

Samuel Johnson once noted, “The greatest part of a writer’s time is spent in reading in order to write; a man will turn over half a library to make a book.” Having just finished going through hundreds of children’s books overflowing with beautiful language, similes, voice, wordplay, and powerful opening lines that immediately engage the reader, we are struck by the irony of our struggle to find the right words to begin this book: “Shouldn’t we now be experts on this subject?” we ask ourselves.

And so we have decided that the best place to start is at the beginning, to tell you what brought us here. We both began our teaching careers as elementary classroom teachers, but chance and circumstance brought us together as reading teachers at St. James Elementary School in the Smithtown School District on Long Island, New York. A bit like college roommates who enter the arrangement with a certain amount of trepidation, neither of us knew how our partnership would fare. But here we are, nine years later, and a generation apart—colleagues who have grown into friends.

One fuel for the fire of our friendship is our passion for books and the role they play in our students’ education. In fact, we often laugh when we find ourselves getting overly excited about a new piece of children’s literature or a new professional book that either confirms or brings new insight to our teaching.

As lifelong avid readers, we both considered ourselves to be experts on the subject of children’s literature. We were able to recognize quality literature and come up with creative ideas on how to use these books in the classroom. *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats (1962) is the perfect springboard for students to write about the season’s first snowfall. *Welcome to the Green House* by Jane Yolen (1993) is packed with information about the rainforest. *Rosie and Michael* by Judith Viorst (1974) teaches children about the true meaning of friendship. But had we ever considered using these books to teach students *how* to write? The answer, we have to admit, was *no*—at least not until the Spring of 2000 when we met Amy Arnberg, a teacher trained through Columbia Teachers College, who had written an article for *Primary Voices K–6* about a memoir study she had conducted with her fifth graders (1999). We approached her about doing some professional development with our teachers and she graciously agreed. The rest, as they say, is history.

In the two years that followed, we immersed ourselves in the words of Lucy Calkins, Ralph Fletcher, and Katie Wood Ray, and the way we look at books completely changed. We found ourselves reading like writers. Words and terms that were once foreign to us—author’s craft, mentor texts, voice, touchstone texts, small moments, zooming in—were suddenly part of our everyday vocabulary. The more we learned, the more we realized that we had even more to learn and more work to do.

Collegial circles were formed, a professional library was started, and teachers began to take what they were learning into their classrooms. Our students were learning to write in a whole new way—they, too, were reading like writers and writing like readers. Soon it was no longer enough just to read the words of the experts in the field; we wanted to see the theory in action so we began taking teacher field trips. The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project Saturday Reunion at Columbia University has become an annual event, complete

with coach bus, food, drink, and laughter. In addition, every classroom teacher at St. James Elementary has had the opportunity to board the Long Island Railroad and head in to New York City to spend a day with teachers and students at the Manhattan New School. There, we have seen many of the authors whose books grace the shelves of our professional library. But rather than seeing them as authors, we were seeing them as classroom teachers—the same as all of us, doing what they love best. Our administrators took this to the next level and arranged for Judy Davis, a now-retired fifth-grade teacher from the Manhattan New School and coauthor of *The No-Nonsense Guide to Teaching Writing* (2003), to come to Smithtown to provide professional development to all intermediate-grade teachers.

We were steadily building upon our knowledge of writing instruction and thus recognized the need to acquire the materials necessary to run a successful writers' workshop. Foremost among these materials would be books. In our capacity as reading teachers, we are constantly sought out by classroom teachers looking for book suggestions. "Do you have a book I could use to teach onomatopoeia?" "How about one with a circular ending?" Questions such as these have become a regular part of our day.

Our teachers needed a collection of books that would serve as mentor texts. The collection needed to be readily accessible and comprehensive. We set upon the task of building such a collection. Our school library and classroom libraries have a wealth of children's literature. We began by dissecting the books we already had in an effort to identify the unique and meaningful techniques the authors used to tell their stories. That was a start. However, to build upon our collection we needed to research and purchase even more books to serve as mentor texts to our students. We spent hours thumbing through the tattered copies of some of our old favorites, as well as some of our more recent acquisitions.

Our next stop was the public library. We went to the public libraries in each of our hometowns and spent days sifting through the stacks looking for children's books that were cited as good mentor texts in professional books about writing instruction. Along the way, we discovered books that were not on any lists but were filled with examples of author's craft. How excited we became with each new discovery! We still laugh about a snowy afternoon we spent together in the Smithtown Public Library, unaware that a blizzard was raging outside until the librarian came over and politely asked us to leave so she could close the library and go home.

