



Workshop Guide

Mentor Texts

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Choosing Mentor Texts

Mentor texts are used in both the reading and writing workshop. I often use the same books from reading workshop for mentor texts in writing. Here are some things I'm looking for:

- short texts or longer texts from which I can pull excerpts;
- texts that represent a variety of genres;
- multi-genre texts; and
- texts that are clear and concise in relation to what I want students to focus.

When deciding between books or excerpts that I might want to use with my class, I often ask myself the following questions:

For Reading

- Is the text interesting to students?
- Does the text invite rereading?
- Are the characters well developed? The setting? The plot?
- Is the content presented in an interesting and unique way?
- Will children from different backgrounds be able to relate to the text?
- Is it a text children may not otherwise pick up on their own?

For Writing

- Is the story interesting and accessible?
- Is the text written in an unusual way?
- Does the author use a variety of writing techniques the children can notice and learn?
- Does the text lend itself to a certain writing structure?
- Does the text represent its genre well?
- Is it a text children may choose to reread on their own?

These questions help me sift between the many samples I may want to use. I have found that less is more in many cases. Being able to use one text on several different days is beneficial for the students. It invites rereading and noticing things that the children may have missed the first time. I try to use a few powerful texts to use as mentor texts with my students. They in turn can find more mentor texts in their own reading and writing.

Discussion: Think about a text you use in your class to model reading and/or writing. How would you answer the questions above? What other things do you consider when selecting a text?

Thinking through *This is the Tree* by Miriam Moss

Testing out the questions above with *This is the Tree*, here is the grid I developed in considering this book as a mentor text:

For Reading	For Writing
Is the text interesting to students? <i>The pictures and text will grab the children's attention. The fact so many things happen with this one tree will be interesting to the students.</i>	Is the story interesting and accessible? <i>The text weaves facts about the tree into a poem. The repeating first line with prepositional phrases makes it an accessible text for even my struggling readers and writers.</i>
Does the text invite rereading? YES	Is the text written in an unusual way? <i>Yes, it's a nonfiction poem.</i>
Are the characters well developed? The setting? The plot? <i>The setting is well developed using prepositional phrases.</i>	Does the author use a variety of writing techniques the children can notice and learn? <i>The author uses repetition, rhythm, and prepositional phrases to create this text.</i>
Is the content presented in an interesting and unique way? <i>Yes. Instead of a boring report or article, it's a lively poem.</i>	Does the text lend itself to a certain writing structure? <i>Yes. The repeating line and focus on a place will give structure to the students who need it.</i>
Will children from different backgrounds be able to relate to the text? <i>Yes, since most children in the U.S. have never seen a Baobab tree.</i>	Does the text represent its genre well? <i>This is a multi-genre text: picture book, poetry and nonfiction. It's blended together beautifully.</i>
Is it a text children may not otherwise pick up on their own? <i>This is not a text most kids would pick up on their own, as it's about a tree. Once we read it and study it, though, I'm sure kids will pick up the other books like it.</i>	Is it a text children may choose to reread on their own? <i>Yes. Because it's a poem and a picture book, it's not overwhelming. Students can easily reread all of it or parts of it.</i>

What I can model with this book:

- Writing about a place in an interesting way.
- Weaving facts into a poem.
- Using a repeating phrase to start a sentence.
- Using prepositional phrases to add detail.

Writer's Notebook Entry

Georgia Heard writes a short piece in her book *Writing Towards Home* called "My Queriencia." A queriencia is a place where one feels special or safe. It can be a secret spot or a place with a lot of people around - it just depends on the person.

Each child can write about their queriencia, their special place.

1. After reading *This is the Tree*, students can make a list of things that makes their queriencia special.
2. Students star the phrases on their list that they feel are most important - 3 to 5 is a good number.
3. Using the repetitive phrase, This is the _____ (kids fill in the blank), students write one stanza for each thing on their list.
4. After sharing their poems, you might show students how to use a prepositional phrase to add detail to their writing. For a notebook entry, this would be an optional thing to go back and add.

Drafting Multi-Genre Texts

Notice how this text weaves factual information into a poem. This is known as multi-genre text, because it is a poem, it's nonfiction and it's a picture book. Through these three genres, the author and illustrator create a text that is accessible and interesting for children. Children can use this multi-genre approach to write about things in the content area.

1. Have students identify a place or event they want to write about.
2. Create a list of facts they want to include in their poem.
3. Star the facts that are most important to include, and start with those.

4. Review the pattern of the book *This is the Tree*. Each stanza starts with This is the tree, and then is followed by one or two phrases to add details about one part of the tree.
5. Remind kids during drafting that they're going to focus on getting their ideas down. They should try to keep one fact per stanza and add a detail or two about that fact.

Grammar Study

What is the point of a prepositional phrase? Writers use prepositional phrases to add details to their writing.

1. Create a poster or list of prepositions.
2. Put a stanza on the overhead from *This is the Tree*. Have students (or point out yourself) identify the prepositions in the stanza.
3. Note that each preposition starts a phrase that ends with a noun.
4. Explain that prepositions can help a writer add details to their writing. In this book, Miriam Ross sometimes uses two prepositional phrases in a row.
5. Have students reread the text and identify their favorite stanza. Have them show this to the class and explain how Moss is using a prepositional phrase or two to add details to her writing.
6. Keep an eye out for other authors who do the same thing. Keep a list in your notebook or on a chart.

Revising to Add Details and Create Rhythm

Students can use prepositional phrases to add details to their writing.

