nulla dies sine linea  Never a Day Without a Line. Horace 65-8 BC

Never hesitate to imitate another writer. Imitation is part of the creative process for anyone learning an art or a craft. Bach and Picasso didn't spring full-blown as Bach or Picasso; they needed models. This is especially true of writing. ~ William Zinsser

Words are sacred. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones, in the right order, you can nudge the world a little. ~Tom Stoppard

Exercise the writing muscle every day, even if it is only a letter, notes, a title list, a character sketch, a journal entry. Writers are like dancers, like athletes. Without that exercise, the muscles seize up. ~ Jane Yolen

If you tell your students what to say and how to say it, you may never hear them, only the pale echoes of what they imagine you want them to be. ~Donald Murray
Choice Inspires Reading

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Teacher Selects All Books
Students read less

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Penny Kittle
Teacher • Author • Advocate
pennykittle.net • @pennykittle
Analyzing Writing Craft in Independent Reading

This is called ‘rhetorical reading’ and it means to break the text down into the sum of its parts... to determine what the writer was trying to achieve and which writing strategies he/she used to try to achieve it. A rhetorical analysis is always looking at the why and the how of the writing.

1. Read one whole chapter of your book today. When finished, go back and skim read to map out what happens in this chapter in your notebook. Write about how the author put the chapter together. Consider what we’ve studied that writers do to move the action: flashback, zoom in, zoom past, narrator aside, etc.
   a. **Day 2**: consider the development of the chapter above and explain why you think the author wrote this chapter at this point in the story in this way.
2. Find several interesting sentences and copy them into your notebook. Annotate them to show what makes them interesting to you. This is an author’s craft question, so I am looking for observations you can make about a writer’s choices in this section that you find interesting.
3. Focus on one of the lenses for reading that we have focused on so far in second and third readings of poetry: word choice, voice, sensory details, tone, or pace. Now apply that to a section from your independent reading book. Write about what you noticed when you reread the section with this lens.
4. Make observations about punctuation today. Does your author favor short or long sentences? What moves in writing craft would you say are common for this particular writer?
5. Take one section of dialogue from your reading today. Analyze what is said (what you learn about plot or character) and then what is NOT said. What are these characters withholding?
6. Style is tricky... sometimes we love the way a writer writes and sometimes we get irritated by too many narrators or moments when we lose our way (yes, I’m talking about that second narrator in *The Book Thief* again)... how was the reading of this book for you? Explain what you loved/grew frustrated with/etc. What would you say to the author (if you could) about how this was written?

Analyzing Text Structures in Independent Reading

1. How important are time and place (setting) in your book? Would anything be lost if your novel were set in a different period of time or in a very different location?
   a. If you are currently reading non-fiction, consider the date of publication of the book. If the book is more than two years old, search online for how the field studied in this book has changed in the last two years.
b. If you are currently reading non-fiction that is place-specific (memoir, war stories, etc.) consider how the setting impacts your understanding of the book. Did you come to the book with strong background knowledge in the area? If not, how did you overcome your ignorance?

2. Consider the narrator of your story. What do you know about him/her? Do you trust him/her? Explain what makes the narrator reliable or not. What do you question about what the narrator says at this point in the narrative? How does the narrator affect your sympathies for other characters?
   a. If the narrator is the author (often true in non-fiction), do you trust this author? Why or why not? What do you think this author does not see clearly or should research more thoroughly?

3. Consider the title of your book. Explain why you think it was chosen. How does the title give meaning to the work?

4. How does the writer arrange ideas in this text? Is there any pattern to this arrangement?

5. Consider the arrangement of ideas in this text. Is it chronological? Alternating between a forward chronology and flashbacks? (If so, why so?)

Analyzing Literary Elements in Writing

1. Skim reread sections of your book. Look for repeating images, motifs, or repetitions and consider their implications on the larger body of work here. What can you find? What might you continue to pay attention to as you read?

2. Literature often uses a specific story to explain something larger about humankind. Can you see connections between the story you are reading and the characters’ conflicts, revelations, or insights that might also be true for all people?

3. Conflicts in literature can be internal, external, or both. Which do you see in your book at this point? Explain how they contribute to your overall engagement with the text.
   a. Writers are skillful with weaving in sub-conflicts and multiple story lines. If you see this in your story, explain how this has impacted your understanding and engagement with the story. *(Game of Thrones readers—I don’t mean ALL of them!)*
   b. Writers create conflicts on three levels in literature: conflicts within the character, conflicts between characters, and conflicts with something outside the character: the world or God, perhaps. What do you see happening in your book?
   c. Have you ever noticed how authors put obstacles in the way of characters resolving conflicts? Find them in your book.

4. Language is central to writing and it is chosen with care. How does this writer use language? Is it formal? Informal? Technical? Slang? Does the language change throughout this piece?
5. Some writers use humor to identify one character or to present ideas in a text. Do you see evidence of humor? Puns? Irony? Sarcasm? Why might the author have used them in this book?

