

Using Literature to Teach Writing Traits

Books to teach the traits

What a Wonderful World by George David Weiss and Bob Thiele, illustrated by Ashley Bryan

This picture book has wonderful, bright, multicultural illustrations to go with the lyrics to the song. It can be used to illustrate **voice** by playing a recording of Louis Armstrong singing the song. Comparison with another "voice" singing the song can be used to reinforce the concept of **voice**.

Charlie Parker Played Be Bop by Chris Raschka

This book features a great jazz musician and the form and style of both text and illustrations suggest the loose inventiveness of jazz. Waddling birds, dancing lollipops, shoes with legs, and Charlie Parker and his saxophone go crazily across the pages to scant words in different kinds of type. Yet they repeat in unexpected ways and give the same pulsating beat as Parker's music in his recording of "A Night in Tunisia," which Raschka credits as the inspiration for the book. This is an upbeat example of **sentence fluency, word choice, and ideas**. Teachers can use music to convey the concept of sentence fluency and demonstrate the rhythm words create. His book, **Yo! Yes?** is another example of how even simple words can get a message across. This book offers an example for younger writers who are using pictures and simple words to convey their ideas.

The Wolf's Chicken Stew by Keiko Kasza

Keiko Kasza has created a great example of **ideas** for primary students. It can also be used for math lessons involving "100." That number is repeated throughout the story. Other traits represented in this story include **word choice, organization, and sentence fluency**. It is a clever story about a wolf and a chicken with a unique conclusion.

More, More, More Said the Baby by Vera B. Williams

According to *School Library Journal*, *The spontaneity and delight of play is captured perfectly in this trio of multigenerational, multiracial "love stories" about three pairs of babies and their grown-ups. Told in a natural, colloquial tone, the simple, engaging text is finely honed with a rhythm that is musical. The style is as buoyant and infectious as the actions described: "Little Guy's daddy has to run like anything just to catch that baby up."* Williams carries the same basic framework and language through each story, generating the repetition that is so satisfying to very young listeners, while the stories and characters maintain their own distinctions. Just as she celebrates universality within the text, Williams presents diversity with characteristic flair within her illustrations. Little Guy and his father are white, Little Pumpkin is African-American and her grandmother is white, and Little Bird and her mother are both Asian-American. This book can be used for **voice** and **word choice**.

Two Bad Ants, The Z was Zapped, Jumanji, The Widow's Broom, and The Mysteries of Harris Burdick by Chris Van Allsburg

Books written and illustrated by Chris Van Allsburg are always strong examples of ideas. These titles can also be used for **word choice, sentence fluency, organization, and voice**. **The Z was Zapped** can be used to practice prediction skills with students. **The Mysteries of Harris Burdick** has unique ideas for "story starters." **The Stranger** is another unique story that could be used to generate discussion about who "the stranger" really is and where the author got his idea.

Julius, the Baby of the World by Kevin Henkes

Kevin Henkes has authored several delightful books with characters, often mice, who display a wide range of human emotions, foibles, and personalities. One of his more famous characters is Lilly of **Lilly and the Purple Purse** fame. His books provide good examples of ideas, word choice, sentence fluency, and organization. The ideas in the books are usually quite familiar and children will connect with them.

The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs by Jon Scieszka, illustrated by Lane Smith

This book presents the well known story from the perspective of the poor, maligned wolf. **Word choice, organization, ideas** are all represented in this book. It is also a perfect opportunity to discuss *point of view*. It can be used at several different grade levels. Teachers can also compare this story with similar stories from other cultures. A discussion of how the wolf is represented in traditional literature is also interesting to use with upper elementary students. Another book by this author/illustrator team is **Math Curse** which can be use for cross curricular instruction and also as an example of *ideas*.

Hiroshima by Laurence Yep

Web reviews included the following comments about this book:

- *"Yep's brief story is the perfect catalyst to spark discussion about war and how lives and countries are forever altered. It is indeed worthy of inclusion in every American classroom, especially in light of the turbulent times of today."*
- *"This is an excellent companion to **Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes** by Eleanor Coerr. The details of the days events during the attack on Hiroshima and the years after bring the reader closer to understanding the surprise of the attack, and the devastation that followed for years. My sixth graders read this book in conjunction with their Social Studies class and the study of World Cultures. They love it. This is truly a book to be added to any classroom library!"*

All the traits are visible in this book but **sentence fluency** stands out in view of the fact that it fits so well with the essence of this book.

Because of Winn Dixie by Kate DiCamillo

Kate DiCamillo's first book received many awards including the Newbery Honor and School Library Journal's Best Book of the Year. It is difficult to avoid being charmed by a dog that *smiles so big it makes him sneeze* and an engaging protagonist named India Opal Buloni. Examples of **word choice, ideas, organization**, and **sentence fluency** are abundant in this book.

