

Powerful Books, Inspired Writers, Part I

Modeling the Traits of Good Writing— Ideas and Organization

by Maria Walther

Early elementary school

When I first learned about the six traits of good writing, I thought to myself, Wow, this is what my writing curriculum has been missing! I envisioned teaching my students how to gather ideas, organize their thoughts, select the perfect words, write with fluency and voice, and, of course, apply the appropriate conventions as their writing abilities developed.

Since the beginning of my career, I have been a proponent of intentional writing instruction for young authors, and have always created opportunities for my first-grade students to engage in meaningful writing activities. Although school days are busy, time is carved out for daily journal writing and writing workshops. Every time my students pick up their pencils and attempt to write, I am nudging them along the path toward independence. These budding writers apply their growing knowledge of phonics as they employ developmental spelling to scribe their ideas. My goal is that students leave my classroom with confidence in their ability to use the written word to communicate thoughts and ideas.

Overall, I felt like I was a fairly good teacher of writing, yet I still

struggled to develop a year's worth of effective writing minilessons. That changed when I attended a three-day summer workshop with Vicki Spandel, a noted expert on the six-trait model. I soon became hooked on this approach.

I see the six-trait model as not only an assessment tool but also a powerful instructional partner. Adding the traits as one component of my balanced writing curriculum has fine-tuned

I want to write about birds, but I need more ideas.



I've got a great idea—a book about ME!



my minilessons, and in turn helped my students become stronger writers. Since that summer workshop, I've been on the lookout for children's literature to complement my writing minilessons. As Spandel shares in *Creating Young Writers* (see "Professional Resource" sidebar on p.34), "If you love reading

aloud to your students—and what teacher of writing does not—you already have in your hands one of the most powerful ways to teach writing, and to show the six traits of writing in action."

In a series of three articles, I will share a collection of books that I have found helpful in demonstrating good writing strategies. The grade ranges that appear in each annota-

Loreen Leedy's *Look at My Book* illustrates the multistep process of creating stories with three aspiring authors.

tion indicate the general audience for the book, and the accompanying minilessons are easily adapted to meet the needs of your young writers. This article will discuss books that help teach the traits of ideas and organization. The next article will present books that demonstrate exemplary

Professional Resource

- Spandel, Vicki. *Creating Young Writers: Using the Six Traits to Enrich Writing Process in Primary Classrooms*. 2003. 272p. Allyn & Bacon, paper, \$29.99 (9780205379538).

Spandel was the codirector of the teacher team that developed the original six-trait model for writing assessment and instruction. This is one of my favorite books about writing for grades K-3. It contains a wealth of practical ideas for teaching the traits within a writing workshop format, along with student work samples, a list of Spandel's favorite children's books, and a helpful chapter on assessment.

word choice and sentence fluency. The final article will offer books that edify voice and conventions.

Ideas

What Should I Write about Today?

Allen, Susan, and Jane Lindaman. *Read Anything Good Lately?* Illus. by Vicky Enright. 2003. 32p. Millbrook, \$15.95 (9780761318897); paper, \$6.95 (9780822564706).

K-Gr. 2. One appealing way to help students find ideas for writing is to share a variety of texts with them. This alphabetical look at 26 different forms of writing and the various locations in which to read them is the perfect place to begin. You might also consider creating a list of the numerous kinds of texts that people write.

Barroux, Stephane. *Mr. Katapat's Incredible Adventures*. 2004. 40p. Viking, \$15.99 (9780670059164).

K-Gr. 2. Good writers get ideas from reading exciting books. Mr. Katapat reads books filled with adventures; sometimes he travels back in

time, while other days he's a detective solving a mystery. This book reveals that amazing adventures are at your students' fingertips every time they venture to the library to check out a book.

Brown, Marc. *Arthur Writes a Story*. 1996. 32p. Little, Brown, \$15 (9780316109161); paper, \$5.95 (9780316111645).