6. There are several comparison devices available to writers: similes, metaphors, personification, hyperbole, etc. Can you find examples of any of these in your text? If not, why not?

**Vocabulary**

You know I believe that the single best way to increase your vocabulary is through wide reading. Now I want you to show me how...

1. Find a word that you didn’t know before you read, but feel you understand after reading it in this book. Write the passage where the word occurred and then explain how the words around the word you didn’t know helped you understand it.

2. Collect at least four words a week from your writing. Keep them in your vocabulary section of your notebook. Look up the definitions and then determine how it was used in the book you’re reading. Here’s the big challenge: start using them! See if you can slip them into conversation. (I suggest you pay attention to pronunciation keys in the dictionary or ask me for help. Many words sound differently than they look.)
Read Like a Writer
from Katie Wood Ray’s *Wondrous Words*, 1999.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notice something about the craft of the text.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noticing <strong>writerly</strong> things means noticing things that are close to the words, close to the text. Examples: repetition, word choice, structure of the text. This is different than responding to <strong>readerly</strong> things such as “It flows” or “It has great description.”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Talk about it and <strong>make a theory</strong> about why a writer might use this craft.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Discussing WHY a writer might choose to write something in a certain way helps students to understand the writing technique. This will, in turn, help them to “untie” the technique from the text studied and try it in their own writing. It’s fine if the theory doesn’t match the particular author’s intentions. The point is to examine the possibilities as to why a writer might craft a piece in a particular way. This gives a strong sense of “I might write my piece like this, or I could write it like this, or I could try this other thing in my writing.”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Give the craft a <strong>name</strong>.</th>
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<tr>
<td>The purpose of naming a technique is to give students a common language with which they can discuss the craft of writing. If we have a name for something, we’re more likely to remember it and to use it with our own work. If students notice a craft that has a name - such as alliteration, metaphor, etc. – use that. If not, then the class can invent a name. The class will know what it means and can add it to the class pot of “things we can try.”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Think of <strong>other texts</strong> you know. Have you seen this craft before?</th>
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<tr>
<td>The same wonderful ways to craft writing can be found in many books. As students are on the “lookout” for crafting techniques, they will notice this. Such ways of writing are not owned by particular authors, but are the domain of all writers. This helps students to understand that it’s not “copying” to use writing strategies, that writers learn from each other. To seek out books that are crafted like books they already know helps students to make connections between authors and to read for voice and style as well as story.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Envision this crafting in your own writing.</th>
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<tr>
<td>The most important step. Students with their own drafts, about their own topics, think about, imagine, how this particular crafting strategy might work in their own draft. They “try them on” for size, talking out how a crafting technique might work with their draft. We can help them by making statements such as, “So if I’m writing and I want to ________, then I can use this technique.” This helps students to make sense of WHY writers might choose certain techniques, why certain techniques make sense for certain types of writing. With envisioning, it makes sense to help students by “writing in the air” / “writing out loud” for them, so that they can hear the sound of the crafting technique in their own draft. This step will ideally give students the feeling of so many possibilities for their draft.</td>
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In Memoriam: Martin Luther King, Jr.
By June Jordan

I

honey people murder mercy U.S.A.
the milkland turn to monsters teach
to kill to violate pull down destroy
the weakly freedom growing fruit
from being born

America

tomorrow yesterday rip rape
exacerbate despoil disfigure
crazy running threat the
deadly thrall
appall belief dispel
the wildlife burn the breast
the onward tongue
the outward hand
deform the normal rainy
riot sunshine shelter wreck
of darkness derogate
delimit blank
explode deprive
assassinate and batten up
like bullets fatten up
the raving greed
reactivate a springtime
terrorizing

deadth by men by more
than you or I can

STOP

//

They sleep who know a regulated place
or pulse or tide or changing sky
according to some universal
stage direction obvious
like shorewashed shells

we share an afternoon of mourning
in between no next predictable
except for wild reversal hearse rehearsal
bleach the blacklong lunging
ritual of fright insanity and more
deplorable abortion
more and
more
Next Time, Stop the Freaking Race

Rick Reilly

There's a man buried in your kitchen.

He's right in that stack of newspapers there, about three weeks down, a headline one day, a one-graph follow-up the next, a nobody since.

His name is Ken Fox. He went to a race at Michigan Speedway on July 26 and was torn in half by a tire that flew into the stands, and they didn't even stop the freaking race. Now he's just part of a stat that sportswriters will fish out the next time a racing fan dies because he sat in the wrong seat—four fan deaths in the last 11 years, they can write now. So the CART circuit moved on to the all-important Miller Lite 200 in Lexington, Ohio, last week, where....

But wait just a second.

Ken Fox deserves one minute before we forget him. Ken Fox was somebody. He was 38, with a seven-year-old son, Christopher, who walked by his casket and left a little note with big sloppy letters. I love you, Daddy.

