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## The Window Seat: Children's Books that Nurture Developing Writers

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# The Window Seat: Children's Books that Nurture Developing Writers

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REVIEWS CONTRIBUTED BY TEACHER CONSULTANTS OF THE UPPER PENINSULA WRITING PROJECT  
SANDRA BONSALE, SHANNON BOYER, MARIE DUNHAM, PAULA DIEDRICH, VICTORIA HAWLEY, JOLENE  
HETHERINGTON, RAGENE HENRY, JOLEEN LORENS, HOLLY MUSCOE, MARSHA PAGE, & JAN SABIN.

Every day Michigan teachers use wonderful children's books in their classrooms in multiple ways. This column is devoted to describing children's books that teachers use each day to awaken their students to the thrill and craft of writing. The books reviewed in this column have become mentor texts (Ray, 1999), texts in which the authors become "unwitting collaborators" with student writers (Smith, 1988, 26). Many of these books will become "touchstone texts" (Calkins, 1994, 227) as teachers and students revisit them again and again for models of powerful writing.

In classrooms where students fully engage in language use for thinking and learning, writing is integral (Ray, 2004). Students learn to capture cherished moments, better understand experiences and ideas, and share their thoughts through writing. Writing serves to clarify thinking, explore alternative viewpoints, wrestle with difficult issues, imagine possibilities, and create vivid memories (Romano, 1987). Writing grows from the ordinary moments experienced each day as students learn to notice and record events of interest to them. Turning students into writers happens as teachers share powerful models of writing from good books (Ray, 1999; Smith, 1988; Calkins, 1994), include time for writing each day (Routman, 2005; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983), provide responses to students' writing (Routman, 2005; Calkins, 1994), give students ownership over what they write (Routman, 2005; Calkins, 1994; Ray, 2004), and teach students structures and skills that support them as writers (Routman, 2005; Calkins, 1994). Nurturing students as writers is a major responsibility of teachers at all levels and in all subject areas.

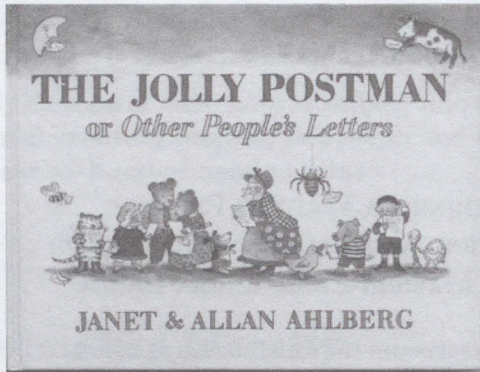
The books reviewed in this column are divided into three types of mentor books. First, many of the books introduce students to a variety of genres. Second, the books exhibit interesting and high quality uses of language and create a love of the written word. Third, some titles model ways to generate authentic reasons for writing. Each of the books could be used for all of these purposes as well as many others.

Books were selected to provide both a variety of older, well-loved books, such as Yolán's *Encounter*, and newer titles that might become touchstone texts, such as Broach's *Wet Dog* or Cyrus' *Hotel Deep*. Many of these books are already in teachers' classrooms or schools, and newer titles would be ideal for library or personal purchase. Diverse genres, interest levels, perspectives, and topics were considered and selected.

One last feature of this column is the "Curriculum Uses" section in every review. Each teacher provided a short summary of how the book might become a mentor text in a writing program, based on her actual uses of the books. Use your imagination, explore these and other fine children's books, consider ways in which books can become mentor texts for your student writers, and share your ideas with colleagues across the state.

## Genre Study

Ahlberg, Janet. (1986). *The Jolly Postman or Other People's Letters*. (Ill. by J. and A. Ahlberg). Great Britain: William Heinemann. Unpagged. ISBN: 0-316-02036-2 (Hardcover); \$16.95.



Having a real bag of postage letters to open up and read makes this a very enjoyable book not only for children, but also for adults. The Jolly Postman delivers to the reader letters from fairy tale characters such as Goldilocks and the Wicked Witch. The anticipation of opening a letter and reading what these famous characters would write is bound to motivate children to read.

*This book would be very useful in teaching letter writing. Also, when teaching a fairy tale unit, children could rewrite stories based on the letters from the fairy tale characters in this book. The rhyming in this book would be a great model for teaching younger children rhyming words and how those words can add to the rhythm within a book.*

Brown, Margaret Wise, (1949) *The Important Book*. (Ill. by L. Weigard). USA. Harper Trophy. Unpagged. ISBN: 0-06-443227-0 (Paperback); \$4.95.