We also spent a great deal of time browsing through publishers' catalogs and visiting publishers' websites, always on the lookout for just the right books to complement our collection. The more time we spent in our search, the more we realized how much time and effort could be saved if teachers had access to an extensive bibliography of children's books that identified the elements of author's crafts contained within each book. From there, our idea grew into creating a comprehensive resource that included not only a bibliography but also descriptions of the craft elements with exemplar mentor texts to teach each author's craft, served up with easy-to-implement craft studies. And so here it is, and here we are. This book is our attempt to help you, elementary-grade teachers, to give your students a most precious gift—books and authors to use as models for their own writing. How rewarding it is when our students can listen to a well-written story, identify the author's craft, and say, "I can write like that!"

The Importance of Establishing a Philosophy of Writing

The starting point for any teacher of writing is to understand one's own philosophy of writing. Our mentor in this journey of self-reflection was Lucy Calkins. In her book *The Art of Teaching Writing* (1994), Calkins eloquently writes:

as human beings we write to communicate, plan, petition, remember, announce, list, imagine...but above all, we write to hold our lives in our hands and to make something of them. There is no plot line in the bewildering complexity of our lives but that which we make for ourselves. Writing allows us to turn the chaos into something beautiful, to frame selected moments, to uncover and celebrate the organizing patterns of our existence. (p. 8)

This statement summarizes our belief in the importance of written expression.

For us, the framework that supports this philosophy is the writers' workshop. As Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) state,

The writing workshop does not place the teacher under the bright lights on center stage. Rather, the teacher sets up the structure, allows students plenty of choice, and gets [students] writing. You work off the energy students create. (p. 3)

Reading and writing instruction in our school district is structured through a balanced literacy approach. The readers' workshop and writers' workshop power this instruction and support the gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student that is at the heart of balanced literacy. To establish a unified foundation among our district's nine elementary schools, our central administration purchased *Units of Study for Primary Writing: A Yearlong Curriculum* (Calkins & The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, 2003) for all primary teachers. For intermediate grade teachers, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Teaching Writing* (Davis & Hill, 2003) was purchased. Over the ensuing years, our teachers have built upon this foundation, learning from experience, from one another, and most of all, from the students.

There are also, however, unseen teachers at the heart of this instruction—the authors whose words line the shelves of our classroom libraries. In *Wondrous Words*, Ray (1999) has devoted an entire book to the importance of learning to write from writers. In her opening chapter, she writes, "Writing well involves learning to attend to the *craft* of writing, learning to do the sophisticated work of separating *what it's about* from *how it is written*" (p. 10). We believe there is no better way to accomplish this than to immerse ourselves and our students in the words of authors through the use of mentor texts within the writers' workshop. Fletcher and Portalupi (1998) sum up this idea beautifully: "The writing you get out of your students can only be as good as the classroom literature that surrounds and sustains it" (p. 10). This is why a teacher's underlying knowledge of children's books and how they can serve as mentor texts is an essential element in becoming an effective teacher of writing.

Picture Books as Mentor Texts

In describing the importance of teaching students to write from writers, Ray (1999) states that "teaching students to do this is the instructional challenge faced by teachers who want to help students to write well" (p. 11). Our experience has shown us that a further challenge faced by teachers is finding just the right books to support this instruction. Although we have attempted to compile a comprehensive bibliography of titles to address this challenge, it is

important to note that we do not claim it to be an all-inclusive list. It's important to note, too, that although we have included only picture books, we do not intend to imply that children's novels, newspapers, magazines, brochures, and so forth should not be used as mentor texts. These are invaluable models of outstanding writing. They can and *should* be used for writing instruction, particularly in the intermediate grades. However, picture books, by their very nature, are shorter, usually just 30 or so pages. It is easier to show students what an author is doing when the format is simple. And so, picture books have become our tools of the trade.

