# Mentor Text:
# Your Personal Teaching Assistant

## Rhonda Orttenburger
## Social Studies

Do you ever feel lonely in your classroom? Do you ever feel like you would like an expert to help you with a particular concept you want your students to learn? Then mentor texts are just the items to add to your classroom resources. Mentor texts take away the isolation of teaching writing. You can fill your classroom with wonderful authors and these authors can help you teach a particular skill or craft to your students. You can show your students what good writing looks like, not just tell them.

Mentor texts are used to teach a writer or group of writers how to improve their writing by noticing what quality writers do in order to capture the attention of an audience. Any genre can be used—a picture book, a newspaper article, an excerpt from a novel, a case study, a poem, a lab report, a literature review. These texts serve as a model, or "mentor" to your students. What is important to remember is short pieces work best, while teaching students to read like a writer enhances the use of men-

tor texts. For more information on reading like a writer, check out this website from Teaching That Makes Sense.

Mentor texts fall into three categories: writer's craft, structure, and ideas. For example, when studying writer's craft, a student would want to notice how an author chooses words to convey a message or observe how an author structures sentences so the writing flows. Another good website for information on mentor texts is Always Write.

Let's not stop there. How do teachers use mentor texts across the curriculum? Think about it. If a Science teacher wants students to write lab reports, shouldn't students study lab reports of scientists to analyze the characteristics? If a Social Studies teacher wants students to write a journal article for a history journal or a historical fiction piece, shouldn't students be exposed to this writing? If a health teacher wants students to create a blog, shouldn't students read other health blogs so they understand the criteria necessary to write one?

Choosing mentor texts that support your content standards is an added benefit for use in content classrooms.

For example, *My Half Day* by Doris Fisher and Dani Sneed can help you teach fractions and give students ideas for writing in math. For more ideas for teaching math, check out this website from The Northern Nevada Writing Project.

*Meet Einstein* by Mariela Kleiner is a good book to teach the tools of science to young kids. Students can then draw and label their own science tool book. Other books for teaching science can be found through the Cooperative Children's Book Center through the University of Wisconsin-Madison's School of Education.

For a comprehensive list of mentor texts for writing across the curriculum, examine this document: Teaching Skills with Children's Literature as Mentor Text.

Remember, mentor texts can be your personal teaching assistant and take the isolation out of teaching. A good book is a good friend.

## From the CALTF Team:

We are busy, working teachers just like you! In trying to make our newsletter as user-friendly and helpful as we can, we have been including hyperlinks to resources we have found helpful. Let us know if this works or doesn't work for you! Your feedback is what keeps up going and growing and we truly appreciate it.

**Coming Next Month:
Critique and Analysis
April: Publishing
Opportunities**

# Learning By Example

**Alicia Hunter, Principal**
**Farristown Middle School**

I often find myself saying, "I would be a much better teacher today than I was when I was in the classroom." (And I hope all teachers say they're better now than they used to be) Recently, I taught one of my school's sixth grade classes. I wanted to see if I could make some of the things I've been learning as the school's instructional leader work. But, more than that, I had read a book that I really loved, and I was looking for some students to share it with.

The students were happy to have me join them and we started class by discussing our goals and what we wanted to accomplish by the end of that day's class. Their teacher, Mr. Carlson, had been working with them on narrative writing, and we included a review of what they had already learned in our short opening conversation. I asked them how writers get ideas for narratives they write:

"From our experiences."

"From other people."

"From schema."

"Wow. What in the world does that mean?" I asked.

"You know, our ideas."

Impressive.

I asked, "Have you ever thought about taking ideas from the books you read?"

"That's a great idea. Yes, we've done that before."

I then told the class I had an award winning book I wanted to share and if it was okay we were going to read it. We'd read it first to enjoy the story. Then, we'd read it a second time to think about ideas for narratives.

I began reading *This is Not My Hat*, by Jon Klassen, coincidentally the just-announced winner of the Caldecott Medal. What a treat it was to watch those students enjoy the reading; they soaked it in, eagerly participating in the reading experience. But I wanted them to read the book like writers, too, so that the skill of taking ideas for their narratives from books they read could be addressed.

So, before I read the book the second time, I gave each student a stack of Post-It notes. This time, I placed the book under the document camera. I instructed students to make connections, look for possible extensions, and look for any ideas that could be developed into a narrative. One student spontaneously reminded the class that narratives don't have to be true: "They don't have to be about real life. In fact, they could be magical."