*The Important Book* allows students to take a closer look at what truly makes objects important and valuable. The book starts out with the importance of glass and ends with the importance of you. This book not only teaches creative writing, it is also a stepping stone for great conversation about individual importance and uniqueness. Or, as Margaret Wise Brown might have written:

*The Important Book is important because it is fun to read.*

*It is a great model of writing across the curriculum.*

*It can be adapted to any age level.*

*It not only shows the importance of objects, it also ends with the importance of you, the reader, which could lead to great discussion.*

*But, the important thing about The Important Book is that it is fun to read.*

*The Important Book is an ideal structural model for teachers of any grade level and can be used for writing to learn. It lends itself to all subject areas where student writings based on this model can be used to explore new vocabulary or as an alternative assessment tool to demonstrate their understanding of new concepts.*

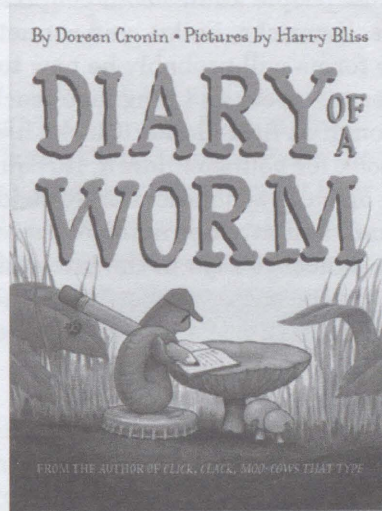
Creech, Sharon. (2001). *Love That Dog*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers. 86 pp. ISBN: 0-439-37095-7 (Hardcover); \$17.99.

Written in verse, *Love That Dog* is told in the voice of Jack, an elementary school boy, and follows him through one school year. His initial reaction to poetry is negative, and he refuses to try writing poetry. "I don't want to because boys don't write poetry. Girls do." As the school year progresses he uses the poetry as an avenue to express his feelings and eventually becomes a champion for the genre. Author Sharon Creech creates an expert writing teacher in Miss Stretchberry. Using various types of poetry as models, Miss Stretchberry's students discover the true beauty of poetry—its language, its liberating expressions of emotions, and its distinctive manner of telling a story.

*Teachers can follow Miss Stretchberry's lead by following the models provided in this book. Each poem that Miss Stretchberry uses is included at the end of the book, and Jack's voice provides ideas for bringing students into poetry reading and writing.*

Cronin, Doreen. (2003). *Diary of a Worm*. (Ill. by H. Bliss). New York: HarperCollins Publishers. Unpagged. ISBN 0-439-69234-2 (Hardcover); \$15.99.

If you were charmed by Doreen Cronin's clever cows (*Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type*) and her audacious trickster, Duck (*Duck for President*), then you will fall in love with the worm family in *Diary of a Worm*. This is a family that digs together, chews together, and composts together. Our narrator is a young worm sporting a jaunty red baseball cap and using a diary to record the events of his earthy life. Perched on his bottle cap stool, he wraps his soft body around his #2 pencil, cozies up to his mushroom desk, and writes. His entries chronicle not only his home and school in the tunnels, but harrowing adventures above ground. Having aspirations to be a Secret Service Agent is a favorite of the vignettes. Like its predecessors, *Diary* celebrates the power of the written word with hilarity and sensitivity. Children adore the humor and, on a deeper level, probably relate to the tiny protagonist in a world run by "big people." Respect for the earth and all its creatures from humans to worms is an important theme. Cronin's sharp-witted story is perfectly complemented by the off-beat illustrations of Harry Bliss.



This is an excellent choice for introducing young children to diary or journal writing. The end pages resemble a scrapbook or even a writer's notebook. For older students, it is a great springboard for writing from a different perspective. Imagine how much fun science reports could be in this format. It is a truly clever way to present factual information about a myriad of topics.

Fletcher, Ralph. (1999). *Relatively Speaking: Poems About Family*. (Ill. by W. L. Krudop). New York: Scholastic. 42 pp. ISBN: 0-531-33141-5 (Hardcover); \$15.99.

Some poetry books make great read-alouds. Some poetry books can be models for writing. This book does both. The deceptively simple poems about Fletcher's family provide examples of most of the elements of poetry, making them accessible to children and adults alike. Many of the poems will initiate conversations about familiar topics seen in new ways, especially in the poem "The Scar," in which boys realize that war is not a game.