Hatchet by Gary Paulsen

Web reviews pose the question: "Could you survive in the Canadian wilderness with just your basic instincts and a hatchet? In Paulsen's book, **Hatchet**, the protagonist, Brian Robeson, does just that, he survives in the wilderness for 54 days by using his instincts and a hatchet, a present from his mother. Brian is being flown to see his father in the Canadian wilderness for the summer after the divorce of his parents, when he is thrown into a life threatening situation when the pilot of the two-seater plane has a fatal heart attack. Immediately Brian must think of how to survive by landing the plane in a lake. From this moment Paulsen takes you through the survival techniques of Brian's 54 days in the wilderness." This book is a good example of **organization, word choice, sentence fluency, and ideas.**

Punctuation Takes a Vacation by Robin Pulver, Lynn Rowe Reed (Illustrator)

Conventions can be presented using many books. **Punctuation Takes a Vacation** obviously brings this trait front and center. This book could be followed up with writing examples that are missing punctuation to show why it is necessary. A discussion of reasons the rules are "broken" is helpful too. Many of the titles on this list have examples of ways authors "broke the rules" to convey a message, idea, or emotion.

Love That Dog by Sharon Creech

Poems about a student who didn't want to write poetry and ends up liking it. He even gets Walter Dean Myers to visit his school. This is a good example of **ideas** and **sentence fluency**. Poetry and music work well as examples of **sentence fluency**.

Miss Alaineus: A Vocabulary Disaster by Debra Frasier

Word choice provides the focus for this story. It also presents teachers and students with a chance to talk about making mistakes. That discussion could also lead into the idea of editing. Debra Frasier is also the author of **On the Day You Were Born.**

The Three Questions *Based on a story by Leo Tolstoy* written and illustrated by Jon J. Muth

This is another title that can be used in myriad ways. Reflection is an important part of the writing process and can be portrayed using this book. *Ideas* and *organization* are represented in this story also.

Through My Eyes *by* Ruby Bridges

Ruby Bridges recounts the story of her experiences, as a six year old, in the integration of her school in New Orleans in 1960. Photos and excerpts from the news media are included as documentation while Ruby's experiences are written in first person narrative. It is a compelling account of this emotional and important time in history. Ruby Bridges writes on the last page of the book: *I now know that experience comes to us for a purpose, and if we follow the guidance of the spirit within us, we will probably find that the purpose is a good one.*

Is This a House for Hermit Crab? *by* Megan McDonald and S.D. Schindler
Primary students can be introduced to good nonfiction writing and *sentence fluency* using this title.

Turtle Watch and other books by George Ancona provide good examples of nonfiction writing combined with photography to provide information on a number of subjects.

Opposing Viewpoints Series and Opposing Viewpoints Juniors *by* Greenhaven Press, Inc.

These series help students understand the traits and other aspects of writing. Main idea, point of view, and several other characteristics are presented in the context of social issues.

Through the Cracks *by* Carolyn Sollman, Barbara Emmons, Judith Paolini
This is a book about students who "fall through the cracks." It uses a storybook format to present a message to educators about meeting the learning needs of *all* students.

Hoops and Fallen Angels by Walter Dean Myers

Walter Dean Myers is an African-American author who has written several outstanding books for young adults. Biographical information on the web quotes Myers explaining his feelings about the young adult novel as *"The special place of the young adult novel should be in its ability to address the needs of the reader to understand his or her relationships with the world, with each other, and with adults. The young adult novel often allows the reader to directly identify with a protagonist of similar interests and development." He is a compassionate, introspective person who believes, "It is this language of values which I hope to bring to my books. . . . I want to bring values to those who have not been valued, and I want to etch those values in terms of the ideal. Young people need ideals which identify them, and their lives, as central . . . guideposts which tell them what they can be, should be, and indeed are."*

Harlem by Walter Dean Myers

This poem by Walter Dean Myers has award winning (Caldecott Honor Book) illustrations by his son Christopher Myers. You see and hear the sights and sounds of Harlem through colorful use of **voice** and **word choice**. Younger students will have a difficult time grasping the sophisticated concepts that are presented but it is a good book to use to discuss issues like discrimination, determination, and the rich cultural history of Harlem with older students and/or adults.

Seen and Heard: Teenagers Talk about Their Lives *Photographs and Interviews* by Mary Motley Kalergis

The photos and interviews included in this book are honest portrayals of the true diversity that teenagers represent. The photos are a celebration of faces, expressions, and cultures. The stories reveal the honesty and depth of what lies inside their minds and hearts.

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Teen Ink is a monthly print [magazine](#), website, and a [book series](#) all written by teens for teens. For more information check their website at www.teenink.com/. The royalties from the books go to the nonprofit *Young Authors Foundation* to further reading, writing and educational opportunities for teenagers. Another series to consider is **Coming of Age: Fiction about Youth and Adolescence** by Bruce Emra. Volume One includes a story by Gary Soto and is followed by a section with questions related to the story, exploring the author's craft, and writer's workshop.

