

*Creating Successful Writers  
with  
Mentor Texts*



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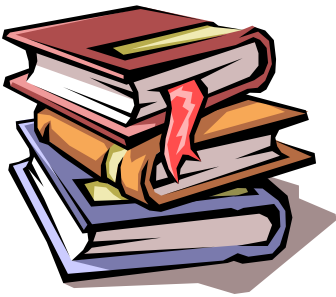
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# Sharing Our Thinking

## ***What Are Mentor Texts?***

- Mentor texts are pieces of literature that you can return to and reread for many different purposes.
- Mentor texts are to be studied and then imitated.
- Mentor texts help students make powerful connections to their own lives.
- Mentor texts help students take risks and try out new strategies.
- Mentor texts should be books that students can relate to and can read independently or with some support.



## ***Why Use Picture Books as Mentor Texts?***

- Picture books provide the models that will help students grow as writers.
- They stimulate creativity and create interest.
- They are rich in beautiful illustrations that add another layer to the text.
- They can be used to connect reading strategies to author's craft.
- They contain multiple life lessons.
- They are culturally diverse.
- They demonstrate the importance of choosing words wisely.
- They are short enough to be shared entirely in one reading.

**Possible Writing Lessons From**  
*Painting the Wind*  
*by*  
**Patricia MacLaughlin and Emily MacLaughlin**

writing in the present tense

effective repetition

variation in sentence length

listing – with semicolon and commas  
using a sentence fragment  
with a dash  
placement variation  
without the use of a conjunction  
with a colon

use of exact nouns and names

strong verbs

hyphenated adjectives

variations in print

effective use of dialogue

setting up the ending in  
the beginning

placing adjectives after  
the noun

character snapshots

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**Taking a closer look at adjective placement in MacLaughlin’s books:**

**From *Painting the Wind*:**

*The paintings are on the walls: the faces, young and old, the bowl of tulips....”*

**From *Sarah, Plain and Tall*:**

*I looked at the long dirt road that crawled across the plains, remembering the morning that Mama had died, cruel and sunny.*

**From *Skylark*:**

*Splashes of color in the sky, red, and silver, and green.*

**Try it out:**

## Walk Around in the Author's Syntax

### From *The Whales' Song* by Dyan Sheldon:

There, enormous in the ocean, were the whales. They leapt and jumped and spun across the moon.

#### Example:

There, tiny in the nest, were the baby robins. They screeched and squirmed and opened their beaks wide for their dinner.

#### Try it out:

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### From *Crab Moon* by Ruth Horowitz:

Everywhere they looked, horseshoe crabs crowded and pushed, like restless cobblestones. Under the sandy shuffle of the surf, he could hear the clack of the crabs' shielded backs bumping and scraping together.

#### Example:

Everywhere they hiked, small animals scurried and hid like frightened children. In the fresh water stream, he could see the trouts' silver fins, glistening and reflecting in the sun.

#### Try it out:

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### From *Shortcut* by Donald Crews:

"I HEAR A TRAIN!"

Everybody stopped.

Everybody listened.

We all heard the train whistle.

Should we run ahead to the path home or back to the cut-off?

#### Example:

"I SEE THE OCEAN!"

Everybody clapped.

Everybody smiled.

We all saw the waves rolling toward the shore.

Should we dash across the sand to the water's edge  
or stand here to delight in the sunrise?

#### Try It Out:

## Getting Started with Mentor Texts

Here are some of our favorites and how we use them to help us teach writing:

*An Angel for Solomon Singer.* Cynthia Rylant.

connections to special places, people, wishes, dreams; snapshots of setting and character; rich descriptions; thought shots; combines final action with a decision made for ending; use of parentheses; effective repetition

*Aunt Flossie's Hats (and Crab Cakes Later).* Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard.

memories built around objects; appeal to the senses; text organized around objects; anecdotes; snapshot of setting; strong verbs; writing dialogue

*Barn Savers.* Linda Oatman High.

connections to special times, people, and objects; use of similes and words that fit the topic; use of colon to list

*Baseball, Snakes, and Summer Squash.* Donald Graves.

use of a writing territory ("growing up" stories); rich, sensory details; sprinkling of dialogue; transition words; thoughtshots; alliteration; writing in the present tense; parentheses; dashed; hyphenated words, proper nouns

*Crab Moon.* Ruth Horowitz.

connections to special places and events; show, not tell; exploding a moment; quick transitions to get to the main event; snapshot of setting; final action and dialogue in ending; figurative language; strong verbs; alliteration; word pairs

*Langston's Train Ride.* Robert Burleigh.

Focus narrowed to one particular moment or event; sensory details; includes Author's Note and an Afterword; flashbacks; written in present tense; effective repetition; effective use of fragments; hyphenated words; dashes; ellipses; proper nouns; use of italics

*Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse.* Kevin Henkes

asking questions to add details; details clustered in threes; show not tell; definite ending – combines action with a wish for the future; word choice – strong verbs and adjectives; alliteration; captions; dialogue

*One Tiny Turtle.* Nicola Davies.

narrative as well as informational text; narrowing a territory to a specific topic; snapshots of setting and character; precise and vivid descriptions; circular ending; use of comparisons to provide clear images; similes; precise nouns and adjectives; vivid verbs; written in present tense

*Painting the Wind.* Patricia and Emily MacLaughlin.

narrowing the topic and establishing a point; snapshots of character and setting; effective use of dialogue; effective repetition; matching the end with the beginning; use of exact nouns and names; strong verbs; hyphenated adjectives; adjective placement; variations in listing

*Prairie Train.* Marsha Wilson Chall.

written in present tense; snapshot of setting; ending reflects the beginning; similes that match topic; hyphenated adjectives; proper nouns; use of listing; dashes; ellipses; onomatopoeia; use of comma; sprinkling of dialogue

*Shortcut.* Donald Crews.

emotional connections – scary times; one small moment in time; effective repetition; ending is an example of a decision made, reflecting the problem revealed in the beginning; variety of sentence types and length; examples of simple noun-verb sentence structures; dialogue

*Teammates.* Peter Golenbock.

use of title to state the point; snapshots of character and setting; use of photographs to build content; anecdotes; dialogue; proper nouns; strong verbs; use of comma

*Widget.* Lynn Rossiter McFarland.

simple character sketch; details clustered in threes; ending reflects the beginning; seesaw structure; strong verbs; different types of sentences; dialogue; ellipses