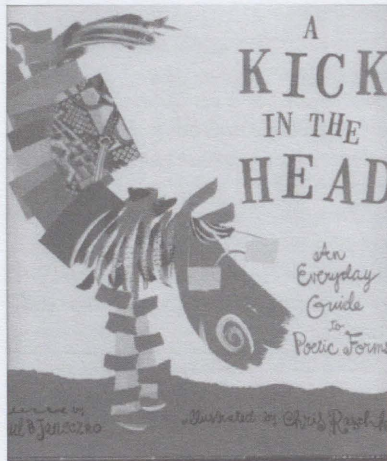
Grandits, John. (2004). *Technically, It's Not My Fault: Concrete Poems*. New York: Houghton Mifflin. Unpagged. ISBN: 0-618-42833-X (Hardcover); \$15.00.

John Grandits uses the "art" of writing to tell the story of Robert and how nothing is his fault. Concrete poems of the "Perfect Roller Coaster," "Sick Day," and "Stop Playing with Your Food!" draw the reader into Robert's life. The selections arouse laughter with each reading. The page devoted to why Mom doesn't allow any more pets includes a gravestone for Knucklehead, "a parakeet, we all looked up to" that warns "watch out for ceiling fans in heaven." Another gravestone tells the snake "You never should have crawled into the La-Z-Boy." Mom's final statement, "The backyard is full" completes the humor. A creative use of not only the text format, but text font, makes reading this book a fun and unique experience.

Upper elementary children can successfully emulate these poems, creating thoughtful beauty in their own poetry. Students can go beyond the idea that poems are rhymes. Elements of poetry such as rhythm, alliteration, repetition, shape, figurative language, deep feelings expressed in a few, best words, and those "Ah ..." moments one can experience through poetry are exemplified and can be taught successfully using this book.

Art and technology teachers can use this text as a model for its unique writing style utilizing various fonts and software programs. A lesson on footnotes can easily be started using Robert's thank-you note to his aunt. The use of concrete poems in all subject areas increases the students' creativity while allowing them to experiment with the power of language. This book is most suitable for upper elementary.

Janeczko, Paul B. (selected by). (2005) *A Kick in the Head*. (Ill. by C. Raschka). Cambridge, MA. Candlewick Press. 61 pp. ISBN: 076360662-6 (Harcover); \$17.99.



This bright and colorful book contains 29 poetic forms, each with an example, charming art work, and a brief explanation of how the form works. Poem examples run the gamut from the silly to the sublime, from the modern to the classic, from Ogden Nash to Shakespeare, from Langston Hughes to William Blake. Most people know about couplets, cinquains, limericks, haiku, and sonnets, but other forms will probably be new to even seasoned poets and language teachers. Although at first glance it looks like a picture book for young children, it requires a certain age and sophistication to read, understand, and attempt many of these forms. As Janeczko says in the introduction, having rules for poetry makes it more fun, just like having rules for baseball makes it a

better game. Those interested in the challenge will indeed have fun with this book.

*This book would be of value in teaching about different forms of poetry or as a model for writing these varied forms. The poems are well chosen. Of special interest to children might be the Persona Poem (written from the point of view of the poem's subject), the "Ode to Pablo's Tennis Shoes," and the Clerihew (poking fun at a celebrity). Deeper explanations of the poetic forms can be found in four pages at the back of the book.*

Moss, Marissa. (1995). *Amelia's Notebook*. (Ill. by M. Moss). Berkeley: Tricycle Press. Unpagged. ISBN: 1-883672-46-5 (Hardcover); \$14.00.

*Amelia's Notebook* is the first of Marissa Moss's series of journals and captures the mind of a 9-year-old girl named Amelia. Hand-lettered and illustrated by Moss herself, the notebook engages the reader as Amelia shares her feelings about moving, starting school, living with an older sister, keeping a long distance friendship, and making new friends. Every page is filled with doodles and random thoughts that accompany the storyline, just like a real writer's notebook.

*This book would serve as a great resource in teaching this genre of writing. It models how a notebook can be a seedbed of someone's thoughts on everyday people and events, thoughts that can later be developed into drafts. Moss's clever words and quirky drawings will surely inspire children to write and draw in their own notebooks.*

Moss, Marissa. (2002). *Galen: My Life in Imperial Rome*. (Ill. by M. Moss). New York: Harcourt Inc. Unpagged. ISBN: 0-15-216535-5 (Hardcover): \$15.00.