Ken Fox had a best friend, Steve Dawson, who can't eat now and can't sleep and can't forget about the day he went to a car race and everybody sitting around him left in body bags. Ken and Steve, from Lansing, Mich., worked together as drill instructors at a boot camp for first-time felons. They commuted to work together, bowled together, hashed out their divorces together. And they went to car races together. Steve had four tickets to the U.S. 500, and Steve's dad was too tired from working all night and Ken's brother had to study and Steve's fiancée couldn't go, either, and thank god. But Steve and Ken went, and they were damn good seats, too, ninth row, fourth turn. Damn good seats.

They were having a blast. Ken was whooping for Michael Andretti to win, and it was a gorgeous day. Then, on Lap 175, Steve thought he saw something black out of the corner of his eye, and he ducked. When he turned back around, he saw that Ken was dead, and the woman just in front of Steve, Sheryl Laster, was dead, and, within the minute, the friend she was with, Mike Tautkus, was dead. "I don't know why I'm alive," Steve says. "I don't know if it was luck or fate or what. I've thought, Did Ken save my life? And I don't know that either. I don't know anything."

They build these race cars to explode on impact because it takes G forces away from the driver, makes it safer for him. But how many engineers are worrying about making guys like Ken Fox safer?

And they didn't even stop the freaking race. Race officials yellow-flagged it as a safety crew cleared the fourth-turn stands, but they left Ken and Sheryl and Mike lying there, covered by blankets, as the cheers started up again and the drivers went flying by again at 200 mph. Congratulations, Greg Moore, you just won the world's fastest funeral procession.
Steve hasn't been able to go back to work, and he's in crisis therapy, and there's a replay in his head that won't shut off. But he's figured out one thing. "Everybody wants to ask me about the blood and how the bodies were twisted, but all I want to do is tell them about Ken," he says. "I just want people to know that Ken was a great guy, a fun-loving, moral, stand-up guy. Everybody seems to be going on like none of this makes a difference. Well, I think it should."

You wonder if it does for Adrian Fernandez. The CART publicity sheets say he's having the best year of his life, ranked fourth in the points standings. But the sheets don't mention how he lost control of his car on the fourth turn that day and smashed the wall, sending his right front tire spinning up and over the 15-foot-high fence and through Christopher Fox's dad.

Three people are dead, and all Fernandez has done is send flowers. He hasn't visited or spoken with the victims' families, and all he has said since the day of the race is, "No comment." The CART people say he was a brave guy to climb back behind the wheel and win on Sunday in Ohio, but he hasn't had the guts yet to look into the eyes of the mothers and the kids.

Yeah, racing and sports and the world spin on at 9,000 rpm. Someday maybe Adrian Fernandez will figure he owes somebody a call. And someday maybe Steve Dawson will be fine, except for an empty seat next to him in the car and a chill that won't go away and the memory of the number of the seat Ken Fox took just ahead of him that gorgeous summer day.

Thirteen.

Sports Illustrated
August 17, 1988
Death deals the cards. They whisper across the shaky table.

Hernandez sticks a cigar in his mouth. Dumbo tucks his wife's letter in his helmet. Loki spits and curses. Roy sips his coffee. We pull the cards toward us and laugh.

I don't remember what my wife looked like, but I recognize Death. She calls for our bets, wearing a red dress, her beautiful face carved out of stone. My friends laugh and lie, already deep in the game.

I remember what my little girl looks like. I remember the smell of her head. The scar on her left knee. Her lisp. Peanut butter and banana. I don't think she remembers me.

Death rattles bone dice in her mouth, clicking them against her teeth. She spits them on the table and they roll.

We bet it all, throw everything on the line because the air is filled with bullets and grenades. We won't hear the one that gets us, but it's coming.

She tells us to show our hands.

We have never been so alive.


Fully assimilated zombies.

I could laugh at them when I was with Gracie. When I walked through their herd in the east wing hall—all alone—I was transformed from my confident freakself into a gaping pile of self-conscious self-loathing. Their shiny-teeth smiles made happiness look easy. They never tripped over their own feet. They could laugh without snorting and tease each other without sounding dumb. They could remember being six years old together and eight and eleven and giggle about all of it.

The flaunts, the taunts, the poses, they were all part of the lie. My brain understood this because I'd heard the whispers. The Honor Society officers who started their day off with a little weed that melted stress like chocolate. The cheerleaders who cut themselves where the scars wouldn't show. Debate team members busted for shoplifting. Mommy's pills being shared like cookies, and the way Daddy's vodka made first-period Latin fly by.

As I walked down the east wing hall, I could feel their sticky fingers reaching for my brain. Puffs of yellow smoke curled toward my ears, my eyes, my nose and mouth. The hivemind wanted to penetrate and infect. Colonize. The danger was so real, so close, I didn't dare open my mouth to ask directions. Or to howl.
Shake the Dust by Anis Mojgani

This is for the fat girls. This is for the little brothers. This is for the schoolyard wimps. This is for the childhood bullies who tormented them. This is for the former prom queen. This is for the milk crate ball players. This is for the nighttime cereal eaters. This is for the retired elderly Wal-Mart storefront door greeters.

Shake the dust.