Whirligig and **Weslandia** are just two titles written by Newbery award winner Paul Fleischman's. His work provides many examples of outstanding, creative writing. He has several works that are appropriate for young adults, award winning poetry, and picture books that can be used with several different ages. Resources related to his writing are also available online.

A Lesson before Dying by Ernest J. Gaines

School Library Journal reviews this young adult book as follows:

No breathless courtroom triumphs or dramatic reprieves alleviate the sad progress toward execution in this latest novel by the author of *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (Bantam, 1982). The condemned man is Jefferson, a poorly educated man/child whose only crimes are a dim intelligence, being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and being black in rural Louisiana in the late 1940s. To everyone, even his own defense attorney, he's an animal, too dumb to understand what is happening to him. But his godmother, Miss Emma, decides that Jefferson will die a man. To accomplish just that, she brings Grant Wiggins, the teacher at the plantation's one-room school and narrator of the novel, into the story. Emotionally blackmailed by two strong-willed old ladies, Grant reluctantly begins visiting Jefferson, committing both men to the painful task of self-discovery. As in his earlier novels, Gaines evokes a sense of reality through rich detail and believable characters in this simple, moving story. Young adults who seek thought-provoking reading will appreciate this glimpse of life in the rural South just before the civil rights movement.

Journey Home by Yoshiko Uchida

The Clarion University webpage contains some biographical information about the author that will give readers a better understanding of why Uchida's books were written. Born in California in 1922 to Japanese-American parents, Yoshiko Uchida lived most of her life experiencing and writing about many different ethnic problems. One of the most difficult issues she dealt with in her children's/young adult books was the problem of the Japanese internment camps of World War II. She herself was sent to one of these, being uprooted from her senior year studies at the University of Berkeley. She was sent to the camp and there had the chance to view not only the injustices which the Americans were perpetrating, but the different opinions other Japanese-Americans had about the racist actions. Uchida was to later write about her experiences there and the many other difficulties she had in establishing her sense of both Japanese ethnicity and American citizenship. She continued writing about these themes until her death in 1992. **Journey Home** is described on Amazon.com: Yuki, born in California, is an American citizen but when the United States and Japan go to war, Yuki and other Japanese Americans are forced to leave their homes, their jobs, and all their possessions and move into "detention camps" outside of California. This story follows Yuki and her family as they leave the camps and try to remake their lives. As they struggle against prejudice, Yuki and her veteran brother each come to a new understanding of what it means to be "home". This is a well written story (written from the author's own experiences) of growing up in a difficult period of American history.

Lest We Forget: The Passage from Africa to Slavery and Emancipation

by Velma Maia Thomas

This book is a three-dimensional interactive book with photographs and documents from the Black Holocaust Exhibit. The multidimensional and realistic artifacts in this book bring this painful piece of history to life. It is a tribute to the lives of the people who live on in this book.

Resources for Teachers

Seeing with New Eyes: A Guidebook on Teaching & Assessing Beginning Writers

by Vicki Spandel This book discusses how the traits show themselves at the primary level. It includes primary rubrics, developmental stages of writing in beginning writers, sample student papers, and many ideas. This is a very useful resource for teachers implementing the traits in their primary classrooms.

The Art of Teaching Writing *by Lucy McCormick Calkins*

This book has been revised and offers additional information on assessment, thematic studies, writing throughout the day, reading/writing relationships, publication, curriculum development, nonfiction writing and home/school connections. Her concept of the writing workshop has also been updated. This is probably a good book for a "summer read" or to use as a resource to consult.

Living Between the Lines *by Lucy McCormick Calkins with Shelley Harwayne* Calkins discusses how the use of writers' notebooks and a new focus on rehearsal lead to some rethinking of the writing workshop. Ideas about conferring, record keeping, mini-lessons, and organizational structures are discussed.

What a Writer Needs *by Ralph Fletcher*

Chapters include information about details, the use of time, voice, character, and beginnings and endings. This information can be used to help students improve their writing and answers some of the questions that appeared when teachers used the writers' workshops.

Walking Trees *by Ralph Fletcher*

This book might be another "summer read." It is a personal memoir of his experiences teaching teachers how to teach writing in New York City schools during the 1985-1986 school year.

Nonfiction Craft Lessons: Teaching Information Writing K-8 by JoAnn Portalupi and Ralph Fletcher

These authors have also written **Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K-8**. The book is divided into sections for K-2, 3-4, 5-8. The lessons focus on helping students improve their nonfiction writing by making it clearer, more authoritative, and more organized. Each lesson features *discussion*, *how to teach it*, and *resource material*. Each section has a range of craft lessons but there are several lessons that focus on the genre that seems to be most appropriate for each age group.

Classrooms That Work: They can ALL Read and Write by Patricia Cunningham and Richard Allington

The authors promote the integration of phonics and literature-based process writing and reading instruction for a balanced approach to teaching literacy. The newer edition includes chapters on multi-level instruction, assessment, and comprehension. This is a good resource for connecting reading and writing.