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Read Like a Writer:

Collecting Mentor Texts to Use with Your Writing Program

Sample Pages



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Course Overview

Ever read a great book, and wish you could write like that? You can. So can your students. Good writing is not just a talent. Learning to write is built from understanding and application of the conventions of writing, but writing well requires an understanding and application of the crafts of writing. And who better to teach those crafts than the authors whose writing we admire? When authors are asked for advice on how to write well, they often say, “Read a lot.” On closer examination, it isn’t just reading *quantitatively* that makes a difference. It is reading *qualitatively* that makes the difference. Read to study how an author crafts writing requires slow, studied reading. After you enjoy the story, after you’ve digested the content or message, go back to those passages that “blow your socks off,” that make you think, “I wish I could write like that.” Re-read those parts of the text mining them for craft. These are mentor texts. Read and study those passages to discover what the author does, how an author crafts. You might be enchanted with word choices, word combining, a construction of a sentence, a lead, or study how an author evokes emotions or creates pace, slowing things down, or speeding them up. Read nonfiction and informational texts and study how an author informs, piques curiosity or stimulate questions. Read like a writer to write like a writer!

In this course, *Read Like a Writer: Collecting Mentor Texts to Use with Your Writing Program* you will have an opportunity to read like a writer. Choose texts from a wide variety of literature, fiction and nonfiction; read to study how authors craft writing. Collect mentor texts to use with your writing program. Use mentor texts as co-teachers of writing to teach all genres of writing and inspire vision for writing, yours and your student’s. Choose selections that model the crafts of writing you want to teach or that are part of your curriculum. Choose any aspect of writing from genre study to text types and purposes to literary devices to grammar and more. Organize your collection of mentor texts in a practical, useful reading log to make your writing program more alive and authentic. Create a unit of study that is useful and practical to you.

Writers are always reading for craft. As you are taking this course, live like a writer. Tune in to anything in print. Anything you read could be used as a mentor text. Notice signs, billboards, advertisements, anything in print that strikes you. Advertisers spend millions to get your attention in as few words as possible. Carry a notebook with you. Jot down clever sentences, interesting word choices, funny sayings. Mine what you read for craft.

Your work for this course will entail reading and completing exercises in the Text, Outside Reading and Writing Activities and a Final Reflection Essay. The exercises in the text will guide you through some of the outside reading and writing activities. A “Lesson” precedes each topic in the text and acts as a study guide, providing “Instructor’s Comments” directions for reading, and comments on the assignment or exercise. Complete the exercises in the text using a separate word document or text document. See “Sending Work” in the opening pages. In the end, please review the Course Requirements to complete the balance of the requirements for this course. Keep a checklist that works for you to be accountable for all course assignments.

This course is for YOU. Tailor designing the course work to meet your needs is invited. Please contact the instructor if you have questions, modifications or ideas that will make this course more meaningful to you. Have fun reading; reading like writer and writing like a writer

*This course supports **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)** for K-12 Anchor Standards for Writing 1, 2, 3, 4,7,8, 9 and 10. Mentor texts can be used to show excellence in texts types; argument, informative/explanatory and narrative writing as well as demonstrate how authors create and support purpose. Exemplary mentor texts can be found to demonstrate how authors produce clear and coherent writing, organization and writing style to meet task, purpose and audience. Mentor texts can be used to model how authors gather and used research to build and present knowledge. And mentor texts can be used as models of text to study, analyze and imitate in structure and style, to develop effective writing skills through writing routinely.*

Teachers taking this course will focus on their grade level or content area expectations of the CCSS and their State Standards.

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Lesson 1- Introduction

Instructor's Comments:

Welcome to the course *Read Like a Writer: Collecting Mentor Texts to Use in your Writing Program*. Whether you are new to the concept of using mentor texts with your writing program or if you are a veteran, I hope you will use this course as an opportunity to explore the reading writing connection more deeply by reading like a writer. Though this course is ultimately focused on using mentor texts with your writing program, it really is more about reading and finding examples of writing craft that you can use as models as co-teachers of writing. I hope that reading like a writer will also be an adventure for you in your writing practice and help you to improve your craft of writing.