This is for the benches and the people sitting on them. This is for the bus drivers, driving a million broken hymns. This is for the men who have to hold down three jobs, simply to hold their children. This is for the night schoolers, and the midnight bike riders who are trying to fly.

Shake the dust.

For the two-year-olds who cannot be understood because they speak half English and half God. Shake the dust. For the girls with the brothers that are crazy, shake the dust.

For the boys with the beautiful sisters, the gym class wallflowers, the twelve-year-olds afraid of taking public showers, the kid who's late to class 'cause he forgot the combination to his lockers, for the girl who loves somebody else, shake the dust.

This is for the hard men, who want to love, but know it won't come. For the ones who are told to speak only when spoken to, and then are never spoken to, the ones who the amendments do not stand up for, the ones who are forgotten:

Speak every time you stand, so you do not forget yourselves. Do not let a second go by that does not remind you that your heart beats nine hundred times a day, and there are enough gallons of blood to make you an ocean.

This is for the police officers. This is for the meter maid. This is for the celibate pedophile who keeps on struggling. This is for the poetry teachers. This is for the people who go on vacations alone, and for the crappy artists and the actors that suck, shake the dust.

This is for the sweat that drips off of Mick Jagger's lips, for the shaking skirt on Tina Turner's shaking hips, for the heavens and the hells through which Tina has lived. This is for the tired and the dreamers, the family that'll never be like the Cleavers with the perfectly-made dinners and the sons like Wally and the Beaver. For the bigots, the sexists, and the killers, the big-house pint sentence cat becoming redeemers, and for the springtime, that always comes after the winters.
This is for you.

Make sure that, by the time the fisherman returns, you are gone. Make these blue streams worth it, because, just like the days I’m burning at both ends, and every time I write, every time I bike through the night, every time I open my eyes, I am cutting out a part of myself to give to you. So shake the dust, and take me with you when you do, for none of this has ever been for me.

All that was placed inside, that continues pushing like waves, pushes for you. So take the world by its clothespins and shake it out again and again, jump on top and take it for a spin, and when you hop off shake it out again, for this is yours.

Make my words worth it. Make this not just another poem that I write. Not just another poem like just another night that sits heavy above us all - walk into it. Breathe it in. Let it crash through the halls of your arms, like the millions of years and millions of poets that course like blood, pumping and pushing, making you live, making you live, shaking the dust, so when the world knocks at your door, turn the knob and open on up, and run into its big, big hands with open arms.
Teeth
By Phillip Kaye

“Ojichama” is what I call my Japanese grandfather. In 1945 this Tokyo home was burned to the ground. Grampy is what I call my American grandfather. In 1945 he was serving on the U.S.S. Shangri-la, sending off American fighter pilots to burn down Japanese houses. Our jaws have not yet healed.

1906 Poland.
Grampy’s father is hiding in an oven. He has heard men singing on the street below, hyenas my family called them, after drinks and songs the outside townspeople will come into the Jewish ghetto for a celebration beating. Molar fireworks and eyelid explosions. Even when Grampy’s father grows up the sound of sudden song breaks his body into a sweat. Fear of joy is the darkest of captivities.

1975 Tokyo.
My father, the long-haired student with the pension for bad sexual innuendo meets Rako Hori, the well-dressed banker who forgets the choruses to her favorite songs. Twelve years later they give birth to a lanky lightbulb.

1999.
My mother speaks to me in Japanese. Most days I don’t have the strength to ask her to translate the big words. We burned that house down, Mother. Don’t you remember?

1771 Prague.
In the heart of the city is a Jewish cemetery, the only plot of land where Grampy’s ancestors were allowed to be buried. When they ran out of room they had no choice but to stack bodies one on top of the other, now there are hills of tombs. Individual tombstones jutting out crooked like valiant teeth emerging from a jaw left to rot.

1985 My parents’ wedding.
The two families sit together smiling wider than they need to. Montague must be so happy we can Capulet this all go.

1997.
From the safety of his Tokyo apartment Ojichama scrawls postcards to his old four-poster bed: haven’t been able to sleep since you left, wish you were here.

1999.
I sit with Grampy’s cousin. He is 91 and dressed in full uniform. I beg with him to untie the knots clenched in his forehead. He says, “Hate is a strong word, but it is the only strength that I have left. How am I to forgive the men that severed the trunk of my family tree and used its timber in the fireplaces of their own homes?”
2010.
Grampy and I sit together watching his favorite: baseball. In the infertile glow of the television I see his face wet. Grampy sits in his wheelchair, mouth open, teeth gasping out of his gums like violent and valiant tombstones in a cemetery left to rot. The teeth sit and I can still read them. William Chotles, killed at Auschwitz. Sara Lee killed at Dachau. Bill Kayne killed off the coast of Okinawa. “I will never forget what happened to our family, Grampy,” and he looks at me with the surprised innocence of a child struck for the first time. “Forgetting is the only gift I wish to give you. I have given away my eldest son trying to bury a hatred I can no longer burden. There are nights I am kept awake by the birthday songs of children I never let live. A plague on both your houses. They have made worm’s meat of me.”