K-Gr. 2. "Write about something that is important to you," advises Arthur's teacher Mr. Ratburn. Following that advice, Arthur starts out writing a tale about his dog, but is swayed by the comments of his friends, and ends up with a crazy, mixed-up story. After Arthur shares his story with the class, Mr. Ratburn helps him see the importance of writing about ideas that are close to his heart.

Bunting, Eve. *Anna's Table*. Illus. by Taia Morley. 2003. 32p. NorthWord, \$15.95 (9781559718417).

K-Gr. 3. Anna tells the reader about the treasured items on her nature table. As she describes each item, she shares memories of how it was discovered. This story pairs nicely with Fox's *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* (see below) to illustrate that writing ideas often come from memories. It also works well for reading minilessons on making text-to-self connections.

Carlson, Nancy. *There's a Big, Beautiful World Out There!* 2002. 32p. Viking, \$15.99 (9780670035809); Puffin, paper, \$5.99 (9780142401842).

K-Gr. 2. Our big, beautiful world is filled with ideas for writing. Talented writers are always on the lookout for ideas from everyday life. Carlson penned this book the day after 9/11 to remind young children that, although our world can be scary at times, there is much beauty to discover and experience.

dePaola, Tomie. *The Art Lesson*. 1989. 32p. Putnam, \$16.99 (9780399216886); Puffin, paper, \$5.99 (9780698115729).

K-Gr. 2. Read dePaola's childhood story to show children how writers use their own life experiences as material for books. The book is a memoir of the author's experiences as a budding artist in kindergarten and first grade. I point this out to my first-graders by saying, "Look, Tomie waited until he was an adult to write about first grade! You don't have to wait. Write about what you are doing right now!"

Fox, Mem. *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*. Illus. by Julie Vivas. 1985. 32p. Kane/Miller, \$14.95 (9780916291044); paper, \$7.95 (9780916291266).

K-Gr. 3. Ideas for writing often come from fond memories, and this touching intergenerational tale illustrates how objects can connect to those memories. Invite students to bring in a treasured object from home to share with the class, and encourage them to say, "This [object] reminds me of when . . ." This oral rehearsal can lead into writing about memories.

Hershendorff, Esther. *Chicken Soup by Heart*. Illus. by Rosanne Litzinger. 2002. 32p. Simon & Schuster, \$16.95 (9780689826658).

K-Gr. 3. When Rudie's favorite babysitter, Mrs. Gittel, gets the flu, he cooks a batch of chicken soup using her secret ingredient: "nice stories about her soon-to-be soup-eaters." Another classic chicken soup story is Maurice Sendak's *Chicken Soup with Rice* (HarperCollins, 1962). My students enjoy singing along with Carole King's sound recording of this book, which is available from Weston Woods.

Miller, Alice Ann. *Treasures of the Heart*. Illus. by K. L. Darnell. 2003. 16p. Sleeping Bear, \$15.95 (9781585361151).

Preschool-Gr. 2. In this title a child tries to convince his mother that

the possessions hidden under his bed are really treasures, explaining, "For everything that's under here, / there's a story I could tell. / I've collected all of these treasures / and I've kept them very well." Read this before asking students to bring in a treasured object to share with the class.

Reynolds, Peter H. *Isb.* 2004. 32p. Candlewick, \$14 (9780763623449).

K-Gr. 3. You might have students in your classroom who are perfectionists; they will not write a word if they can't spell it correctly or draw an illustration unless it is perfect. If so, reach for this book about a young artist named Ramon whose sister helps him understand that although he doesn't draw exact replicas (his trees are only "tree-ish"), his pictures are unique. I read this book early in the year to help create a risk-taking environment for my young learners.

Root, Phyllis. *The Name Quilt.* Illus. by Margot Apple. 2003. 32p. Farrar, \$16 (9780374354848).