Marissa Moss, the author of the best-seller *Amelia* series, has written an intriguing, historical journal from the point of view of a Greek slave living in ancient Rome. Among other things, Galen tells of his life as a slave, his adventures with a chariot racer, and his loyalty to his master, Augustus. He also mentions watching the gladiators fight and how it didn't make sense to him, but rather made him physically sick. Toward the end of the journal, Galen shares how he accidentally uncovered a plot to assassinate his master, which, in turn, earned him his freedom.

*Galen was selected as a Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People in 2003. Not only is the book a fine example of journal writing, but it also contains valuable historical information on ancient times. Teachers could easily use this book as a base for a thematic unit that integrates language arts and social studies. Moss has hand-written the journal and illustrated Galen's thoughts and memories to make it look like a real diary. Students will see how journal writing can be useful for remembering and documenting important events in their lives.*

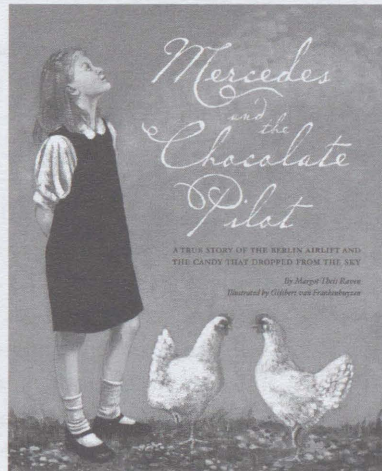
Paolilli, Paul and Dan Brewer. (2001). *Silver Seeds: A Book of Nature Poems*. (Ill. by S. Johnson and L. Fancher). New York: Puffin Books. Unpagged. ISBN: 0-14-250010-0 (Paperback); \$6.99.

Using the familiar poetic form of an acrostic, Paul Paolilli and Dan Brewer inspire readers and writers to look at the ordinary objects in their lives from a different view. Paolilli and Brewer have moved the acrostic and these ordinary objects to a higher level. Trees become "Tiny hands Reaching up from the Earth, tickling an Enormous Sky," while stars are "Silver seeds Tossed in the air And planted in the sky, Reaching out of the darkness Sprouting wonder." A total of 15 acrostics are included in this appealing book of poems.

Teachers in all subject areas and levels can use this model of writing to encourage students to synthesize their knowledge of any vocabulary term through writing acrostic poetry.

Raven, Margot Theis. (2002). *Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot: A True Story of the Berlin Airlift and the Candy That Dropped From the Sky*. (Ill. By G. van Frankenhuyzen). Chelsea, MI: Sleeping Bear Press. Unpagged. ISBN: 1-58536-069-4 (Hardcover); \$17.95.

Margot Theis Raven tells this story from the perspective of Mercedes, a 7-year-old living in West Berlin during the Airlift of 1948. It conveys the grim life West Berliners faced when Josef Stalin blocked the roads, railroads, and canal routes in and out of their city. Without the Airlifts, a humanitarian rescue mission using British and American pilots and planes, over 2.2 million people could have died. One pilot, Lt. Halvorsen, in a thoughtful and generous act, made parachutes from handkerchiefs and attached candy to them. He dropped them over the skies of West Berlin for the children in *Operation Little Vittles*. This book includes an epilogue of Mercedes and Lt. Halvorsen's friendship and the background to this heart-warming story.



This story would be a good model for students writing a personal narrative story. It could be used to discuss how books come from the major episodes in people's lives. Students could interview senior citizens, examine a major event in their lives, and write stories using the details discovered. The book itself provides examples of an author's note, a historical note, and an epilogue. Several social studies topics could be explored using this book: the West Berlin airlift, humanitarianism, or how one person's actions affect another.

Sandin, Joan. (2003). *Coyote School News*. New York: Henry Holt and Company. 45 pp. ISBN: 0-8050-6558-X (Hardcover); \$17.95.

Joan Sandin utilizes, in part, a collection of mimeographed 1932-1943 newsletters from southern Arizona country schools to write *Coyote School News*. Through articles and drawings the children of Coyote School reveal the events in their lives, such as the Christmas piñata, the Perfect Attendance Competition, and the La Fiesta de los Vaqueros—the biggest annual parade and rodeo. Ramon Ernesto "Monchi" Ramirez narrates events that tie the newsletters to the lives of the 12 students of Coyote School. It is a portrayal of life in the southwestern United States prior to World War II and includes the traditions of the Mexican culture. The text is interspersed with Spanish words and phrases and includes a glossary with pronunciations and meanings.

This book would be a wonderful mentor book geared toward a classroom production of a school newsletter. It gives both fictional newsletters and individual articles about events in lives of the students. It is a great addition to the classroom library for children to experience Mexican culture and the way of life in Arizona in the 1930s.