Do not forget that all the writing you do, all the writing you read, all the responses you hear in conference and in workshop are part of your preparation.

~Donald Murray

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A handful of my favorite spoken-word poems you can find on youtube:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Knock Knock” by Daniel Beaty</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Teeth” by Phillip Kaye</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Pretty” by Katie Makkai</td>
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<tr>
<td>“An Origin Story” by Phil Kaye &amp; Sarah Kay</td>
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<td>MSA 2009 Taylor Phillips</td>
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<td>“Thinking of You” by Mike Taylor</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Shake the Dust” by Anis Mojgani</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Repetition” by Phil Kaye</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Crab Apple Pirates” by Andrea Gibson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“To This Day: for the Bullied…” by Shane Koyzcan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Beethoven” by Shane Koyzcan</td>
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Our students are terrified of failure when they need to know how to make use of it. They have been taught, by teachers and parents, the press, and their own instinct, that everything must be done perfectly the first time. They are inhibited, constipated, frightened—in no condition to produce good writing. Writing that is written to avoid failure guarantees mediocrity.

~Donald Murray
Harper's Index

Help students write from information. Not only does this require deeper reading in order to analyze what exactly is being said, but transferring that understanding into sentences that can support a claim is a foundational skill for writing well in argument. Helping students write from factual information is challenging, so I first model how I might write from one of the examples. I show them how I break down the information to understand what the statement is saying and then transfer it into words to support a claim. I then have them talk and write together in pairs before attempting to do this on their own.

Number of people killed in mass shootings in the United States last year: 66

Number killed by Muslim-American terrorists since September 11, 2001: 33

Percentage of movies that led the U.S. box office for at least one weekend in 2011 that featured Apple products: 42

Portion of all North American Internet traffic accounted for by videos streamed from Netflix: 1/4

Percentage of U.S. population that is foreign-born: 13

Percentage that was foreign-born in 1913: 15

Factor by which energy drink-related emergency room visits have increased in the past eight years: 14

Number of reports of record-high temperatures by U.S. cities in 2012: 362

Number of reports of record lows: 0

Percentage change since 1969 in the portion of U.S. schoolchildren who walk or bike to school: -76

Percentage change since 1992 in the portion of U.S. women who diet: -12

Percentage of U.S. women who believe they have a personal responsibility to help the worse off: 42

Of U.S. men: 27
Average salary subjects in a September study offered a fictional woman applying for a U.S. university laboratory position: **$26,508**

Average salary they offered a fictional man with identical credentials: **$30,328**

Percentage of U.S. children who save their allowance money, according to a survey of American parents: **1**

Percentage change in the likelihood a child will eat an apple from the school cafeteria if the apple has an Elmo sticker on it: **+68**

Projected year by which more than half of Americans will be obese: **2030**

Average number of times each week U.S. surgeons operate on the wrong patient or body part: **40**

Average SAT score (out of 2400) of students from households with an income below $20,000: **1322**

From households with an income above $200,000: **1722**

Percentage of British teens who say they are embarrassed to be seen reading: **17**

Percentage change in the past twenty-five years in the Consumer Price Index: **+41**

In the price of beer: **+40**

Of books: **-1**

Number of students currently attending the thirteen Washington, D.C., public schools expected to close this year: **2,633**

Number of them who are white: **2**

Percentage of U.S. college graduates who are women: **51.1**

Of Fortune 500 CEOs who are: **4.2**

Percentage change since 1970 in the portion of U.S. children growing up in single-parent households: **+133**

*The source of this information is harpers.org, which publishes the index every month.*
NOTEBOOKS
Penny Kittle

Passage Study... helping students imitate great writing to understand conventions better and to generate ideas for other writing

The important thing about my family being Baha’i was that growing up I was exposed to lots of big ideas about philosophy, art, spirituality, and the human condition. Don’t get me wrong. My parents were dysfunctional misfits who couldn’t effectively parent a sack of russet potatoes. But they were good hearted dysfunctional misfits with eclectic and expansive ideas. (Wilson, x)

The important thing about my family being in crisis in neighborhood of perceived perfection is that I was taught to lie to cover up my father’s absences from work, the bounced checks at grocery stores, or the new scrapes and dents in our cars. Don’t get me wrong. My parents were funny and lively and serious and playful, creative and thoughtful and truly generous people who were always extending themselves to help others. But in the first 12 years of my life when alcoholism had a hold of my father, we spun like a wobbly top keening from one side to another, unable to right ourselves for long. Lying was not only expected, it was practiced, perfected, and used regularly to minimize immediate consequences, and that is volatile skill to teach a pre-teen.
~Penny Kittle

More than once did Elizabeth in her ramble within the Park, unexpectedly meet Mr. Darcy.—She felt all the perverseness of the mischance that should bring him where no one else was brought; and to prevent its every happening again, took care to inform him at first, that it was a favorite haunt of hers.—How it could occur a second time therefore was very odd!—Yet it did, and even a third. ~Jane Austen

