Why Teach Authentic Writing

- Students are less motivated to write than they are to read:
  - Unlikely to witness writing (at home and elsewhere) for pleasure
  - Unlikely to witness writing (at home and elsewhere) to achieve goals
- To launch students in authentic writing, show them that what we care about most in their writing is…
  - That they write what they want to tell us
  - That they tell it in as interesting and genuine ways as they can
- Do this by validating, empowering, and inspiring…
  - Modeling it in our own writing (with something we want to tell them);
  - Responding enthusiastically to whatever they tell us in their writing.
  - Offering mentor texts and mentor people

Why We Use Writer’s Notebooks (a.k.a. Creator’s Notebooks)

- A tool for feeling like and “living like” a writer.
- A place to practice a “writing life” everyday.
- A reason to keep eyes wide open and notice very big and little things.
- A place where we develop our own writing fluency (being able to write and think at the same time)
- A private, useful tool that becomes something we are proud of/grateful for.
- A place to cultivate “high-impact, low-stakes” writing.

How to Implement Creator’s Notebooks into your Life and Classroom

1. Decide on a notebook for you and your students. You could use the same composition notebook for all students or ask parents to donate random notebooks. Allow students time to make their notebook uniquely “theirs”.
2. Have them divide their notebook into sections (2-4 depending on their grade level)
3. Leave the first page blank. It will eventually be the Table of Contents.
4. Have older students add page numbers.
5. Give them one category that you want them to have. “In Our Classroom” for example. Let them choose at least one category, or more.
6. Have a “Creator’s Notebook Corner” in your classroom. Allow students to use stickers, markers, pictures, etc. from the corner.
7. DEDICATE 10 MINUTES EVERY DAY for students to work in their notebooks.
   a. I’ve seen teachers implement Creator’s Notebook time as students’ bell work. They work on it for the first 10 minutes of class. This allows early birds or late comers to participate and not miss instruction. Do not let them take their notebooks home.
   b. Students entries are their choice!
   c. “We don’t teach students to write so much as create a safe space where they can teach themselves by DOING” (Fletcher, 2017).
8. SHARE! Put students in Creator’s Notebook Groups. Allow sharing in some way every day. Sharing is motivating!
Guidance for Writer’s Notebooks Available:


Introducing & Using Mentor Texts in Writing Instruction

1. **Choose the writing trait, skill or characteristic you will focus on:** This isn’t the time for a “shotgun” approach. Simplify your choice based on what your students are ready for… something they’ve been exposed to but are not skilled in using yet. Think in terms of “mini-lesson” – what you can effectively address in a short, mini-lesson setting.

2. **Choose the text:** Be sure the texts you choose as mentors exemplify the genre or medium or literary element your students will be trying. Use picture books, newspaper articles, opinion columns, excerpts, passages from novels, brochures, etc. Be selective about the actual text you will refer to the most, but it’s good to have “a few” on hand for students to browse and study for themselves.

3. **Read and analyze the text to/for yourself:** Pay attention to little details that you can point out, and develop open-ended questions for later on, when you want to students to analyze the text.

4. **Emulate:** Prepare your own piece of writing that experiments with your chosen trait, skill or characteristic. Make your writing example brief, just to assist students in recognizing elements of the trait, skill or characteristic. As you get better at this step, don’t prepare your own piece of writing in advance… rather, write in front of your students. It is powerful for them to see you experimenting with the ideas you are asking them to try out.

5. **Read aloud (and “hint” at thinking aloud):** No matter what grade level or age your students are, your read-aloud of a mentor text is one of the most powerful portions of “Think-Aloud” teaching there is. Be sure students can see your facial reactions and hear your verbal responses as you read-and-think-aloud. This does not mean that you discuss the text with the students – only that they see you modeling positive responses/reactions to the text. The only task for your students is to listen, watch, learn and enjoy!

6. **Engage!** Let this become more than just instruction. Let this become an opportunity for you to share yourself with your students, and to begin becoming a mentor to them, yourself.

7. **Anchor all ideas:** create anchor charts listing students’ ideas and what they notice. Include a photo of the author, or a picture of the book/magazine, etc. where the mentor text originated. Hang the chart where students can refer to it as they do their own writing.

8. **Celebrate favorites:** Periodically talk about who students’ favorites are; compare and contrast several authors or written texts. Vote on class favorites. Talk about them in other areas of the curriculum or classroom settings. Make it a real, truly mentoring relationship for your students.

“Your notebook is uniquely yours. Only YOU can decide what to put in it” (Fletcher, 1996).
Guidance for Teaching Writing with Mentor Texts
https://twowritingteachers.org/2016/05/05/how-to-choose

### Using Students’ Writing as Mentor Text
- “Mine” valuable text from one-on-one conferences.
- Help the student share their text as a mentor would.
- **Conduct classroom discourse about the mentor text**, together analyzing it; discovering it, praising it).
- Question the text; “question” its author – who is a peer!
- Vote on favorite portions of peer-mentor texts
- Reward the students when they attempt to revise their writing… to **imitate, simulate, or emulate!**

### Using Teacher Writing as Mentor Texts
- “Mine” valuable excerpts from your own writing (use real-life pieces you have written outside of class – your Writer’s Notebook, letters you’ve written, email you’ve written, etc.)
- Sometimes model your writing, thinking aloud as you write, then discussing your writing and thinking with your students.
- Share your text as a proud mentor would! Do “Think-Alouds” as you share – be genuine.
- **Conduct classroom discourse about your text**, analyzing it and discovering it with students; teaching students how to praise/critique it).
- Teach students to question the text; to “question” you, its author!
- Have students vote on their favorite portions of your mentor texts.
- Reward the students when they attempt to revise their writing… to **imitate, simulate, or emulate!**
- Two Writing Teachers (twowritingteachers.org) suggest: “Be known and loved (students need to see their teachers ‘ache with caring’ – Mem Fox”)