1. Reread the book *This is the Tree*, and have the students listen for the rhythm of the text. The rhythm is created by the chunking of phrases that follow the repeating line, *This is the tree...*
2. Have students reread their own piece to their partner. Is there a rhythm to their piece? Is there a rhythm in some places but not others? Have students try adding one or two phrases to each sentence/stanza. It should be the same for all of the stanzas to create a parallel rhythm throughout the piece.

3. Now reread the piece. Does a rhythm surface? Where is it off? Go to the spots where the rhythm seems off and add or subtract words to balance out the text.

Discussion: Above are some ways I use this mentor text in my reading and writing classroom. What are some other ways you might use this text? What are some content area topics that might lend itself to this kind of writing?

This Is The Moon

This is the moon

bright with the Sun's light

that shows up against the dark, night sky.

This is the moon,

whose phases tell me,

where it is roaming

as it orbits our planet.

This is the moon,

Earth's closest neighbor,

where a man's footprints have stayed
for over forty years.

This is the moon,

that is tangled in Earth's gravity,

and dances with the waves.

This is the earth's moon.

Writer's Notebook Entry

We all have secrets that we like to keep. Slow Loris' secret is that she is nocturnal, and so she comes 'alive' at night. What are some parts of your life that other people may not know about? Do you go to school by day and play football in the evening? Do you take piano lessons or tend a garden? Writers often think about the everyday

things that are a part of their life and write about it in an interesting, surprising way.

The author, Alexis Deacon, could have written, Slow Loris is a nocturnal animal called a slow loris. This means it's sleepy during the day and wide awake at night. Instead, she took an 'everyday' kind of idea and wrote about it in a surprising way.

Make a quick list of some things that you do outside of school. Put a star by the things many people don't know you do. Then try to write about it in a surprising way.

Additional Reading - *The Night I Followed My Dog* and *Charlie Anderson*

The Rule of Three

The Rule of Three is the idea that writers write in threes - three characters, or three events, or three words in a series. For example, Goldilocks and the Three Bears has three bears, three bowls of porridge, three chairs, and three beds. Each of these three things is bothered by Goldilocks.

In *Slow Loris* by Alexis Deacon, she shows the slowness of Loris with three segments of time followed by three actions.

It took Loris ten minutes to eat a satsuma...

twenty minutes to get from one end of his branch to the other...

and an hour to scratch his bottom.

Students can improve the quality of their writing by describing three actions instead of just one. For example, in a piece of student's work, he wrote:

As we saw got closer to the game I heard the faint sound of the band.

After thinking about the rule of three and trying to think of two other clues that told him he was getting closer to the game, this third grader wrote:

As we got closer to the game, I heard the faint sound of the band, saw the large T's on the street and smelled hot dogs in the air. We were almost there.

The rule of three can be found in many pieces of literature. Once you start looking for it, you'll find it every where.

Try looking at:

Leah's Pony by Elizabeth Friedrich

Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse by Kevin Henkes

Discussion: What are some other times the 'rule of three' might come in handy? Can you think of some other stories where the rule of three may show up? How does the rule of three apply to novels?

From Questioning to Research

Often writers get their ideas from reading other books or articles. Reading *Slow Loris* made me wonder if this was really an animal and if it really moved fast at night. I went to my notebook to generate some questions:

- Does it go faster at night? Is it nocturnal?
- Is a slow loris a real animal?
- How did it get the name, slow loris?
- Is this a rare animal? Where does it live?
- Can you have one as a pet or are they dangerous?

I show this list to my students and talk about how this book got my interest in finding out more about this animal. I could go on to tell them some of the interesting things I learned, like LORIS comes from the Dutch word LORES which means sluggish. And a slow loris is always slow but snatches its food quickly. Interesting. There's more and I'm now adore these little creatures.

Discussion: What books have lit a 'research' fire for you? How did you record what you found? What did you do with that information? Sometimes writers just research and keep their ideas in their notebook - waiting for the right moment. It doesn't always have to be a school project.

Reading Notebook Strategies with *Goblins in the Castle* by Bruce Coville

Rereading gives students time to think about the story and to find the author's clues for the inside story.

Reasons to encourage rereading:

- Good readers reread books they love.

- If kids read go ahead of the class or their group , it's not a big deal; they'll be rereading anyway.
- It gives struggling readers more than one chance to be engaged with the text.
- Coupled with small group instruction and group discussions, rereading can provide readers with the opportunity to understand what they had missed. The process forces students to slow down and think about the story.
- Rereading develops vocabulary and fluency. A child must hear or use a word between 4 and 14 times before it becomes a part of his/her vocabulary.
- Rereading allows children to develop their understanding of new concepts.

For this book, our class reread the story and developed a character map to think through the complexity of the characters' relationships and emotions:

Character Connections

All characters within in story are somehow connected to each other and/or the main character. – April Pulley

Igor	William	Herky
Igor likes talking to William.	Igor is William's only friend at the beginning of the story.	Herky tries to 'attack' William, but he becomes friends with William. Herky shows William to Nilbog.
<i>Igor guarded the goblins. He kept them locked up.</i>	William takes Herky with him to Nilbog. They become friends.	<i>Herky and the other goblins are angry at Igor.</i>

Discussion: Think of a book that you reread to your class (or with your class) year after year. What do you find interesting about this book? How has your understanding of the book changed as you have reread?

Writing Connection: Student writers should reread their writing. It's one thing that many writers, including myself, often forget to do. Rereading their writer's notebooks can help students find patterns or interesting lines to lift for a new entry. Rereading their draft aloud helps writers hear the 'rough spots' in their writing.

Discussion: Think of a novel or book you know well. Identify the main character and two other characters. Think about the connections between the characters. How do these connections help you think more deeply about the book?

Writing Connection: Within student writing, characters should be connected to each other and the plot. If not, the character(s) should be deleted.