More than once did Penny in her first reading conferences with students, unexpectedly discover a history of non-reading—and she felt all the perverseness of the misfortune that should bring a student through three years of high school without reading a wit; and to prevent it from recurring, took care to inform him of the wealth of books that might be just right and worthy of his effort.—How it would occur moments later in another conference was therefore very sad!—Yet it did, and even a third. ~Penny Kittle

Depending on when you met me, I might have been: a checkers champion, the kid who squirted Super Glue in his eye, a competitive Ping-Pong player, Tweedle Dum, a high school valedictorian, a fake blond, 1/12 of an all-male a capella group, a graduate of the Vanderbilt School of Engineering, a nomad, a street musician, or a pigeon assassin.
~Devon Gundry
Depending on when you met me I might have been: a curler, a kid who set a boy’s pants on fire, a competitive tennis player, Big Bird, a soda jerk, the second-shortest in my class, 1/5 of the varsity football cheerleaders at Franklin High School, a graduate of cooking school (twice), Lady Macbeth, a dedicated, early a.m. runner, or a clown at children’s birthday parties. ~Penny Kittle

My family members could not be more different from one another. The mix includes one rocket scientist brother; one fashionista sister; one honey-harvesting, lover-of-all-creatures-big-and-small mother; and one classic music enthusiast father. And then there’s me—a camera junkie and jetsetter with a penchant for tasty type treatments (and alliteration). ~Golriz Lucina

And from non-fiction...

Early mornings are a wondrous time on the backside of the racetrack. The shed rows are alive with pre-dawn activity, the stalls getting mucked out, the hay racks restocked, the feed tubs refilled. Floodlights partially sweep aside the darkness. Mist hangs in the heavy air. Seabirds swoop past in low arcs. ~Barry Bearak, “The Jockey”, New York Times

Early afternoons boil with energy on the backside of a school day. The classrooms empty of teenagers, the locker doors slam, the voices and shouts bounce toward the exit, cars fill then stack onto Eagles Way, nudging slowly toward the traffic light. Athletes sweep aside the silence of the practice fields. Drummers spinning sticks with fast hands gather and march through the now-empty parking lot. Teachers clear white boards, shelve books, gather papers, and begin reading, marking, learning. ~Penny Kittle
Why Sentence Study?
Penny Kittle

While she poured, chair legs scraped the floorboards, ice cubes cracked between molars, and silverware clattered against plates.

~Adelle Waldman

This sentence can be used to teach several important things at once when students are invited first, to study the sentence and list things they notice about the way it works, and two, imitate the sentence with their own.

- The use of sound as a sensory detail that engages readers.
- The use of parallel structure to expand an image and create a pleasing rhythm at the same time.
- The use of specific verbs to carry a sentence.
- Smart alliteration in a sentence (‘cubes cracked’)
- Consonance (poured, boards, molars; clattered, plates) is pleasing to the ear—feels as if a writer is paying attention to words as he writes.

I model what I mean by “noticing” just like I do when we study mentor texts. I also use student annotations to teach approximations… how observations, even when you don’t know the name of the tool are important.

I also model imitation, creating a sentence like the one above with my own experiences. When students imitate a pattern, of course, they learn its elements deeply. I create an imitation sentence live in front of them, struggling to find words or images for the sentence as they watch. (When I create my example sentence before the lesson, my students miss out on all of the teaching my model can show them—how to think as you craft sentences.)

What do you notice about this mentor sentence from a non-fiction feature article? (List with a partner.)

Try an imitation of one that follows the pattern of the sentence.

Early mornings are a wondrous time on the backside of the racetrack. The shed rows are alive with pre-dawn activity, the stalls getting mucked out, the hay racks restocked, the feed tubs refilled. Floodlights partially sweep aside the darkness. Mist hangs in the heavy air. Seabirds swoop past in low arcs.

Tinkering/Revising for Fearless Writing

- Penny Kittle, Kennett High School, Conway School District, NH
- Tom Romano, Dept of Teacher Education, Miami University, Oxford, OH
- Judy Rowe Michaels, Poet-in-the-Schools for the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation Teacher Emerita, Princeton Day School
- Maja Wilson, Teacher, Writer, Consultant (Looking for a job -- know of any good ones?)

Strategies to bring "second genius" to your words*

- **Create Mind Pictures.** Leave your writing for half-an-hour, a day or three, a week. Reread as a stranger and interact with your words. Be open to new images that appear; choose language to capture and refine what you imagine. Look for narrative summary that would benefit from the immediacy of being recast as dramatic narrative (characters in action, scenes exploded, slowed down).

- **Add Sensory Detail.** Find places where the addition of sensory detail will help readers experience your words (In writing about a favorite place in her childhood, one student wrote, "Big Mouth Spring bubbled up, and you’d put your face down there and suck. It was like a liquid crystal ball, cold on your lips . . . .")

