

Powerful Books, Inspired Writers, Part II

Modeling the Traits of Good Writing— Word Choice and Sentence Fluency

by Maria Walther

Early elementary school

I hope you found a book or two in my May 2007 article on six-traits writing to inspire creative ideas or model organization. This article will spotlight books that are helpful for teaching minilessons about word choice and sentence fluency.

I believe it is important to teach writing using books you love. Many of the treasured books that fill the shelves of classroom or school libraries

are fine examples of writing. Like you, I am always looking for captivating books to read aloud for sheer pleasure and then return to as I model and teach strategies for both reading and writing. The books here are ideal for many purposes, but they are especially suited for teaching minilessons about word choice and sentence fluency. Please keep in mind that the grade ranges reflect the general audi-

ence for each book. Happy reading, thinking, and writing!

Word Choice—The Wonderful World of Words

Classrooms are brimming with words. We collect words for students on charts that we create together and on the Word Wall after focused practice. We help young writers compile personal dictionaries to use while writing. Why, then, do children choose to use the same words again and again? For example, the following sentences may sound familiar: “The birthday party was fun.” Or, “I like my dog.” Just as vocabulary is an essential component to reading success, thoughtful word choice is an essential component to writing success. The words a writer chooses lead to his or her own personal style. As Carol Fuhler and I point out in our book *Literature Is Back!*, “With deftly mixed words, we can see the character, visualize the setting as if we had been there . . .” Fortunately, students are intrigued by



Barbara M. Josse's poetic language and vivid descriptions distinguish *I Love You the Purplest*, illustrated by Mary Whyte.

interesting words, and educators can capitalize on their interest by sharing books like those below that will enrich their vocabulary.

Banks, Kate. *Max's Words*. Illus. by Boris Kulikov. 2006. 32p. Farrar/Frances Foster, \$16 (9780374399498).

K-Gr. 2. Max's brother Benjamin collects stamps; his brother Karl collects coins. Neither boy will share his collection with Max, so he decides to start a collection of his own—words! Max soon discovers that when he puts his collection of words together, he can create stories. Have students collect words from magazines and newspapers at home, and then provide class time to sort, organize, and share their words with each other. Finally, challenge students to combine their words into poems or stories.

Edwards, Pamela Duncan. *Slop Goes the Soup: A Noisy Warthog Word Book*. Illus. by Henry Cole. 2001. 32p. Hyperion, \$14.99 (9780786804696).

K-Gr. 2 As a clumsy warthog and his wife are making soup, he sneezes ("A-A-A-choo!") and inadvertently sets off a hilarious chain of onomatopoeic events. Cole's illustrations add crackle and punch to the story as brightly colored onomatopoeia pops off the page. After reading this book aloud, send students on a "sound-word" search through other familiar books, and collect their favorite finds on a chart, or have students record the words in their writer's notebooks.

Ehlert, Lois. *In My World*. 2002. 40p. Harcourt, \$15 (9780152162696); Voyager, paper, \$7 (9780152054298).

Preschool-Gr. 1. Author-illustrator Ehlert offers the youngest readers a glimpse of nature's gifts, using vivid adjectives to describe each animal or object. Die-cut figures show how each animal or object is connected to the next, with all the shapes coming together to form the world. Have students write their own book using Ehlert's model. For example, "Our

zoo is made of things I like: swimming polar bears, diving penguins, roaring lions, and climbing monkeys. Thank you, zoo, for everything."

Fox, Mem. *Tough Boris*. Illus. by Kathryn Brown. 1994. 32p. Harcourt, \$16 (9780152896126); Voyager, paper, \$7 (9780152018917).

Preschool-Gr. 2. The author uses six compelling words to describe pirate Boris von der Borch as he and his crew discover and retrieve buried treasure. Remind students to look closely at Brown's lively watercolor illustrations, which tell a parallel tale of a young stowaway whose violin playing enchants Boris. After enjoying the story and illustrations, have students pick another person to describe using six carefully selected words.

Jenkins, Steve, and Robin Page. *Move!* 2006. 32p. Houghton, \$16 (9780618646371).