K-Gr. 1. Each night before bed, Sadie listens to her beloved grandma tell stories about the relatives whose names are lovingly embroidered on her patchwork quilt. When a storm blows the quilt away, Sadie is sad until she realizes that the memories remain alive with her grandma, and the two begin making a new quilt. At the beginning of the year, have students design their own name-quilt squares and write stories about themselves. Once students have polished these stories, post them on the bulletin board along with the assembled name quilt.

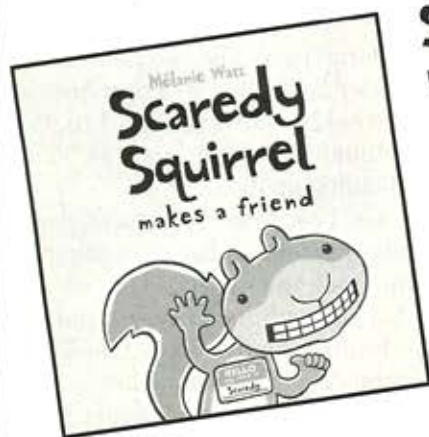
Rylant, Cynthia. *Mr. Putter and Tabby Write the Book.* Illus. by Arthur Howard. 2004. 44p. Harcourt, \$14 (9780152002411); paper, \$5.95 (9780152002428).

K-Gr. 2. Share this chapter book

from the Mr. Putter and Tabby series when students are having difficulty finding writing ideas. On a snowy day, Mr. Putter decides to write a mystery novel, but ends up writing about something he knows—good things! After sharing this book, encourage students to make their own list of good things in their writer's notebooks.

Wong, Janet S. *You Have to Write.* Illus. by Teresa Flavin. 2002. 40p. Simon & Schuster/Margaret K. McElderry, \$17 (9780689834097).

Gr. 2-5. This clever book shows children that their lives are filled with experiences to write about. Wong reminds writers that "No one else can say / what you have seen / and heard / and felt / today." Her encouraging words help motivate reluctant writers to "Write now. / Think now. / Remember. / Take your mind for a walk . . ."



"Fans will hope for much more from this endearing fellow."
— Publishers Weekly

Scaredy Squirrel Makes a Friend

Written and illustrated by Mélanie Watt

In *Scaredy Squirrel*, our lovable little worrywart branched out of his routine and discovered the joy of jumping into the unknown.

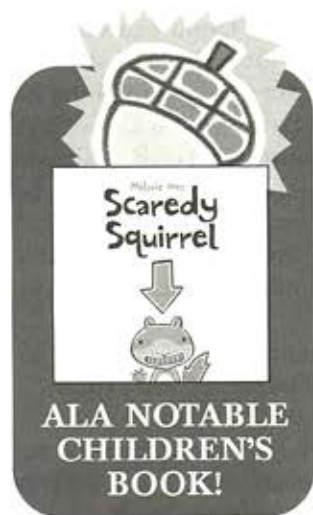
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Organization

From Leads to Conclusions and Everything in Between

Allen, Susan, and Jane Lindaman. *Written Anything Good Lately?* Illus. by Vicky Enright. 2006. 32p. Millbrook, \$15.95 (9780761324263).

K–Gr. 3. This companion to Allen and Lindaman's *Read Anything Good Lately?* (see above) is another alphabetical look at the various forms of writing. Many of the bright illustrations include examples of young writers' creations.

Duke, Kate. *Aunt Isabel Tells a Good One*. 1992. 32p. Puffin, paper, \$5.99 (9780140505344).

Gr. 1–3. Choose this book to illustrate the concept of story elements for either reading or writing lessons. In this story within a story, Penelope and Aunt Isabel craft a tale with all the vital elements of a make-believe narrative—appealing characters, a scary setting, conflict, a terrible villain, and romance.

Fanelli, Sara. *My Map Book*. 1995. 32p. HarperCollins, \$16.99 (9780060264550).