- **Improve Sound and Rhythm.** Do the sound and rhythm of your words create music? Reread in a deliberate, appropriately paced voice, giving each word its due. Listen to the language. Enhance rhythm and sound by deleting, adding, or changing words, altering sentence lengths, repunctuating. (Listen also for a "clang" and recast to eliminate it: "When I came back home, my back began to hurt.")

- **Add Precise Words and Interesting Language.** Are your words living and leaping? (Did the homeless man go away or disappear or vanish?) Are the words vivid, specific, palpable? (Did the teacher drive a car or a Mini Cooper?)

- **Vary Sentence Length.** Does one sentence length dominate and become monotonous? Do some sentences need combined? Do long sentences need broken into shorter sentences for clarity and comprehension? Can you use a short sentence for emphasis? Remember Melville’s first line of Moby Dick? “Call me Ishmael.”

- **Placement and Payoff.** Words, information, and ideas gain or lose impact by where and when they appear in a sentence, a paragraph, a piece of writing. Beginnings are powerful spots for placing information. Endings are even more powerful. Anne Lamott wrote, “. . . she transferred me to a two-thousand-year-old monk. Or at least this is how he sounded, faint, reedy, out of breath, like Noah after a brisk walk.”

- **Weed the Garden.** Unnecessary words or longwinded passages can sneak into your writing without you even realizing it, sapping the energy from what is good. Do you need all the words in, “Bob swaggered arrogantly”? (Not all adverbs are bad; they can be useful; but be wary when they volunteer).

- **Pump Up the Verbs.** Have you used “verbs of muscle” as Mary Oliver called them? (Did the teen go into the room? Or did she walk or limp or shuffle or dash or stride?) In her poem, “John Chapman,” Oliver did not write in an emotional moment for her character, “. . . his gray eyes turned into ice.” She wrote, “. . . his gray eyes brittled into ice”).
In a multigenre paper about a summer job she held as a waitress at a country club, college junior Leah Wessman had written this sentence:

“Hey, Leah,” Celeste follows me hurriedly into the kitchen. “Gaggini requested you.”

Leah tinkers with the language, finds a stronger verb, and eliminates an adverb. Amid her tinkering and language work, she also creates additional visual detail:

“Hey, Leah.” Celeste scurries behind me as I plow through the swinging kitchen doors.
“Gaggini requested you.”

*Kim Stafford coined the "second genius" in The Muses Among Us*

1. **Change the Lead/Write Numerous Leads.** Does your first sentence/paragraph/page/chapter draw readers into the writing? Would the writing work better by beginning with a paradoxical statement, bit of dialog, critical description, or compelling scene? Below are leads Tom wrote in his notebook with his students as they began their “Literature Relationship Papers.”

   When we write leads with reckless abandon, trusting the gush of language within us, we not only write ourselves into a beginning, but also generate information we can use in other parts of the essay/story/poem. Tom wrote about his relationship over the years with a Robert Frost poem. The leads include the irrelevancies, redundancies, misinformation, blathering, errors, and raw thinking of five-minute quickwrites:

   **Lead #1: Begin telling about the piece of literature (include some of your research here):**
   Robert Frost wrote “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” in June 1922 while he was living in VT, the really getting warm days in that part of NE, the children just getting out of school. It was published the following year in his volume of poems titled New Hampshire. Frost told the story that he had been up all night working on a difficult poem, titled “New Hampshire.” It wasn’t finished, but at dawn he walked outside to see the sunrise, thought of a snowy evening, the little horse—and it was as if he had a hallucination. He went inside the house, he says, and wrote out the poem “in just a few minutes without strain.

   He says.
   I’m not Frost, but gosh its humbling.

   **Lead #2: Describe the circumstances of your life at the time of your initial reading.**
   First year of teaching at Marion L. Steele HS in Amherst, Ohio. I was bran new, afraid of being revealed a fraud for not knowing enough about literature, about reading, about teaching. And I “taught” (loosely using the word in the way my professors had taught me. I assigned the literature for out of class reading. Then when students came to class, I stood in front of them at a podium, lecturing about the literature, in this case a Robert Frost poem, with the infamous help of the “teacher’s manual,” which explained the meaning of the poem. I noticed nothing amiss. That was, after all, how I had been taught (I use the word loosely).

   **Lead #3: Use dialog with no conversation tags or explanations**
   Why are you looking at me like that? / Do you remember what you did? / Did I say a poem? / Yes. Don’t you remember? / I remember something. I remember thinking, “This seems weird but I’m not stopping. / That’s what the poem was: Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening. / I know that poem by heart. / You didn’t miss a beat. Here, eat a cracker and drink the juice. / Did the nurse’s think it was weird? / No. / What did they do? / They went about their business, Tom. They have work to do, you know?