Preschool-Gr. 2. How do animals move? They swing, walk, dive, swim, leap, slither, and much more. The authors of *What Do You Do with a Tail Like This?* (Houghton, 2003) team up once again to offer young readers and writers a minilexicon of words that describe animal actions. Each verb is presented in large bold type, and the accompanying text cleverly mimics the action portrayed in the words. Consider using this simple book for introducing vivid verbs.

Joose, Barbara M. *I Love You the Purplest*. Illus. by Mary Whyte. 1996. 32p. Chronicle, \$16.95 (9780811807180).

Gr. 1-3. As you read this book aloud, Joose's poetic language will glide off your tongue and fill young listeners' minds with vivid descriptions. The story takes place on a summer evening as two young sons compete for their mother's attention. She reassures both boys that they hold a special place in her heart and uses colors to describe each boy's special traits. Invite students to choose a family member's favorite color and then

use vivid words to write their own loving description of that person.

MacDonald, Ross. *Achoo! Bang! Crash! The Noisy Alphabet*. 2003. 32p. Roaring Brook, \$16.95 (9780761317968).

K-Gr. 3. Pair this alphabet book with Edwards' *Slop Goes the Soup* (see above) to extend your students' knowledge of onomatopoeic words. MacDonald's illustrations have an antique comic strip feel, and the slapstick humor will have young listeners giggling as they learn. To extend this book, assign each student one letter of the alphabet to depict using onomatopoeia.

Newman, Lesléa. *The Boy Who Cried Fabulous*. Illus. by Peter Ferguson. 2004. 32p. Tricycle, \$15.95 (9781582461014).

K-Gr. 3. Poor Roger is late for school because he couldn't resist a store filled with an assortment of fabulous wares. Similarly, he gets distracted by the fabulous surroundings on his way home from school and arrives late. As a result, his parents decide to ban the word *fabulous*, but Roger soon chooses other equally enthusiastic adjectives to describe his trip around town.

Ryan, Pam Muñoz. *Hello Ocean*. Illus. by Mark Astrella. 2001. 32p. Charlesbridge, \$16.95 (9780881069877); paper, \$6.95 (9780881069884).

K-Gr. 3. Ryan's carefully selected

For more on six-traits writing, see Part I of "Powerful Books, Inspired Writers" in the May 2007 issue of *Book Links* and "Six-Traits Writing" in the May 2005 issue of *Book Links*. (Both articles are available in the "Archive of Online Articles" section of the *Book Links* Web site at <http://www.ala.org/BookLinks>.)

words depict a young girl's sensory tour of the ocean. Readers enjoy descriptions of the view of "amber seaweed, speckled sand," the gentle sounds of "water shushing and rushing in," the feeling of walking through "squishy, sandy, soggy ground," and the smell of "drying kelp and musty shells." This book works well for visualizing.

Steinberg, Laya. *Thesaurus Rex*. Illus. by Debbie Harter. 2005. 24p. Barefoot, \$15.99 (9781841480428); paper, \$6.95 (9781841481807).

Preschool–Gr. 3. Good writers use tools to improve their writing. One of the tools to teach students how to use is a thesaurus. Join the playful dinosaur Thesaurus Rex as he "starts his day / stretching, / reaching, / extending, / bending. / Uh oh, his pants need mending!" He continues to romp through his playful prehistoric world while introducing readers to the subject of synonyms.

Sentence Fluency—Rhythm and Flow of Language

Putting carefully selected words together in varied ways leads to fluent sentence patterns. Primary-grade teachers model, practice, and teach sentence fluency on a regular basis. They sing songs, chant poems, and read books alive with rhythm and rhyme. Many of the same activities that strengthen reading fluency are also helpful when modeling and teaching writing fluency. I hope the books in this section will have your students' toes tapping and fingers snapping as you read aloud.

Beaumont, Karen. *I Ain't Gonna Paint No More!* Illus. by David Catrow. 2005. 32p. Harcourt, \$16 (9780152024888).

