

This material complements pages 104–109 in *Focus on Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Equitable and Joyful Learning in Kindergarten*.

CHAPTER 19

Teaching Writing with Mentor Texts in Kindergarten

Katie Schrodtt, Erin FitzPatrick, Bonnie A. Barksdale, Brandi Nunnery, and Michelle Medlin Hasty

Reading Like a Writer

Introduce mentor texts through read-alouds so that children can first listen to, enjoy, and understand the book as a whole (Laminack 2017). During subsequent readings, the children can begin the process of reading like a writer—noticing powerful craft, naming it, seeing it modeled by their teacher, and trying it out in their own writing. "Read Like a Writer, Write Like a Writer" displays steps that guide this process.

Read Like a Writer, Write Like a Writer Steps for Teaching Writing

1. Read like a writer yourself. As you select a text and design lessons and activities, read the text the first time thinking about comprehension and text-dependent questions. Then re-read through the lens of a writer, making notes about how you can use the text during writing lessons.
2. Plan to read entire mentor texts during whole-group reading lessons. Then, use excerpts during individual and small-group writing lessons and activities.
3. Authors make purposeful choices to create a mood, shape meaning, or deepen the impact of the characters and setting in the story. When writing text-dependent questions, include some that address the author's craft. For example, when reading *Frog and Toad Together*, by Arnold Lobel, you could say this: "On page 22, Arnold Lobel wrote, 'Toad put his head very close to the ground and shouted, NOW SEEDS, START GROWING!' Why do you think he used that text feature?"
4. After identifying a key writing strategy, use mentor texts to show one or more examples of it.
5. Try the strategy in your own writing, either by modeling or doing a shared writing with the children.
6. Ask children to try the strategy while they are still together during a whole-group lesson—either on a dry-erase board, in their journals, or in a piece they are already working on.
Remind the children to try the strategy as they work in small groups or write independently.

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Gradual Release of Responsibility

Instruction with mentor texts follows a gradual release of responsibility instructional framework (Duke & Pearson 2002; Pearson & Gallagher 1983; Vygotsky 1978). The teacher moves from explicit instruction (“I do”) to guided instruction that can include intentional interaction among peers (“We do”) to independent student work (“You do”).

The gradual release of responsibility instructional framework assumes sufficient time and support exist to shift the cognitive work of writing from teacher to children. “How to Gradually Release Responsibility During a Kindergarten Author Study” displays how this process can be divided across multiple days and weeks.

How to Gradually Release Responsibility During a Kindergarten Author Study

Components of the Gradual Release Model	Sample Steps to Take	Examples of Teacher Talk & Mini-Lessons
“I do” Day 1 (approx. 30 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Examine the text prior to reading it with the class. Read through the text yourself multiple times to gain an understanding of the patterns and features of the book.■ Choose at least three spots to pause the reading, with time and prompts so that children can notice and process key features or content.■ Plan one writing skill you want to model for your class in a mini-lesson that connects to the text.■ Read the text aloud with your plan as a guide.■ Together, create an anchor chart to summarize the skills learned. Hang the anchor chart in the classroom where the children can reference it during their writing time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ “What do you notice about the characters in Mo Willems’ books? What does he do to show that the characters are moving?”■ “Mo Willems brings his characters to life by making them run, jump, and change expression. He uses ‘movement lines’ in his illustrations.”■ “Mo Willems brings his characters to life by making them say funny things and talk back and forth. He uses speech bubbles in his illustrations to convey the characters’ back-and-forth talk.”■ On the anchor chart, draw a picture of a stick figure “moving” and a speech bubble coming out of its mouth. Write, “We can make our characters move and talk in our writing.”

How to Gradually Release Responsibility During a Kindergarten Author Study

<p>"We do"</p> <p>Day 2 (approx. 30 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Show an example of your own writing on a large piece of chart paper or projected on a screen. ■ With your class, revise your writing, adding in movement and dialogue for your characters. ■ Guide students with the key idea and ask them to help script the revisions as a class. ■ Revise your writing in front of the children, helping them to see the revisions in action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ "I am noticing in my writing that many of my characters are still. Let's help 'unfreeze' my characters by making them move and talk." ■ "In my story about accidentally setting the alarm off in my house, my children are frozen even though they are scared of the noise and crying. What could I add to my writing to make them move and talk?"
<p>"You do"</p> <p>Day 3 and beyond (Students need to build writing stamina. Start with 15 minutes and build up to 30–45 minutes.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allow the children at least 15 minutes to try out the lesson from the mentor text in their own writing. ■ As the students are writing, circle the classroom, conferring with individuals and small groups of children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ "Today and every day, you can make the characters in your writing move and talk like Mo Willems." ■ "How is it going? What are you writing about today? Are any of your characters moving or talking?"

References

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