Sweet, Melissa. (2005). *Carmine: A Little More Red*. New York: Houghton Mifflin. Unpaged. ISBN: 0-618-38794-3 (Hardcover); \$16.00.

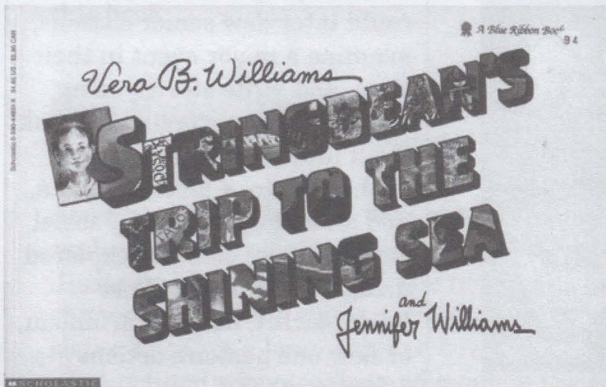
Melissa Sweet combines timeless fairytale and alphabet book genres to create a pleasing version of Little Red Riding Hood. Carmine (Sweet's own Little Red Riding Hood) and her pet dog Rufus set out on a trip to Grandmother's house for some alphabet soup. Ignoring her mother's and grandmother's warnings about dilly-dallying, Carmine stops to paint a picture for Grandmother along the way. Meanwhile, Rufus encounters the wolf. Out of fear, Rufus barks out information that leads the wolf to Grandmother's house in search of the famous alphabet soup with bones. Perry includes maps of the story's setting, dialog balloons, and pictorial references to other classic fairytales. She also highlights on each page one word that can be defined through the context. This unique retelling is sure to be enjoyed by children and adults of all ages.

*This book could be used during a genre study of either fairytales or alphabet books. Because Sweet has incorporated so many different types of text within this book, it is also ideal for teaching students how to write and use language in a multigenre style.*

Williams, Vera B. (1988). *Stringbean's Trip to the Shining Sea*. (Ill. by J. Williams and V. B. Williams). Singapore: Tieh Wah Press. Unpaged. ISBN: 0-688-07161-9 (Paperback); \$5.95.

Williams has created a series of fictional postcards sent by Stringbean Coe and his brother Fred to their mother, father, and grandfather during a long trip to the West Coast. Their grandfather organizes these descriptive postcards into an album for the rest of the family to see. Readers will enjoy Stringbean's honest views of the "history places" he is forced to visit as well as his amazement with the change in landscape.

*This book would be a great way to incorporate geography into a language arts lesson. Also, these postcards would serve as a great model for letter writing and for the language one uses when writing a personal postcard or letter.*



## QUALITY OF LANGUAGE

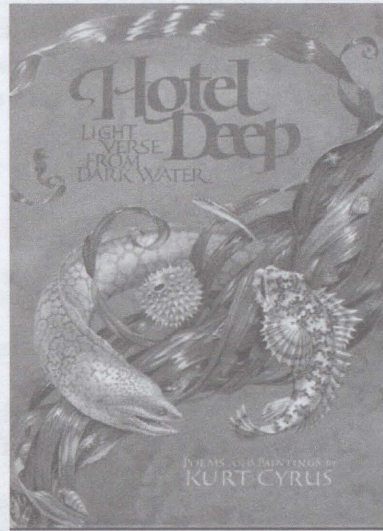
Broach, Elise. (2005). *Wet Dog*. (Ill. by D. Catrow). New York: Dial Books. Unpaged. ISBN: 0-8037-2809-3 (Hardcover); \$16.99.

Just about everyone can relate to the horrors that are associated with wet dogs. Creators Elise Broach and David Catrow bring the misadventures of a "good old dog" to life by taking the reader through the mud to encounter a variety of characters with no patience for a wet dog. The story starts with this "good old dog" sitting around bearing the heat of summer. The dog's day is spent trying different ways to cool off. As one can imagine, the people are busy and the dog is not welcomed. The dog finally finds himself at a wedding reception where the reader will discover an interesting twist. The book is truly refreshing.

*The book is well written, which provides many opportunities for writer's craft lessons and models for students to apply various aspects of the writer's craft in their own writing. Topics could include use of adjectives, quotation marks, repetition, and mood. Point of view could be another focus for instruction. Discussions might include how the story would be different if written from the point of view of the people or the dog.*

Cyrus, Kurt. (2005). *Hotel Deep: Light Verse from Deep Water*. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc. Unpaged. ISBN: 0-15-216771-4 (Hardcover); \$16.00.

