Title: Using Mentor Texts to Teach Craft

Grade Appropriate: K-12 (with modifications)

Approximate length: Craft lesson – 30 minutes…depends how rich a text you choose.

Objectives:
- Turing reading eyes into writing eyes
- Creating active readers – metacognitive awareness
- Developing structural awareness of texts
- Creating common language for the writing community
- Developing trust in mentor texts – independence

Brief Summary/Outline:
Using a typed text, students are asked to read and underline things they notice in the text that the author did that they find interesting. As a group we brainstorm and chart our observations. The chart is divided into 3 sections: **What we noticed; Why the author did it** (remember: everything is done on purpose! Why did they do it? What purpose does it serve?) **What will we call it?** (Let the kids brainstorm a descriptive name until they find one they like and seems memorable. For instance, *sound words* may be a way to describe words like ‘buzzzzzzz’ or ‘glub glub’ found in text.) This act of class naming creates a common language within our community of writers. It also serves as a bridging technique to enable readers to construct understanding of literary device without the burden of formal terms. These terms can be incorporated later. **Note: If this lesson is used in the upper grades, creating a class term to describe may not be necessary because they already know the formal term.** For instance, if they know what alliteration is and call it that, there is no need for a bridging term.

I have subsequently posted out craft discoveries on the bulletin board to encourage it becoming part of our common language.

I have found this to be a simple and elegant lesson that had lasting impact on my readers and writers!

Examples of good mentor texts:
- *Water Dance* by Thomas Locker
- *Night in the Country* by Cynthia Rylant
- *When I was Little* by Jamie Lee Curtis
- *The Moon was the Best* by Charlotte Zolotow
- *What You Know First* by Patricia MacLaughlan
- *My Mama Had a Dancing Heart* by Libba More Grey
- Selections from The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros
- *Twilight Comes Twice* by Ralph Fletcher
- *When the Relatives Came* by Cynthia Rylant
- *Uptown* by Bryan Collier
- *Duke Ellington* by Andrea Davis Pinkey

So many more that I can’t even list! Use what YOU love!
I also use mentor texts to enhance revision work with my students. I will frequently take a typed text and look with the student for craft that they like and want to try in their own writing. One example of this is in my poetry unit.

With a mentor poem displayed on the overhead, I explain we are going to be looking for things that the author did that stand out to us and that we liked. As I read it aloud, I expect children to be attending to this task, trying to notice textual patterns, etc. Then I go back and underline what they noticed. (they have copies, too, and so can mark their own copy for reference) I mention some of the terminology for what they notice (simile, metaphor, alliteration, personification, etc.) and we discuss why we think the author may have done it.

Next I ask the students to write down 3 of these pieces of craft in their own poem. They may choose what they want to try, but they must have at least 3. In my conferences I assess whether they have tried out their choices and we discuss their work.

The next day I ‘make a student famous’ by putting their before and after work on the overhead so that students can see the improved poem.

Resources:
- **Water Dance** by Thomas Locker
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