You will spend most of your time choosing and reading texts, paying attention to the craft of writing, noticing how an author creates hooks, creates images, writes dialogue to advance a story or how an author enthralls you with information about a topic. You will look for examples of the kind of writing you want to teach and how to craft it. This process of reading like a writer is seeing how authors of literature, both fiction and nonfiction, wield their craft so we can show students authentic examples of what we are trying to teach. The more we model using mentor texts, and read like a writer, especially as a read aloud, we are also giving our students the opportunity to learn to read like writers, too.

As you read texts and find examples of mentor texts to use with your writing program you will create a reading log to record the mentor texts that you read and the crafts of writing you could use in your writing program or in your own writing. The first task is to read, and enjoy how authors craft with language.

In the end, you will put it all together by creating a unit of study, using the question, “What have I read that is like what I want to write?” Find mentor texts that are exemplars of the craft you are studying and create a unit of study using these mentors as co-teachers of writing. Before you take it to the classroom, I will encourage you to try it out in your own writing.

Text Reading: Introduction.

Comments on Assignments: Please read the text and complete the exercise. Use a Word or text document to record your responses. (See “Sending Work”).

Introduction

This course, *Read Like a Writer: Collecting Mentor Texts to use with your Writing Program*, is for you. It is for you because I know that in today's educational climate there is a huge push to meet content standards and improve writing scores on state and national assessments. I know that many of you have been inundated with new curriculums to improve reading and writing for your students, K-12, and just as you seem to master the "new" curriculum, another one comes along, replacing what you've just figured out. And I know that the finger is pointing at you to teach writing, and teach it well, and thoroughly and competently to all those smiling faces, eager with pen in hand to attend to your tutelage.

This course is for you because I know that you, like me, majored in teaching, perhaps with an emphasis in a content area, but primarily teaching-curriculum and instruction. Few of you are professional writers, some of you like to write and some of you took and remember enough of your English courses to help you with writing and some of you, well, some of you are like I use to be, wondering if you can get by teaching writing without writing yourself. Where are those worksheets, anyway?

Many teachers I know are not fond of writing, do as little as they can and are grateful they have a teacher's guide to direct their curriculum and instruction in writing. Many teachers I know were relieved when Step-Up-To-Writing, or any other formulaic writing model created easy to use and useful patterned, structured writing. The 5 paragraph or 5 sentence structure, became so popular, that everyone could quote it, "Topic sentence, 3 supporting details and in conclusion..." Students who use formulaic writing usually get a "3" or "average" on the state assessment scoring rubric. Never mind that a 5-paragraph essay is hard to find in any text outside of school to show as a mentor text. We can teach it, students can do it; it is a writing structure that works even if it is boring. But how will it meet the new writing standards for the Common Core State Standards? How will it help students meet 21st century skills for college and the workplace? Is the 5-paragraph essay the best they can learn to communicate their thoughts, opinions or voice?

How comfortable are you with teaching writing?

This course is designed to help you build your confidence as a writer and a teacher of writing by learning how to read like a writer and mine writing crafts like a miner digging for gold. Whether you are a good writer or even like to write, you do know when an author writes so beautifully, you find yourself in tears, like Gary Paulsen in the opening pages of *Winter Room*. You do know when an author writes and informs so well about a topic that even if you do not have background knowledge you can learn, as I did reading *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot. Read, and notice what strikes you as a reader. Choose passages of writing to study that strike you. Rather than literary analysis, look and study how authors craft the language of writing. You might notice how an author creates vivid description or how an author uses verbs or how they punctuate. Crafts are the skills of writing. You will select texts to use as mentors to illustrate how to

write a simile, a description, an opening line or how to punctuate or how to persuade or how to write humorously... or whatever skill you are teaching in your writing program. These mentor texts will be teaching models, these authors will be co-teachers of writing.

My first mentors are the teachers like Ralph Fletcher, Katie Wood Ray, Lucy Calkins and Don Graves whose books I read about using mentor texts to discover how a writer writes, I read them first for content, then I study them for writing craft. I use these texts as my writing mentors as I wrote this course. You'll see and recognize their influence in these pages. But the real work comes after I put down the professional books about reading like a writer, and start to read literature of all kinds, fiction, nonfiction, books, articles, advertisements any text with print. I read first for the joy of reading, then read like a writer and then using what I notice about the craft of writing as a writer and then as a teacher of writing. And it is this practice, of reading like a writer and collecting mentor texts to use with your writing program that is the focus of this course. You will select texts to read, then read like a writer, choosing mentor texts as co-teachers of writing to use with your writing program. You will discover the crafts of writing, and envision yourself as a writer, while thinking about offering writing possibilities for your students.