One lone, lost sardine is searching for his school in the deep-sea life of a coral reef in Kurt Cyrus's book. He uses shape poems and rhyme to add excitement, scariness, and awe to capture the lives of animals that live in one of the least explored places in the world. The last page of the book identifies the ocean dwellers discussed in the book. Superb illustrations enhance the poetry.



*This fantastic book adds to any collection of poetry as the author demonstrates how word choices and uses of shape poems show the actions and emotions of his poetry. For a class studying the ocean, this book would introduce many animals that are not widely known such as the Irish lord and cleaner wrasse. All age levels will enjoy this book.*

Fletcher, Ralph. (1997). *Twilight Comes Twice*. (Ill. by K. Kiesler). New York: Clarion Books. 32pp. ISBN: 0-395-84826-1 (Hardcover); \$16.00.

In *Twilight Comes Twice* Ralph Fletcher paints a poetic description of the time of day when the horizon changes colors and people's lives shift, flowing from dawn to dusk and back again. In a quiet soothing style the author ends a summer day with fireflies writing messages in the night sky and evening trains bringing hungry workers home. Fisherman cast out evening lines and children listen to the wakening crows as they take their morning walk. Gentle illustrations follow a young girl and her dog as they observe the subtle hues of pinks and oranges in the sky around their community.

*A true wordsmith, Fletcher's text uses personification to introduce the two personalities of twilight. He offers a wealth of rich language through the use of similes, metaphors, and alliteration coupled with simple science concepts. This book is an excellent mentor text for the introduction of these literary devices.*

Laminack, Lester L. (2004). *Saturdays and Teacakes*. (Ill. by C. Soentpiet). Atlanta: Peachtree Publishing. Unpaged. ISBN: 1-561451-303 (Hardcover); \$16.95.

Lester Laminack has written a memoir about Saturday visits to his grandmother's house. Every Saturday Lester rode his bike through his small childhood town to Mammaw's house. He shares the routine of those Saturdays with beautiful descriptions using detail, metaphor and simile. For example, he writes, "In Mamaw's big kitchen, sunlight poured through the windows like a waterfall and spilled over the countertops, pooling up on the checkerboard floor." The period illustrations of life in the 1950s are painted by Chris Soentpiet and add to the richness of the written descriptions.



*Saturdays and Teacakes would be a great book for modeling revision techniques. The ways Laminack uses language to show the reader his memories of Mammaw's house would model for students how to craft pockets of brilliance in their own writing. For example, he describes eating lunch in a way that even young children could understand: "Before long she came back with two big tomato sandwiches on hamburger buns. Every Saturday, I gobbled mine down like a hungry dog, but she nibbled hers like a bird." This book could be a touchstone text to use throughout the year as a model of vivid descriptions.*



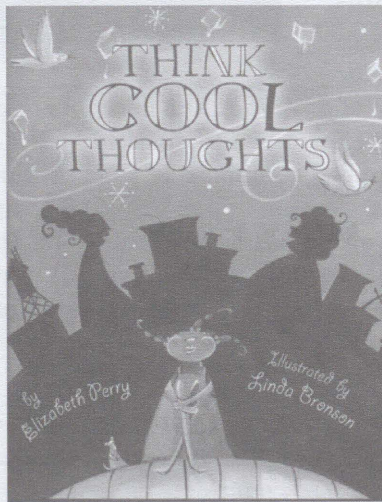
McMullan, Kate and Jim McMullan. (2002). *I Stink!* New York: Harper-Collins. Unpag. ISBN: 0-06-0298480 (Hardcover); \$15.99.

In *I Stink*, a garbage truck takes the reader from the curb to the barge for delivery to the landfill. The voice of the truck is so strong that it makes the reader believe he is human. The language is animated and begs to be read as such. Students will be captivated by the rhythm and personification of this story.

*This book demonstrates personification at its best and provides the perfect mini-lesson on this literary technique. Because of the author's unique use of the truck's voice, students could see how writers develop voice.*

Perry, Elizabeth. (2005). *Think Cool Thoughts*. (Ill. by L. Bronson). New York: Clarion Books. 32 pp. ISBN: 0-618-23493-4 (Hardcover); \$16.00.