### Some of Nancy’s and Keri’s “Best Friend” Texts
Our advice: Less is often more. You don’t really need to have a huge collection of mentor texts, but you do need to have a variety that you know really well, and that address the writing themes, ideas, voice – traits and characteristics you want to teach. We have followed advice from [http://twowritingteachers.org](http://twowritingteachers.org), and started with our most “beloved” picture books – the one’s we have read and re-read.” Reading them “through the lens of writers,” helped us see how the author crafted them. Here are a few of our best friends:

- **Clever ABC Books (not just for babies!)**
  - *Alligator Arrived with Apples: A Potluck Alphabet Feast* by Crescent Dragonwagon, Illustrated by Aruego & Dewey
  - *Ogres! Ogres! Ogres! A Feasting Frenzy from A to Z* by Nicholas Heller, Illustrated by Jos. A. Smith
  - *Tomorrow’s Alphabet* by George Shannon, Illustrated by Donald Crews

- **Writing as Writers**
  - *Chester* by Melanie Watt
  - *Diary of a Wombat* by Jackie French
  - *Christmas Underwear* by Keri Measom-Francis, Illustrated by Addison Welch

- **Descriptive Writing**
  - *Night in the Country* by Cynthia Rylant, Illustrated by Mary Szilagyi
  - *In the Middle of the Night* by Kathy Henderson, Illustrated by Jennifer Eachus
  - *All the Places to Love* by Patricia MacLachlan, Illustrated by Mike Wimmer
• **Writing Through a Mask**
  *I Am the Dog; I Am the Cat* by Donald Hall, Illustrated by Bary Moser
  *(NF) Water Dance* by Thomas Locker
  *(NF) Are You a Dragonfly? (Grasshopper?) (Snail?) (Ant?) (Ladybug?)* by July Allen & Tudor Humphries

• **Writer’s Voice/Characterization**
  *Clementine* by Sarah Pennypacker
  *Love That Dog* by Sharon Creech
  *Tough Boris* by Mem Fox, Illustrated by Kathryn Brown
  *We Don’t Eat Our Classmates* by Ryan T. Higgins

• **Figurative (& Playful) Language**
  *Up North at the Cabin* by Marsha Wilson Chall, illus. Steve Johnson
  *Twilight Comes Twice* by Ralph Fletcher, illus. Kate Kiesler
  *Yaks Yak: Animal Word Pairs* by Linda Sue Park, illus. Reinhardt
  *The Difference Between Babies & Cookies* by Mary Hanson, illus. Debbie Tilley
  *This is the House that Jack Built* (Saimms Taback); *This is the Mouse that Jack Built* (Cundy Szekeres);
  *The House that Drac Built* (Judy Sierra)

• **Nonfiction: Defining/Describing**
  *The Sun is My Favorite Star* by Frank Asch
  *One Small Square Woods* by Donald M. Silver
  *Is a Blue Whale the Biggest Thing There Is?* by Robert E. Wells

• **Autobiography /Memoir**
  *Aunt Claire’s Yellow Beehive Hair* by Deborah Blumenthal, Illustrated by GrandPre
  *Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born* by Jamie Lee Curtis, Illustrated by Laura Cornell
  *A Fine Dessert: Four Centuries, Four Families, One Delicious Treat*, by Emily Jenkins & Sophie Blackall
  *This Quiet Lady* by Charlotte Zolotow, illus. Anita Lobel
  *The Relatives Came* by Cynthia Rylant, illus. Stephen Gammel
  *When I Was Young In the Mountains* by Cynthia Rylant, illus. Diane Goode
  *Birthday Presents* by Cynthia Rylant, illus. Sucie Stevenson
  *The Leaving Morning* by Angela Johnson, illus. David Soman
    (“Love on a Kickstand” -p.69-70)

• **Ideas /Organization**
  *(NF) Chocolate Chip Cookies* by Karen Wagner, Illustrated by Leah Palmer Preiss
  *(NF) Who Hoots?  And Who Hops?* By Katie Davis
  *(NF) The Important Book* by Margaret Wise Brown, Illustrated by Leonard Weisgard
  *(NF & Fiction) Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans* by Kadir Nelson
  *(NF & ABC) Geography From A to Z: A Picture Glossary* by Jack Knowlton, illus Harriett Barton
  *(NF & ABC) G is for Googol: A Math Alphabet Book* by David Schwartz, illus Marissa Moss
  *(NF How-To) Thank You Book for Kids: Hundred of Creative, Cool, and Clever Ways to Say Thank You!* By Lauren Spizman

• **Integrated Writing & Social Studies**
  *(NF) Lady Liberty: A Biography* by Doreen Rappaport, illus. Matt Tavares
  *(NF) If the World Were a Village: A Book About the World’s People*, by David J. Smith, illus. Shelagh Armstrong
  
  [https://www.randomactsofkindness.org](https://www.randomactsofkindness.org) Free lesson plans, true kindness stories, etc.
• **Poetry**
  *Autumn: An Alphabet Acrostic, Winter: An Alphabet Acrostic, Spring: An Alphabet Acrostic,* and *Summer: An Alphabet Acrostic* all by Steven Schnur, Illustrated by Leslie Evans
  *Giant Children* by Brod Baggert, Illustrated by Ted Arnold.
  *Monster Goose* by Judy Sierra
  *Pieces: A Year in Poems & Quilts* by Anna Grossnickle Hines (Anthology) *Sky Words* by Marilyn Singger, illus Deborah Kogan Ray

• **Mentor Text ideas shared by participants in this session:**