

Study Guide



A Teacher's Guide to
Mentor Texts



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Chapter One | Why Mentor Texts?

Questions for Discussion

1. What benefits (for teachers or students) to using mentor texts in the classroom most excite you? If you've been using mentor texts already, did you discover any new benefits or possibilities after reading this chapter?

Try it!

Turn to page 1 and study Mari Andrew's "October Heart". Try making your own writing-teacher heart by combining what you notice about Andrew's heart with the hopes for your student writers.

Peruse the many "Spotlight on Student Work" pairings throughout the chapter. Choose one of the pairings to focus on, and notice what the student was able to do with the guidance and inspiration of the mentor text. Then, pull out a piece of one of your own student's writing. Ask yourself, "What could this mentor text help my student do in their writing?"

Chapter Two | Teaching Students to Read Like Writers

Questions for Discussion

2.1 How do you understand the difference between reading like readers and reading like writers? Why is the distinction important? How will you communicate this difference to your student writers? Can you think of any other metaphors that might help unlock this distinction for students?

2.2 In Step Three of Reading Like a Writer, we suggest using “words that make sense to us,” which may mean choosing a made-up phrase over classic terminology. How does this suggestion sit with you? How might you envision students benefiting from friendlier terminology? In what situations might students need more classic literary terms?

Try it!

Read Clint Smith’s poem “Something You Should Know” (page 17). Then grab a pen and mark it up! Jot some notes in the margin about what you notice about the decisions Smith made. Then watch Video 2-1 to see what we noticed when we read like writers.

Check out Online Resource 2-1 (see page 27 for details). Read about the five supports for reading like writers. How might these help your students read like writers? Which students or groups of students might these help in your class? Choose one support to introduce to your students. Spend a little time gathering supplies or preparing a demonstration.

Chapter Three | Learning About Craft and Punctuation

Questions for Discussion

3.1 Why might it make sense to start with craft study instead of genre study when first introducing students to mentor texts?

3.2 Where, in one class period or over the course of a few days or even a week or two, might you find time for craft study? What are some creative ways you might sneak it into everything else you have to teach?

Try it!

Read the sentence from *Pax* by Sarah Pennypacker (page 29). Grab your pen again and make notes about what you notice about the craft and punctuation. Then watch Video 3-1 to see what we noticed!

Browse the Gallery of Craft and Punctuation Moves (pages 37-51) and identify a sentence to use in craft study tomorrow. Type it into a slide, or write it on the board, and spend a few minutes noticing on your own and perhaps weaving your noticings into your own sentence. Then choose a quick way to share on page 34 and note this in your planbook.

Chapter Four | Learning About Structure

Questions for Discussion

4.1 Using mentor texts to study structure is a bit different from using mentor texts to study punctuation or word choice. In your own words, how can mentor texts be used to study the structure of a text?

4.2 Can you think of a common structural dilemma in student writing-- and a move from the Gallery (pages 65-75) that could help?

Try it!

Treat yourself to the recording of Glen Weldon's essay "*The Lion King Had the Perfect Villain Song. This Time, 'Be Prepared' for Less*" as you read along. Grab a pen and jot down what you notice. This time, think specifically about these aspects of structure:

- The broad skeletal frame of the text - what comes first, next, and so on
- The parts and pieces that constitute the text
- The movement from one part of the text to the next
- Organizational features like paragraphs, chapters, sections, and subheadings.

Practicing mentor text tools first ourselves can help us troubleshoot the things that might come up for our own students. Choose one of the tools for visualizing structure -- index cards (page 61) or scissors (page 63) -- to record your noticings after you listen to and annotate the Weldon essay.

Chapter Five | Learning About Genre

Questions for Discussion

- 5.1 Why is genre study important beyond the classroom?
- 5.2 How can a Must and Might chart help you and your students learn about genre?
- 5.3 What genres do you typically teach? Where might you find mentor texts for this genre study? Let's pool our thinking!
- 5.4 Can you imagine teaching with designed texts in your classroom? Where might you be able to incorporate these rich mentor texts?

Try it!

Study the three author bios on pages 77-79. As you make notes about what you notice this time, be sure to think about what the examples have in common. Think especially about length, style, tone, and content (kinds of information). The goal is to understand how to write an engaging author bio. Then watch Video 5-1 to see what we noticed!

Flip through the Gallery (pages 85-95) and select one of the genre studies to work with. Gather the suggested mentor texts, find a pen and highlighter, and curl up in a cozy chair or with a cup of coffee or beverage of choice. Spend time reading the texts and marking them for patterns. What have you learned about this genre that you didn't know before? Can you imagine bringing this genre study into your classroom? If so, how might you need to tweak it to fit your particular students' needs?

Chapter Six | Planning Instruction with Mentor Texts

Questions for Discussion

6.1 After reading this book, where do you fall on the teaching with mentor texts continuum? Are you ready to make a small investment? Medium? Large? What will your first step be?

6.2 How is teaching with mentor texts like a super power?

6.3 Look over the three suggestions for organizing mentor texts in the sidebar on page 101. Which system seems to fit you best? Or can you envision another way of keeping track of all your mentor texts?

6.4 Is there a place for mentor text study in an already packed curriculum? Explain.

Try it!

Use the questions on page 103 - and the notes you took from your mini genre study in Chapter 5 - to determine which skills you could teach your students if you were to begin the study with them tomorrow. Use Online Resource 6-2 (and the corresponding video) to help you map it out!

Plan a mentor text-based lesson that you need to teach your students. First select a skill, and then choose from one of teaching methods described on pages 105 and 106. Watch the Chapter 6 videos for help in crafting your lesson.

Chapter Seven | Assessing Students' Work With Mentor Texts

Questions for Discussion

7.1 How can the learning continuum on pages 110-11 help us move students towards independence? Can you identify students you teach now (or have taught in the past) at each place on the continuum?

7.2 How could you support a colleague who is frustrated with mentor texts because their “students have trouble making meaningful noticings” after months of practice?

7.3 If you have been teaching with mentor texts for a while, using a class roster, mark where your students fall on the continuum. Are most of your students beginners, imitators, move lifters or somewhere else on the spectrum? What are some takeaways from this book that may help move the majority of students to the next level?

Try it!

After Chapter 6, you planned a lesson using mentor texts. Now select a quick tool for assessment on page 114. Now you're all ready for tomorrow!