We then began the second reading. I had planned to model a few ideas, and had my sticky notes written out ready to use as a model. But when I read the first two pages and asked, "Does anybody have an idea about writing a narrative from these pages?" most of the students very eagerly raised their hands. Students made personal connections; they had ideas about what Klassen was doing and about how they could do similar things in the narratives they were envisioning. After spending more time than expected on the first two pages, we

continued through the book in this same manner. Students used sticky notes to hold their thinking and laid them out on their desks or handed them to me to claim a spot on a page. I did nothing but read. Klassen inspired them to think about storytelling, idea development, and details that would capture their thinking and their readers' imagination. And, really, his text alone showed them how to do it.

By the time we reached the end of the book, I was amazed at the ideas students had generated. They were ready to build on them. I had planned to have students organize their notes so I could walk them through choosing a topic, but I looked around and saw many students were ready to write (a quick and necessary formative assessment that let me immediately alter my instructional plans). So I asked, "How many of you guys have gotten a topic from *This is Not My Hat* that you could write about?" Most of the boys and girls in the class did not need me to walk them through the next steps I had carefully planned. It was just as clear that a small group was not quite ready. That group huddled with me up front where we took a sampling of their sticky notes and organized them on the white board, finding "Personal Connections," "Extensions," and "What If." The students in this group found an entry point and were ready to begin writing. I then found students to confer with, talking to a few who

# Mentors in Everything

## A Writer's Craft Mini Lesson in Social Studies
### Jennifer Bernhard, Literacy Specialist

*The Sound Of Our Writing Voices Is Crafted Where We Live Our Reading Lives* – Katie Wood Ray

   In my role as district literacy specialist, one of my most pleasurable tasks is to occasionally design and teach content area literacy lessons.  What follows is a writer's craft "noticing" mini lesson in Social Studies that demonstrates the role of mentor texts for such lessons.  As part of an Immigration Unit, sixth grade students read several articles about Ellis Island.  We first read them for content.  Consequently, students were familiar with the immigration process/specialized vocabulary before this lesson.

TDQ*1:  In the introduction of the article entitled "Gateway to Freedom," what do you notice about how its author has structured the opening sentence to distinguish/set apart the different classes of passengers?

As the first-and second-class passengers disembarked at a Manhattan pier, the steerage passengers remained aboard the steamship. They had to wait for the U.S. Immigration Service ferry to take them across New York Harbor to Ellis Island. These anxious passengers were dressed in their best clothes to impress the officials and prove that they were worthy of becoming Americans.

TDSR*1:  "First and second class passengers were listed first and then steerage passengers."

TDQ2:  Do you think the author intended to imply that steerage passengers are inferior/lower in standing to those who are first-and second-class by placing them at the end of the sentence?  If the first sentence were changed to  "The steerage passengers remained aboard the steamship as the first-and second-class passengers disembarked at a Manhattan peer," do you think there would there be a change in connotation/meaning?

TDSR2:  "Not necessarily because the rest of the paragraph shows that the steerage passengers weren't as well off as the other passengers and had to prove themselves to be 'worthy.'  But we think putting the steerage passengers last is more effective than putting them first because this helps the reader to infer that they are inferior."

TDQ3:  What should we call this crafting technique and is it worthy enough to put in our "noticings" journal?

TDSR3:  "Making lists of people (and events) purposeful, e.g., in order of importance.  Yes, it's worthy because it reminds us that we need to make our beginning sentences have real meaning."

Thus comes to life in a small way the intent of Reading Informational Standard 4:  Craft and Structure – CCR Anchor Standard – *interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone*. There were additional writing craft lessons in "Gateway To Freedom," which I will gladly share if you are interested.  Please email:  Jennifer.bernhard@clark.kyschools.us