Elizabeth Perry's use of language successfully conveys the sweltering heat that the characters of *Think Cool Thoughts* are experiencing. Seven-year-old Angel, her mother, and Aunt Lucy feel helpless in their city dwelling as the temperature climbs. Angel follows the advice of her mother and begins to imagine melting ice cubes in hopes of magically escaping the unbearable summer heat. This tactic proves to be unsuccessful, so Angel, her mother, and Aunt Lucy haul a mattress to the rooftop to sleep. Angel dreams of the city buildings resting on chairs and of ice cubes dancing. To her surprise, she awakens to find coolness in the air, and a sweet summer rain begins to fall. After putting the bedding indoors, mother, daughter, and aunt enjoy the magic of a refreshing summer rain and a memory is made. Readers will smile at their connections to the stifling heat and the joyful moments of dancing in the rain. Perry's words will make any reader escape into her story.



*Descriptive language, repetitive words, and successful imagery make this book ideal for teaching these crafts of writing. The setting of the story makes this book a great candidate for use within a unit on community.*

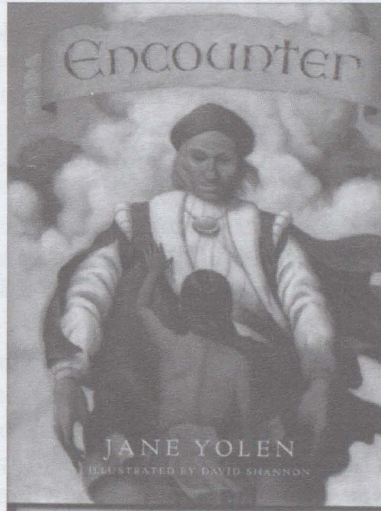
Wong, Janet S. (2002). *You Have to Write*. (Ill. by T. Flavin). New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books. Unpag. ISBN: 0-689-83409-8 (Hardcover); \$17.00.

There is a simple beauty in Janet Wong's *You Have to Write*. Her words are honest and her style straightforward. From the lonely musings of an author without a topic to the pride of a final draft, she captures the painful and exhilarating process of writing. She tells young writers to remember who they are and encourages them to write about what they know, what they live. She says, "Reach inside. Write about the dark times. Write about the bright times." The joy of having your own story connects you with all the other stories ever told. The book builds to a crescendo as the children stretch, move, dance, share, and celebrate through their own wonderful words. They want to write, and it has to be good.

*This book is a must for writing workshop. It is especially useful for craft lessons on choosing a topic, drafting, and revising. Teachers might consider the snapshot pages for introducing a writer's notebook. There are many fine prompts for quickwrites. If you are looking for a book that inspires and empowers budding writers, check it out.*

Yolan, Jane. (1992) *Encounter*. (Ill. by D. Shannon). San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company. Unpaged. ISBN:0-15-225962-7 (Hardcover); \$16.00.

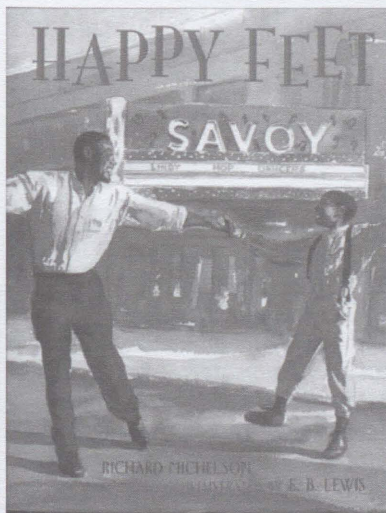
Yolan and Shannon have created a rich and beautiful book that tells the Columbus story from the point of view of the Taino people who had inhabited San Salvador for centuries before Columbus landed there. The book begins with the mystical dreams of a young Taino boy foretelling disaster and ends when that boy is an old man still trying to warn his people. Gorgeous acrylic paintings combine with striking words. The reader is amazed at how such simple language can contain such beautiful metaphors and similes. Examples include a description of the boy trying to determine whether the pale-skinned, bushy faced visitors were true men, "I took one by the hand and pinched it. The hand felt like flesh and blood, but the skin was moon to my sun." The strangers brought "round pools to hold in the hand that gave a man back his face." One page of author's notes following the text gives historical details of what happened to the Taino people after Columbus's "discovery."



*This book is perfect for use in social studies for such topics as discovery, Columbus, Native Americans, or the effects of one culture upon another. The book provides wonderful examples of figurative language that can be used as models for writing. It is also a fine example of writing a story from a different point of view.*

## Write for Authentic Purposes

Michelson, Richard. (2005). *Happy Feet: The Savoy Ballroom Lindy Hoppers and Me*. (Ill. by E. B. Lewis). Orlando: Harcourt. Unpaged. ISBN: 0-15-205057-4 (Hardcover); \$16.00.



