

Reading Like a Writer: Using Mentor Texts to Teach Craft

IF you are wanting to teach students the qualities of writing by using mentor texts, THEN you might want to lean on this suggested list of mini lessons to teach students how to read for craft.

Consider this list as a menu of possibilities, selecting only the teaching points that meet the needs of your students. You may use your assessment data, observations, and other information to decide on a plan that is tailored to the needs of your class. These teaching points may be used as whole-group mini lessons, mid-workshop teach points, or to support conferences and small-group work. You need not use every teaching point. Also, you may use the teaching points you have selected in any order and at any time throughout the year, according to need.

Reading Like a Writer

How to Read for Craft

Read & Notice

1. Respond initially to what the text says to you.
2. Point on the page to a part you like.
3. Describe what the writer is doing using your own words.
4. Think about what the writer had to do to write like that.
(ex. read, ask experts, travel, observe) What kinds of revision might the writer have done?
5. Imitate one thing that you like about the author's craft:
topic, tone, style, language patterns, imagery, use of dialogue, structures, sentences, punctuation, etc.

How to use Texts to Teach Qualities of Writing

Teach Points

1. Have a short stack of favorite texts to teach from all year long.
2. Carry a favorite book under your arm as you confer. Put sticky notes in places to demonstrate craft moves.
3. Create rituals of reading poems or short texts daily.
4. Chart what kids and you notice about craft moves.
5. Borrow a craft move from a poem or picture book to try out in your own writing.
6. Demonstrate choosing one feature or element to imitate.
7. Go on language scavenger hunts for great uses of language.
8. Study an author and chart what kids notice about style, voice, and word choice. Imitate one or two features.
9. Study a genre by multiple authors. Imitate one or two features.
10. Ask kids to reflect on how reading has influenced their writing.

Reading Like a Writer

Other Ideas for Reading Like Writers When Crafting Narratives & Memoir

Generating

- List the topic or theme of 5 different first person narratives
- Make a character map
- Study the opening paragraphs of 5 mentor texts. List the craft moves.
- Make a list of your own topics/themes
- Make a character map of yourself and list ways you can show those traits in your story
- Try out 3 different leads

Crafting & Drafting

- Highlight in colored pen places where the character is thinking
- Highlight places that describe character's gestures
- Highlight places that describe or "paint" the environment
- Mark places with a possible turning point
- Find places in your story to insert your character's internal thinking
- Find places in your story to add gestures to characters
- Find your story's turning point

Revising

- Study the ending paragraphs of 5 mentor texts. List the craft moves.
- Make a timeline, chart, or graph of how time moves in a model text (in sequence, present to past, flashbacks)
- Put a star next to the most important moments in a model text
- Imitate 3 different ways to end your story
- Make a time line of two different ways time could go in your story

Editing

- Study how 2 model texts make paragraphs (new idea or time, new person talking...)
- Choose 3 favorite sentences and copy them into your notebook. Write why you like them (length, tone, rhythm, language, etc.)
- Chunk material in your writing with boxes.
- Rewrite 3 sentences from your story to imitate model sentences in length, style, tone, etc.