Using Literature to Teach Writing Traits

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.
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, 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."

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 with 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.

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.

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.

1/04 List compiled by Nancy Anderson, CC-VI