*Happy Feet* captures the joy of a Harlem day in 1926, when not only the world famous Savoy Ballroom opened, but a shoeshine shop opened, and a boy nicknamed Happy Feet was born. Michelson writes in poetic form using a conversation between father and son to tell the story. The father tells of the Savoy's Grand Opening when the people of Harlem, dressed in their finest threads, and the white dukes from Hollywood danced together. Daddy spins and dips his son as he recalls the day "Happy Feet" was born, the day his dream of opening the shoeshine shop came true. Award winning illustrator E.B. Lewis paints scenes that

show the wonder and excitement of this day.

*This book could be a model for students to write stories that connect human stories to world and community events. Students could interview seniors and other community members and create stories that weave together human and historical events.*

Napier, Matt(2002). *Z is for Zamboni: A Hockey Alphabet*. (Ill. by M. Rose). Chelsea, MI: Sleeping Bear Press. Unpaged. ISBN: 1-58536-065-1 (Hardcover);\$19.95

Melanie Rose, the illustrator, takes the reader through a fabulous picture walk to accompany Matt Napier’s poetic verse. *Z is for Zamboni* is an alphabet book that enables the reader to learn about both the history and other factual information about the sport of hockey. He begins with “A is for Arena as well as All-Star” and ends with the title, *Z is for Zamboni*. Napier engages the reader through the use of poetry as well as informational passages that represent each letter of the alphabet. These informational passages play a key role in learning about the sport of hockey.

*Z is for Zamboni* could be used in conjunction with other alphabet books for learning beginning research skills. Students could learn how to research a topic of interest and apply what they have learned through the alphabet format. This book could be used with other similarly organized alphabet books.

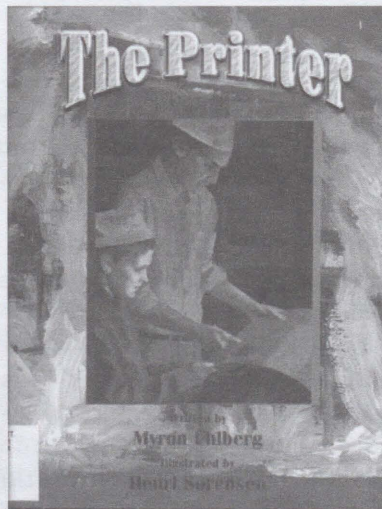
Orloff, Karen Kaufman. (2004). *I Wanna Iguana*. (Ill.by D. Catrow). New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons. Unpaged. ISBN: 0-399-23717-8 (Hardcover); \$15.99.

Karen Orloff uses a friendly letter and note writing format to follow a child’s determination to have a pet. From the beginning of the story to the end, mother and son debate the responsibilities and rewards of caring for an animal. Young Alex pleads to have a moving friend’s pet iguana so that it isn’t eaten for lunch by a dog, signing his note “Your Sensitive Son.”. Mother responds with, “Nice Try.” Begging, Alex promises to clean the cage and pay for the iguana’s lettuce out of his allowance. Mom’s response, “Are you sure you want to do this?” lets the reader know Alex may soon get his wish. Parents and children alike can relate to this fictional story of a classic family debate. Carrow’s illustrations are hilarious exaggerations of each side’s points.

*I Wanna Iguana* is a perfect introduction to note and friendly letter writing. The author uses greetings, proper comma punctuation, and great examples of closing lines as the two main characters try to convince each other of their points. The conclusion supports the lesson that communicating through the written form can be more powerful than spoken words. This is a humorous example of authentic writing with real world purposes.

Uhlberg, Myron. (2003). *The Printer*. (Ill. by H. Sorensen). Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers. Unpaged. ISBN: 1-56145-221-1 (Hardcover); \$16.95.

*The Printer* is set in 1940 in the newsroom of *The New York Daily News*. It was common in the 1940s to have deaf men work in the noisy printing press rooms of newspapers. However, hearing workers typically showed little respect for deaf workers, and there was little contact between the two groups. This story, narrated by the son of a deaf printer, tells of a silent fire that spread through the newsroom. The boy’s father alerted the deaf workers by signing, “FIRE!” The deaf workers alerted the hearing workers, and all lives were saved. Myron Uhlberg used the memoir style to write this realistic fiction. Although Uhlberg’s father was deaf and worked as a newspaper printer, the story itself is fiction.



*The Printer* provides a good example for students on how to develop realistic fiction stories based on real life events. It models how authors change and embellish actual events into interesting stories that hold a reader’s attention.

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