There are countless exemplary children's picture books. No list can encompass them all. There are picture books that tell wonderful stories with meaningful messages that make great read-alouds, but may not lend themselves to writing instruction. Those titles are not included here. Libraries are filled with picture books noted for their illustrations (many with a Caldecott designation to prove it). Although we appreciate beautiful artwork, we believe that for the purpose of teaching children to write, the illustrations are secondary to the words. Thus, many of those titles are not included here. We selected books that we feel will make our students better writers, following Ray's guidance from *Wondrous Words* (1999):

The bottom line for why I select the text is that I see something in *how that text is written* which would be useful for my students to also see. I see something about the text that holds potential for my students' learning. I am looking for texts that have something in them or about them that can add to my students' knowledge base of how to write well. (p. 188)

Although there is no template for selecting mentor texts, we did have some specific criteria that guided us through our particular selection process. We attempted to seek out a variety of multicultural literature. We attempted to select books whose characters and settings address the broad range of lifestyles experienced by children across the United States. We selected books that reach our youngest readers and books that will capture the interest of our more mature students. And finally, we attempted to select books that represent a balance of genres, including fiction, personal narrative, memoir, literary nonfiction, poetry, how-to books, letter writing, and journals or diaries. Most important, we selected books that we feel will make our students better writers.

We have included many authors whom you will find mentioned time and time again in books about writers' workshop. These are the authors who exemplify outstanding writing and serve as accessible models for our students. We, as teachers of writing, owe them a huge debt of gratitude. We also have included books and authors that may not be so well known, gems that we've discovered along the way that add sparkle to our library. Yet, we recognize that there are many others—authors and books that may be among your favorites—that we haven't had the good fortune to experience. So, although we hope the bibliography will serve as a useful tool, keep in mind that it is not exhaustive. Our hope is that you will use everything we have provided to further your own discovery of children's literature and its applications in the writers' workshop.

Teaching Author's Craft

Twenty-seven different craft elements are highlighted within this book. Before listing the individual elements, we would like to clarify our definition of *author's craft*. We believe that any purposeful and meaningful technique that an author uses to capture the reader's attention may be considered an element of craft. As you explore this book, you will find that

our definition extends beyond the traditional literary devices and applies to works of both fiction and nonfiction.

We have purposely chosen only those craft elements that we feel are appropriate for elementary-age students. We believe that our students should be exposed to all of the 27 craft elements by the time they complete elementary school. They should be given ample opportunity to study these techniques and should have the opportunity to try them in their own writing. It is important to note that although all of the craft elements highlighted should be studied, some will be beyond the reach of certain students' abilities as writers. We do not want to discourage our young writers from trying out different writing styles and crafting techniques, but we also do not want to set them up for failure. Writing is a means of personal expression. There are many times that students need to complete an assigned writing lesson not of their choosing, but our goal as writing teachers is to expose them to the many crafting techniques available, encourage them to experiment, and show them how to incorporate the ones that work best for them as part of their repertoires. It is important to tread carefully in deciding when to push our students to experiment and when to leave the decision to them. To make those choices effectively, you must understand the crafts you are teaching and you must know your students as writers. We never want to create reluctant writers who are frustrated by unrealistic demands.

Among the literary devices in this book are several that you already know. Terms like *metaphor* and *simile*, as well as others like *onomatopoeia*, *alliteration*, and *personification* are universally recognized. For this reason, we choose to teach our students the accepted terminology. In other cases, authors and publishers use techniques or styles (such as the layout of the print on a page or the choice of font) that may not have established names but which, nevertheless, should be deemed as craft. For the purpose of consistency, we have assigned names to these craft elements. You and your class may choose to name these elements for yourselves as the students discover them in the authors' works. For example, what we refer to as *Wordplay* has been called *Mixed-Up Language* by a third-grade class in our building. We have used the term *Breaking the Rules* to encompass several different techniques that contradict accepted rules of grammar but which are often used by authors to create a particular effect.

Use terminology that works best for your students, but bear in mind the importance of a consistent instructional vocabulary that your students will use year after year with each grade's new teacher. Also keep in mind that our list is not intended to be all-inclusive. If you and your students discover a craft technique that we have not included, celebrate that discovery and add it to your list!

How to Make This Book Work for You

To help you navigate your way through this book and to help you decide how best to use it to suit your specific instructional needs, the remainder of this Introduction provides a brief synopsis of all the tools and resources available to you in this book, as well as our ideas for how you can use them. We hope you will come to view this book as an essential resource for your writers' workshop and turn to it when seeking to accomplish the following:

- To build a library of mentor texts
- To uncover all that you can teach from each book in your growing mentor library, whether it be from an old favorite or a new discovery

- To find the perfect mentor texts to teach specific craft elements
- To locate age-appropriate craft studies that support your writing curriculum and further serve as models as you develop craft studies of your own

Turn to Part 1 to get an overview of each craft element as well as to view the different craft techniques you might choose to teach within your writers' workshop. Part 1 describes each of the craft elements you'll find in this book, listed alphabetically. Included with each craft element is a definition, elaboration on its use by writers, and a list of four or five picture book titles that *exemplify* this craft. This is where you can turn to find the perfect book to serve as a mentor text for a particular craft. And if you are just starting out with writers' workshop, these are some books you might want to include as you begin to build your library.