Exercise 1: Please share a little about yourself as it relates to reading like a writer and your experience with collecting mentor texts to use with your writing program. What do you hope to gain from taking this course?

Lesson 2- Read Like a Writer to Write for a Reader

Instructor's Comments: So, what does it mean to “read like a writer,” and why is it a helpful skill to develop to be a better writer and to teach writing? This section discusses the importance of studying author’s craft for examples or models to use as mentors or co-teachers of writing in your writing and in the teaching of writing.

Looking Ahead: If you are new to this process of reading like a writer, I would highly recommend that you jump ahead to the section just a few pages forward titled, “Using Professional Resources to Learn about Using Mentors Texts”, and peruse several professional books about reading like a writer. Reading one of these texts or one of your choosing meets an Outside Reading Requirement

Text Reading: “Read Like a Writer to Write for a Reader”.

Comments on Assignment: Please read the text and complete the exercise. Use a Word or text document to record your responses. (See “Sending Work”).

You will be asked to find 10 texts you love. I strongly advocate using picture books. Though the picture book is often thought of as a “children’s book” this genre is one of the most sophisticated for writers to craft well. Picture books by authors, such as Cynthia Rylant, Jane Yolen, Patricia Polacco, Mo Wilems, and Gary Paulsen provide a wealth of craft in the short text of a picture book. If you haven’t read any lately, I encourage you to check out this genre. P.S. College Courses Online also offers a graduate level course called *Using Picture Books, K-12*. Nice companion to this course! ☺

Read Like a Writer to Write for a Reader

“Crafting writing is nothing new. Describing the craft of writing was what was new to us. We were never taught to look at how Hemingway or Swift was writing. When it came time to learn *how* to write we were given prescriptions far removed from the texts we were asked to read.” *Wondrous Words*, Katie Wood-Ray, 1999, p. 21

I collect books. Loads and loads of books. I have books I love to read and don't want to give away, those that sit on the bookshelf ever-reminding me of the journey I've taken through them, like the heart warming story of a boy and his dogs in *Where the Red Fern Grows*, or the anger I felt toward Amir Jan's arrogance and jealous toward Hassan in *The Kite Runner*. Classics, and poetry, short stories and picture books, old ones and new ones, line my shelves, each book a piece of me, each book saying something about who I am. I have self-help-get-over-it books, parenting books and how-to-be who ever I want to be books. I have cookbooks that smell of onions and garlic, pages marked with chocolate fingerprints and stained with chicken broth. I have heavy books bound in hard covers with lofty titles on the philosophy-psychology-theory-du-jour on teaching and learning. And I have loads of books on teaching reading and writing.

But it is the writing books; it is that stack that seems to be growing. It is that stack which I delve into for insights about learning to write. It is those authors who have become my heroes and heroines, who ride on shiny white horses. How do they do it, writing, that is? How do they write so well? Is this a talent, a gift or can it be learned? Could I ever learn to write like that?

What I learn about writing from these texts is: Writers read... a lot. Writers write... a lot. I do read a lot and I do write a lot, but my writing doesn't come out like their writing. It isn't until I read books by professional teachers like Ralph Fletcher or Lucy Calkins that I understand that I have to read differently to understand how writers create their craft. The difference is reading like a writer and then writing for a reader.

Reading like a writer means studying the art and technique of master authors, noticing how they use the tools of their craft to create meaning: weaving words into sentences, transitioning gracefully into paragraphs, developing ideas, organizing information, creating lasting impressions for the reader. Writing for a reader means creating carefully crafted writing so that the reader can make intentional meaning from print

Ahh...insight! I hone my collection of professional books about writing, focusing on those that enlighten me about how to read like a writer. I read books by Katie Wood Ray, Lynn Dorfmann, Lester Laminack and Susan Hall. “Just collect a set of mentor texts and discover what an author does to create their craft”, they say. They make it look so easy. I gather some texts that I love, picture books, novels; books I've read before. I know the story. Now, I can read them differently; I can read like a writer, studying how the authors use language to create effect. I am daunted by the amount of “craft” to choose from, let alone knowing what is a “craft” or naming it and thinking about how to use it in my writing program. So, I get more focused, simplifying the process. Look at one book.

Pick out one paragraph. Focus on one well-crafted sentence. Notice one thing a writer did that struck me and name the craft in my own language.

END OF SAMPLE PAGES.

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