Preschool–Gr. 2. Using the rhythm of the familiar folk song "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More," this book invites listeners to sing along as a precocious child paints his body, starting with "So I take some red /

and I paint my . . . / HEAD!" As the painting continues, Catrow's illustrations portray the young artist, who gets as much paint on the walls, floor, and dog as he does on himself.

deGroat, Diane. *Roses Are Pink, Your Feet Really Stink*. 1996. 32p. HarperCollins, \$16.99 (9780688136048); HarperTrophy, paper, \$6.99 (9780688152208).

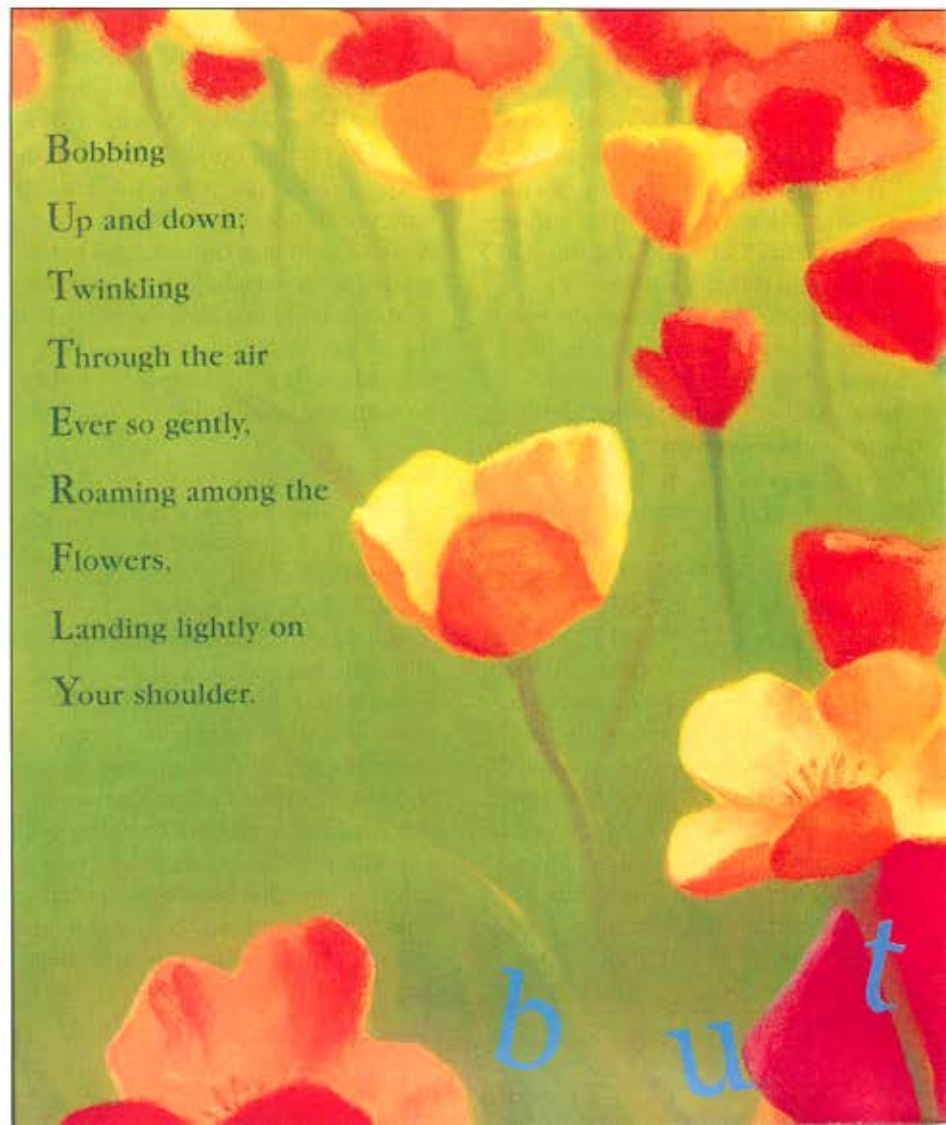
K–Gr. 2. This Valentine's Day classic lends itself to teaching students how to write simple "Roses Are Red" poems. In the story, Gilbert writes both nice and nasty poems for Valentine's Day. This causes a problem, until he has a change of heart. Teach your students how to write poems about the topics you are studying in class, such as "Roses are red / pickles are green / Abraham Lincoln was number 16."