K–Gr. 2. Visual learners organize their ideas in pictures. The concept of mapping ideas is not a new one, but this book adds a twist as a young girl creates a collection of unique maps, including a map of her heart. As a bonus, the book jacket unfolds into a poster-size map! Encourage creative thinking by having students brainstorm a list of objects or concepts to map. The list could include a map

of an animal, a planet, or a favorite story. Invite students to make a map of something that is important to them.

Kloske, Geoffrey. *Once upon a Time, the End (Asleep in 60 Seconds)*. Illus. by Barry Blitt. 2005. 40p. Simon & Schuster/Anne Schwartz, \$15.95 (9780689866197).

K–Gr. 3. Beginning with a list of classic story leads, including "Once upon a time / And a long, long time ago," this book details the efforts of an exhausted father who shortens and puts hilarious twists on classic bedtime tales in an attempt to get his child to fall asleep. The retelling of "Little Red Riding Hood," titled "Small Girl, Red Hood," is especially clever. This book also works well for reader's theater.

Kroll, Steven. *Patches Lost and Found*. Illus. by Barry Gott. 2001. 32p. Winslow, \$16.95 (9781890817534); Marshall Cavendish, paper, \$5.95 (9780761452171).

K–Gr. 2. This book demonstrates the concept of storyboarding for young writers. When her teacher gives the class a writing assignment, Jenny has trouble thinking of a topic. In the meantime, her guinea pig disappears. As Jenny searches for Patches, she draws her adventures. When the time comes to complete her writing assignment, her mother points out that Jenny's pictures already tell a story and all Jenny has to do is add the words.

Leedy, Loreen. *Look at My Book: How Kids Can Write and Illustrate Terrific Books*. 2004. 32p. Holiday, \$17.95 (9780823415908); paper, \$6.95 (9780823419593).

Gr. 1–3. This brightly illustrated resource shows children how to plan, write, design, and illustrate their own book, and includes numerous lists, such as "Tips on Getting Ideas" and "Revising Tips," which offer ideas for writing mini-lessons.

McDonald, Megan. *Stink: The Incredible Shrinking Kid*. Illus. by Peter H. Reynolds. 2005. 112p. Candlewick, \$12.99 (9780763620257); paper, \$4.99 (9780763628918).

K–Gr. 3. For many students, comic strips are an appealing way to organize their writing. In Stink's solo debut, Judy Moody's kid brother is very worried that he is shrinking. Each humorous chapter ends with a comic strip created by Stink. If your students enjoy this book, follow up with *Stink and the Incredible Super-Galactic Jawbreaker* (Candlewick, 2006).

McLeod, Bob. *Superhero ABC*. 2006. 40p. HarperCollins, \$15.99 (9780060745141).

Preschool–Gr. 2. If you are looking for an alphabet book to entice reluctant readers, introduce them to comic-book illustrator McLeod's hilarious cast of characters. Each letter of the alphabet is represented by a superhero—including Upside-Down Man, who wears his uniform under his underwear—and accompanied by alliterative text.

Pallotta, Jerry. *The Furry Animal Alphabet Book*. Illus. by Edgar Stewart. 1991. 32p. Charlesbridge, \$16.95 (9780881064650); paper, \$6.95 (9780881064643).

Gr. 1–3. After the letter Q, Pallotta interrupts the alphabetical pattern of this book to interject, "Hey, who is that guy with the furry face and what is he doing in this book? Oh! That's right! People are mammals too." If your students are working on organizing ideas alphabetically, share ABC books with unique features and an engaging voice. Pallotta's books fit the bill because he not only writes about unusual creatures and fascinating facts but punctuates the text with questions and humorous anecdotes.

Maria Walther is a first-grade teacher in Aurora, Illinois, a national literacy consultant, and the coauthor of *Literature Is Back! Using the Best Books to Teach Readers and Writers across Genres* (Scholastic, November 2007). Look for further articles by her about six-trait writing in the July and September 2007 issues of *Book Links*.