When selecting the exemplar titles for each author's craft, we tried to include books that used a craft in a variety of ways. This necessitated omitting some exceptional texts to keep each list of exemplars to a reasonable length. Keep in mind that there are additional titles in the Annotated Bibliography that *you* might like to include as *your* exemplar mentor texts for any given craft.

In Part 2 we have included craft studies using some of our favorite mentor books. These craft studies are meant to provide guidance, not to serve as prescriptive teaching formats, so please feel free to adapt them to fit your writers' workshop. We have designed the craft studies following a consistent format that we hope will serve as an easy-to-follow model for future lessons you develop as you and your students expand your study of author's craft. Sprinkled throughout are examples of authentic writing from the students in our school. You also will find some suggestions for ways to celebrate your students' writing through publication and display.

And now we come to the heart of our book—the annotated bibliography—the seed from which this book has grown. The large charts and extensive bibliography that make up Part 3 are the culmination of many, many hours of study, research, and reading, and we hope they provide a quick guide that you can turn to time and again. Our goal is to help you find titles that serve well as mentor texts and to identify the craft elements that are contained within each book.

First you will find two charts. The first, organized alphabetically by title, allows you to choose a particular craft element and cross-check an alphabetical listing of titles wherein that craft can be found. This will serve as a handy tool when you have a particular picture book in mind and want to discover the craft elements that can be taught through it. The second, organized alphabetically by author, allows you to quickly find titles by a favorite writer. This second chart will prove useful when planning an author study or when selecting mentor authors. After the charts, you will find the bibliography to which you can turn for more detail about quality picture books with rich examples of author's craft.

We have taken the traditional idea of an annotated bibliography a step further to provide information that will be useful to you as you structure your writers' workshop: We have listed 150 picture books that exemplify numerous examples of author's craft, and we have provided you with a list of the craft elements that are contained within each book. For ease of navigation, all craft elements are listed alphabetically and not in order of importance or frequency of use within the book. When copyright permission allowed, we have provided

examples of the craft from the book. These are representative examples and are not meant to include every example of an author's use of a particular craft.

You also will find a number of additional resources in the appendixes of this book. The five reproducible recording sheets included in Appendix A will serve as models as you design the Explore phase of your craft studies. Photocopy them for your students or use them as models for your own recording sheets. Regardless of whether you use our sheets or ones that you design, we encourage you to complete a sample entry for your students to use as a model as they begin their research. Recording sheets are included for the following six crafts:

- Descriptive Language
- Hyperbole
- Lead
- Onomatopoeia
- Print Features and Print Layout

We've included two lists in Appendix B: Children's Books About Writing and Suggested Professional Readings. The Children's Books About Writing list provides you with titles of some of our favorite books that speak to young writers about the process of writing. Some of these titles are works of fiction, some are informational, some are autobiographical—but are all specifically written for young writers and give insight to the writing process. Student writers are often surprised to discover that professional authors experience many of the same stumbling blocks that they do. Understanding this serves as validation that writing can be hard and it also provides encouragement to young writers who may be experiencing frustration. Additionally, these books can be useful in reaching those students who *never* feel frustrated—the ones who dash off a piece of writing, think it is perfect as is, and refuse to go through the process of revision. Reading about the amount of time that authors devote to revision can be a humbling eye-opener for these reluctant revisionists. Enjoy sharing these books with all of your budding authors.

The Suggested Professional Readings list (in addition to the references cited within the pages of this book) reflect the professional resources we pull off our shelves time and again because of the wealth of information they impart about teaching students to write well. We hope this and all the other tools in this book will help you expand your own writers' workshop and help you in your efforts to nurture your student writers.

Finally, to get you excited about what you'll find in the remaining pages of this book, we thought it apropos to include a finished piece of student writing. The following poem, written by Sara, a third grader, reveals a child who has taken to heart her four years of writing instruction from Kindergarten through Grade 3. She has listened to poetry with a writer's ear and has learned to weave craft elements effectively into her writing. Enjoy...

The Sun

A blaring hot flare of light
Casting bright shadows
On the depths of Earth

A yellow-orange ball of fire
Rising in the sky
For a new day to shine in the morning

And sinking down for a rest at night
With colors that dawn in the evening air
Impeccable
Colorful streaks shine
Like carnival lights
It turns plain ordinary grass
Into rays of...
Shining pieces of sun!