* TDQ – text dependent question; TDSR – text dependent student response

# Recommendations From the Library Media Specialist
**Katie McClain**

-*The Art of Teaching Writing* by Lucy Calkins
-*Using Mentor Texts to Teach Writing with Traits: K-2* by Ruth Culham, et al.
-*Using Mentor Texts to Teach Writing with Traits: Middle School* by Ruth Culham, et al.
-*Using Picture Books to Teach Writing with the Traits, Grades 3 and up* by Ruth Culham
-*Mentor Texts: Teaching Writing Through Children's Literature, K-6* by Lynne Dorfman
-*I Can Write Like That!: A Guide to Mentor Texts and Craft Studies for Writers' Workshop* by Susan Ehmann and Kellyann Gayer
-*Write Like This: Teaching Real-World Writing Through Modeling and Mentor Texts* by Kelly Gallagher
-*Make It Real: Strategies for Success with Informational Text* by Linda Hoyt
-*Cracking Open the Author's Craft: Teaching the Art of Writing* by Lester Laminack
-*Learning Under the Influence of Language and Learning* by Lester Laminack and Reba Wadsworth
-*Wondrous Words: Writers and Writing in the Elementary Classroom* by Katie Wood Ray
-*Texts and Lessons for Teaching Literature: 65 Mentor Texts* by Harvey "Smokey" Daniels and Nancy Steineke

## Mentor Text in Math
### Brittany Stacy, Mathematics

As in any other content area, mentor texts are important to math education. While at times the mentor text can look drastically different than in other contents, the role is still the same.

The goal of mentor text is to give a model for students to strive to achieve.

In math, this can be working out problems in the manner you want your students to work towards, showing examples of word problems, and having students write their own problems using the same pattern to promote high levels of thinking, writing stories to express their knowledge, or writing as a mathematician would.

One that I use in my classroom is the writing of word problems to not only promote higher level thinking but also to give the students ownership of their work.

I do this in my room after completing and reading many word problems. While reading the problems as a class, we point out what has to be in the problem to be able to find an answer.

This can be different depending on the goal and what makes a good word problem compared to a not so good word problem.

Then, after letting the students read and work word problems created by others and the teacher, it is then the students turn to get to write! This allows for ownership, creativity and continued learning on the part of the student.

A site I use for word problems and other great math resources is K-5 Math Teaching Resources.

## EKUWP Summer Conference: Critical Conversations

This summer the Eastern Kentucky University Writing Project will host a Summer Conference focused on the theme Critical Conversations. The event will take place on June 8 and the tentative location is the New Science Building on EKU's campus in Richmond. The day will begin with a presentation by keynote speaker James Frederickson, co-author of *So, What's the Story?: Teaching Narrative to Understand Ourselves, Others, and the World (Exceeding the Common Core State Standards)* and continue with lunch and break out sessions. Conference presenters from elementary, middle, and high school points of view will share sessions on technology, a variety of content areas, literacy, and the Common Core.

**Continue to watch the CALTF newsletter for more information and registration materials.**

# Text Structures in History
## Maggie Brewer, Social Studies

Using mentor texts in history classes can seem like a challenging task. The texts that we most often read in our classrooms are primary and secondary sources which we examine, not for their writing craft, but rather for how they present the time and place we are examining. Often, as in the case of very old records or journal entries, these pieces are perfect examples of how not to write.    This being said, what can we do to help teach our students to write as historians? In my classroom, I teach my students about text structures, why they are important, how to locate them in order to better comprehend what they are reading, and how to use them to become better writers of history.

Text structures are the patterns that can be found in writing. The text structures that I teach my students are: main idea and detail, compare and contrast, problem and solution, cause and effect, description, and chronological order. I help my students to understand how to locate and use particular text structures by asking questions as they read and looking for signal words specific to each text structure.   The entire process looks like this: my students create a flip chart in which each page contains one text structure, questions to ask when reading a piece of writing using that particular text structure, and signal words that indicate that text structure. Each day during a mini lesson, we focus on one text structure discussing how it might be used in a history text. I locate

an example from our textbook which we read together. (You can use examples from articles or other sources; I use the textbook simply because each student already has a copy handy which is easy to reference.) As we begin, I point out the signal words that help to designate the text structure. These example paragraphs serve as our first mentor texts.   As we go through each text structure and look at examples, I talk to my students about the structures that are more prevalent in history texts. For example, texts using chronological order (signal words: first, next, then, later, finally, dates, and times), cause and effect (signal words: cause, effect, as a result, consequently, because, in turn, thus, and therefore), and compare and contrast (signal words: like, similar, unlike, on the other hand, also, too, and however) are very common in history texts as these are tasks that historians frequently take on. We put events in order. We consider what caused an event to take place. We compare and contrast two places, two types of government, two leaders. However, texts involving description and problem and solution are less common. Historical writing is less likely to be descriptive unless it is of a geographic nature (signal words: spatial words such as next to, on top of, beside, around, and directions) thus examples from geography lessons or a unit on exploration provides good examples. Similarly, historians rarely see a time in which one problem leads to one solution. Although sample

