a bit longer to read than your typical read aloud. Allowing a bit of extra time or spreading them out over a couple of days will give you and your students the chance to fully enjoy all of the animals and information in these books. At the end of each book there are two pages about what's special about that body part (teeth, in this case) and also how to keep your human teeth healthy.

When I introduce What If You Had Animal Teeth? to my class, we read it over two days. Second graders can have a hard time sitting for too long and they might zone out and miss a really cool animal or facts about them. Reading it over two days also allows your students to share what they remember from the previous day--and allows you to review those important components you want to focus on (in this case, those nonfiction text features). You could do a quick formative assessment to see if kids remember the terms you taught them the day before (heading, sidebar, etc.).
After we've read the book during a writing mini lesson we talk about how they could incorporate headings and sidebars into their own nonfiction writing. I model some examples of what it could look like. I haven't had students print photographs for using in their books yet, but I think it would be a great idea. I'd love to see how kids might mix both drawings and photographs into their nonfiction books.

What are some of your favorite books to teach nonfiction text features with? Share them below!

Happy Reading!

~Carrie

Blog Post #4

Speech Bubbles & Thinking Bubbles

When we are teaching our students how to infuse their writing with various craft moves, structure their texts in different ways, or use a variety of text features, there is no easier way to do this than with a mentor text. Some of my favorite mentor texts are the Diary of A Worm/Spider/Fly books written by Doreen Cronin and illustrated by Harry Bliss. These are great humorous books with so many teaching purposes you will have a hard time deciding which one to start with! Because I read one of these stories at the beginning of the year with our reading series (Journeys), I start with a mini lesson that makes the most sense for my second graders at the beginning of the year.

In my classroom during writer's workshop, we write books. My students often write fiction stories, and needless to say, it's not long before they are writing dialogue in their books. I
do get to the point where I teach them about quotation marks, but at the beginning of the year, I find that speech and thinking bubbles are a bit more accessible.

The Diary of . . . books are great for teaching this concept. The stories are told like a diary with entries in order by date. The illustrations take up the majority of each page, with limited text. This focus on the illustrations really makes this book a great choice for teaching about speech and thinking bubbles because kids are concentrating on the illustrations--they are a big part of the storyline. Additionally, the text in the speech and thinking bubbles adds to the story, so if the kids don't read it, they are missing out on some humorous dialogue.

The mini lesson for this concept typically goes very well as the students are excited to share other examples of speech and thinking bubbles they have seen in other texts. Modeling is not always necessary as kids have seen speech and thinking bubbles previously, and once you bring their attention to it, they look for them everywhere. Second graders are typically very in tune to the slight difference between the two types of bubbles--the little circles vs the pointy part. They enjoy practicing drawing them and incorporating them into their writing. A good tip is to teach them to write the words first and then draw their bubble around it.

This is one of my favorite mini lessons to teach because the kids are so excited to utilize this craft in their writing! What are your favorite books to use to teach thinking and speech bubbles? Leave your favorite titles below.

Happy Reading!!

~Carrie
Teaching Point Of View

One of my favorite things about being a teacher is getting to read (and buy!) new books. Going to a bookstore or filling up my shopping cart online never feels guilt-ridden--it's always perfectly okay to spend some money on books. After all, me and my students will not only enjoy them but use them for a learning experience. There is no way to put a price on that!

There are a couple of second grade reading standards relating to characters. One is how characters respond to major events and challenges, and the other is acknowledging the differences in the characters' point of view. I use a couple of different books for this purpose--I usually use one to teach the concept with the whole class (I Wanna Iguana), and then I use a second book to assess the standard. I use The Day the Crayons Quit by Drew Daywalt (illustrated by Oliver Jeffers) to do the point of view assessment with my second graders. I also use The Day the Crayons Quit for other teaching purposes (stay tuned to upcoming posts about those), and our school librarian reads it to the kids as well. So I find that my students have a good grasp on the storyline and characters, thus making it a great choice for an authentic assessment.

This text lends itself beautifully to the discussion of point of view. If you aren't familiar with The Day the Crayons Quit, it is comprised of a series of letters written from the various colors of crayons found in a box of crayons to their owner, Duncan. They are, as the title implies, quitting. Each of them has their own issue with Duncan and his use of them. One of the best things about this book is that each page appears to be written by the actual crayon--meaning in that color--and in a script-like font. It can be a bit tricky for kids who don't know cursive to be
able to read it, but it adds so much to the book. The illustrations are 'colored' in crayon and helps kids remember what each crayon mentioned drawing in their letter to Duncan. After you enjoy this book with your students, you can follow up with *The Day the Crayons Came Home*. This time, instead of letters, the crayons have written to Duncan on postcards.

Much of my 'teaching' with this text involves talking about it each time we read it. By the time I use this text for my point of view assessment, my students have generally heard it 2-3 times. I read it one more time and discuss the crayons' letters to Duncan. You could even make an anchor chart as students recall the details of the text. The next day I pass out a sheet that asks the kids to tell me the point of view from 3 different crayons. I even let them write with colored pencils that match each crayon (which they love!). Because this book is told from each crayon's perspective, it makes it really easy for the kids to give text evidence in their answers.

What are your favorite books for teaching point of view?

Happy Reading!!

~Carrie

Blog Post #6

Teaching Quotation Marks

As the school year progresses, I always try to push my students to try new craft moves in their writing. Early in the year, I introduce using speech bubbles to show dialogue (read about that here). Partway through the year, I find my more advanced writers are ready to start using quotation marks. It is great to offer a second way for students to show conversation between
characters. Quotation marks can be a bit tricky, but it's worth it to teach the correct way to use them. Even if kids don't get the comma in the exact right place, it is an important skill they will be able to refine in the future.

To teach the use of quotation marks, I return to one of our favorites, Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes. This is a read aloud I share the first week of school to talk about how our words have power. It is a great lesson that many kids can connect with. Kevin Henkes has so many great books and I wish I had time to use all of his books throughout the year. So many great books, so little time! Anyway, I like to use Chrysanthemum because there is such great dialogue on almost every page.

For this mini lesson I start by putting the text (or a copy of some of the pages) up on the Smartboard. We look for quotation marks and I highlight them in yellow. I point out the comma and we highlight that in blue. Then I give kids copies of various pages of Chrysanthemum that I have photocopied. They work together in pairs, highlighting the quotation marks in yellow in each sentence of dialogue. We discuss their findings and share them using the document camera.

The next day we review their observations from Chrysanthemum, discussing that there are quotation marks and commas where the dialogue is. I have some dialogue prepared on chart paper (without quotation marks and commas) and we go through it together and add quotation marks in the appropriate places. Then, I have them get out one of the books they have already written (or are in the middle of writing) that has dialogue. They practice adding quotation marks with the guidance of their learning partner.

In second grade, I don't expect perfection with this skill, which is why we focus on just adding the quotation marks. Later mini lessons can focus on the dialogue tag and that pesky
comma (if it's needed). The next time I teach quotation marks, I am going to try incorporating
some strategies that Jeff Anderson suggests in Patterns of Power. He has some great lesson
ideas, and the key one I think I am going to try out is using the focus phrase, "I open and close
words spoken aloud with quotation marks." It helps bring students' attention to the fact that
quotation marks are used when a character is speaking. If you are interested in Anderson's
lessons, I highly recommend his books. Patterns of Power is focused on primary, while
Mechanically Inclined and Everyday Editing are more suitable for those teaching upper
elementary on up. Those books are linked at the bottom of the post if you're interested in
checking them out.

I'd love to know which texts you use to teach quotation marks~share those below!

Happy Reading!!

~Carrie
References