Locker, Thomas. *Cloud Dance*. 2000. 32p. Harcourt/Silver Whistle, \$17 (9780152022310); Voyager, paper, \$7 (9780152045968).

Gr. 1–up. Locker's lyrical text and luminous illustrations introduce children to the cloudy world above. The text is divided into 14 short sections, making it an ideal piece for a reader's theater performance. In addition, Locker's brilliant paintings will inspire budding poets to create their own pictures with words.

Oh My Darling Porcupine and Other Silly Sing-Along Songs. Edited by Bruce Lansky. Illus. by Stephen Carpenter. 2006. 32p. Meadowbrook, \$15.95 (9780689052309).

Gr. 1–3. Lansky's hilarious collection of "piggyback" songs to familiar tunes is sure to motivate writers to pen their own versions of their favorite songs.



This collection includes such innovative ditties as “Clean Your Bedroom,” “Bring Back My Sister to Me,” and “Take Me Out to the Mall, Mom.”

Paolilli, Paul, and Dan Brewer. *Silver Seeds: A Book of Nature Poems*. Illus. by Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher. 2001. 32p. Viking, \$15.99 (9780670889419); Puffin, paper, \$6.99 (9780142500101).

K–Gr. 4. Complemented by Johnson and Fancher’s glowing two-page spreads, these acrostic poems take readers on a journey from dawn (“Down goes the moon / And up comes the sun, / Welcoming the / New day”) to night (“Now it / Is time to / Gather our dreams / Holding them tight / Till tomorrow comes”). The simple yet elegant poetry provides helpful examples for writers crafting their own acrostic poems.

Perkins, Lynne Rae. *Snow Music*. 2003. 40p. Greenwillow, \$15.99 (9780066239569).

K–Gr. 2. Newbery Medal–winning Perkins cleverly captures the music of a snowy day as two neighbors search for a runaway dog. The text and illustrations echo the quiet sounds of falling snow, the jingle of dog tags, the banter of a confused squirrel, and the loud scraping of a snowplow. Reach for this book on a snowy day to inspire children to pen their own observations of the sights and sounds of winter.

Prelutsky, Jack. *Read a Rhyme, Write a Rhyme*. Illus. by Meilo So. 2005. 32p. Knopf, \$16.95 (9780375822865).

Gr. 1–4. Prelutsky has collected poems about a variety of kid-friendly topics, including dogs, bugs, friends, and birthdays. To get kids writing, the

author includes three poems about each topic and a “poemstart,” the beginning few lines of a poem and an invitation to complete it. Visit Prelutsky’s engaging animated Web site at <http://www.jackprelutsky.com> for more



poetry, biographical material, and a humorous collection of letters from students.

Roberts, Sheena. *We All Go Traveling By*. Illus. by Siobhan Bell. 2003. 24p. Barefoot, hardcover and CD, \$17.99 (9781841481685); paperback and CD, \$9.99 (9781841484105).

Preschool–Gr. 1. Song picture books set an upbeat tone for the day or provide a bit of calm before you wave good-bye. In addition, they provide young writers with rhythmic language models. If you like to sing with your students but prefer books with CDs, Roberts’ cumulative, repetitive text will entice students to sing, beep, rumble, and vroom along as they travel to school. I promise you will also be humming this tune for the rest of the day.

Maria Walther is a first-grade teacher in Aurora, Illinois, and the coauthor, along with Carol J. Fuhler, of *Literature Is Back! Using the Best Books to Teach Readers and Writers across Genres* (Scholastic, October 2007). Look for the final installment in her six-traits writing series in the September 2007 issue of *Book Links*.

Paul Paolilli and Dan Brewer’s acrostic poems in *Silver Seeds*, illustrated by Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher, are wonderful examples for children to use in writing their own poems.