paragraphs can be located (using signal words: problem, solution, solve, effect, and hopeful) it is important to explain to students that these are few and far between in our discipline. Subsequent mini-lessons involve asking students to locate paragraphs with specific text structures as well as filling in a "noticings" chart where students explain the purpose of each text structure, where they have seen it used before, and where they might be able to use it in the future. The paragraphs students locate serve as their second set of mentor texts. Once students seem to fully grasp each structure and its purpose, they are ready to try writing them. I present the class with several sample paragraphs to use as an additional set of mentor texts. They then pick a text structure and use it to write a paragraph.   I have found that teaching students about text structures helps to make them more aware readers of history. As better readers of history, they become better overall students and learners of history. As better learners of history they then are better writers of history. At the end of the year when I read their final informational essays I can tell that these lessons on text structure are indeed paying off. I can see that they are using text structures in their writing using appropriate signal words for the intended purposes of their work.

## Weather Poetry
### Vivian Bowles, Science

Poetry inspired by mentor texts is an economical way to bridge students' personal experiences with science content.

Before sharing published weather poetry, allow students time to create a vocabulary chart of weather words.

Ask: How do you react to weather? Show and read poems such as cinquains and discuss how the authors made thoughtful choices of: poetry styles to convey ideas and emotions; word choices to describe events, convey actions and feelings or effects; and voice to express emotions and reactions to the weather event. Choose a topic from the student-generated chart or your own experience and model pre-writing nouns, descriptors, actions, and feeling/effects for the subject. After modeling or share-writing a weather cinquain based on the analysis of a mentor text, provide time for students to make their own real-word connections. Here is a cinquain written by one of my fourth-graders after one such session:

|  |  |
|---|---|
| **Spring Rain** | **Line 1**: Title Noun (2 syllables) |
| Spring rain | **Line 2:** Description (4 syllables) |
| God's tears glide to | **Line 3:** Action (6 syllables) |
| The ground. Can you hear that | **Line 4:** Feeling or Effect (8 syllables) |
| Soothing sound? The miracle of | |
| New life | **Line 5:** Synonym of the initial noun. (2 syllables) |

### Links to Resources for Selecting Science Poetry:
Cabrera, Matilda, The Poetry of Science: Effects of Using Poetry in a Middle School ELD Science Classroom, University of California, Davis
American Scientist
Read, Write, Think: Earth Verse
Read, Write, Think: Forms of Poetry

were struggling to get started, and encouraging others to remain focused.

With a few minutes left, we were able to share a few of our narratives. The writing reflected a wide range of creative engagement with Klassen's themes and emerged from unique personal experiences. In the end, I'm not sure from this experiment whether my skills in the classroom have improved or not, but I've definitely learned that choosing the right mentor text can make a huge difference to the way students think about and create narratives. And I'm figuring out that having a range of mentor texts available to students will let them think critically about the writing process and about themselves as writers. As for me, this experience has sparked an undeniable desire to get into the classroom and teach a little more.

# Text Structure Signal Words and Phrases

## Chronological Order

**Signal words**: first, next, then, later, and finally

**Questions to Ask:** How are the steps organized? What is the time span from the first event to the last? How does the author signal the change from one event to the next? What do all of the events explain?

## Compare and Contrast

**Signal words:** like, similar, unlike, on the other hand, also, too, however

**Questions to Ask:** What is being compared? What are the similarities? What are the differences? Which similarities and differences are the most significant? Are the details alternating or clustered?

## Problem and Solution

**Signal Words:** problem, solution, solve, effect, hopeful, and so forth

**Questions to Ask:** What is the problem? What are the solutions? Who worked to solve the problem? Has the problem been solved yet, or will it be solved in the future? What caused the problem?

## Cause and Effect

**Signal Words:** cause, effect, as a result, consequently, because, in turn, thus, therefore

**Questions to Ask:** What is the cause? What are the effects? Were there several causes and several effects? How did the cause lead to the effects? How did people react?

## Main Idea and Detail

**Signal words:** for example, also, one reason, and another reason; spatial words such as next to, on top of, beside, around, directions

**Questions to Ask:** What is being described? How does the author organize the description? Which detail is the most important? How do all of the details fit together?