   **Lead #4: Write a lead that states a paradox/makes a blunt statement**
   Frost’s poem about death has given me many lives: teaching lives, philosophical lives, writing lives. Frost’s quintessential poem of winter in New England with a rural setting and snow falling steadily amid the trees was written by Frost a few minutes after he had stood on his porch in _____ VT, and
watched the sun rise on June 22, 1922. I labor over all my writing. I can’t even resist sometimes tinkering with a text message. I can’t seem to get anything written right the first time through. And one of the poems I admire most was written, said RF, in just a few minutes, his “best” bid, he wrote the poet Louis Untermeyer, “for remembrance.”

**Lead #5: Describe a place that is somehow important to you and the literature**

The graveyard is beside and behind the large white clapboard church in Old Bennington, VT. Somehow I knew he was buried there and went looking for the gravesite. It took me awhile before I found it: two large slabs, each maybe 2 ½ feet by 6 feet, lying flat on the grass more than 50 years now with the names of several family members carved into it. RF, his wife, and one of his daughters. And someone—the church perhaps, or the town planning commission, maybe literati of some kind, planted two birch trees by the slabs; they still slim and shooting into the air maybe 15 or 20 feet.

**Lead #6: Render a significant scene, an indelible moment**

One of the most vivid memories I’ve spent in the classroom in my 39 years occurred in my second year of teaching, 1973 or 1974, I taught a class of Honors sophomores and I loved working with them dearly, since I hadn’t yet learned to work with unmotivated students. I prepared for the Honors sophs, made sure I knew my subject matter inside out. When we approached Robert Frost’s “Stopping . . .” I had something up my sleeve. With the lit anthology open on a podium in front of the classroom, I glanced at it then began saying Frost’s words, “Whose woods these are I think I know.” I left the podium and walked about the front of the classroom . . .

*[For the lead to this creative nonfiction essay, “The Lives of a Poem,” Tom built upon Lead #3. In Lead 4 he stumbled upon language that suggested his title. Information and lines of reflection from the other leads worked their way into the essay, too]*
Eleven Elements of Effective Adolescent Writing Instruction

Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools, a report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2007.

This report identifies 11 elements of current writing instruction found to be effective for helping adolescent students learn to write well and to use writing as a tool for learning. It is important to note that all of the elements are supported by rigorous research, but that even when used together, they do not constitute a full writing curriculum.

1. **Writing Strategies**, which involves teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions

2. **Summarization**, which involves explicitly and systematically teaching students how to summarize texts

3. **Collaborative Writing**, which uses instructional arrangements in which adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions

4. **Specific Product Goals**, which assigns students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete

5. **Word Processing**, which uses computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing assignments

6. **Sentence Combining**, which involves teaching students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences

7. **Prewriting**, which engages students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition

8. **Inquiry Activities**, which engages students in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task

9. **Process Writing Approach**, which interweaves a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing

10. **Study of Models**, which provides students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing

11. **Writing for Content Learning**, which uses writing as a tool for learning content material.
How do we lead students to own the qualities of strong argument writing?

- **Study forms** that will lead to success for all students (letter, list essay, editorial, blog, podcast, digital commentary, documentary)
- **Students who choose** their passions write better
- **Define the audience** who will read their work
- **“Several laps around the track”** allow students to practice their skills, then repeat what they’ve learned and improve, then begin to move beyond form to larger understandings of the qualities of argument (repetition = retention.) During one unit of study in argument, students might create 3-4 texts that represent different forms, but the similar understandings about the qualities of argument
- **Frequently study texts** and notice qualities, list, & evaluate during the unit, adding to class understandings & the practice of analytical reading
- **Create anchor charts** of understandings for your classroom that remain in place throughout the unit—anyone should be able to walk into your classroom and know what you’re studying and how today connects to yesterday & tomorrow
- **Frame the year of study** for students, showing how qualities of writing and skills and forms are related to each other & how students will gather skills and larger understandings

Quick Writes:

- Use poetry that presents a position or argues a point—short texts, big messages—because poetry reinforces the idea that there are many forms of writing that argue = a bigger picture of the genre and the way all writing is connected
- Use charts, tables, and graphs to practice writing from information that supports ideas with evidence, not just emotion
- Use controversial, local issues to help students connect to the thinking they are already doing & focus on how to support their thinking with reason
- Quickly write in imitation of a mentor text form (like “6 Things You Should Know About” from ESPN magazine); day two take one element of the quick write and expand it
- Quick writing is effective for partners; collaborative writing is a powerful teaching tool
- Revise quick writing “make it better” as daily practice in rereading & attention to craft

Revision focus:

- Reread your writing and find: your best phrases, lines; the line that is the heart of what you’re trying to say; a place where you can make it better writing; a place where you can add information to strengthen the idea; a place where you have more to say; then write just from that place...
- Practice introducing support for your idea through another source you quote. Pay attention to the duet of voices: source and writer
Sentence Study (can be chosen from mentor texts in unit):
• This work is ideal for partners—collaborative writing is one of 11 best strategies for teaching adolescents writing skills (Writing Next)
• Practice skills like quotations of sources
• Mentor students to samples from texts you study together during this unit: zoom in on one sentence & practice together
  o Example: sentences that group information
    ▪ “Dash and description” (zooms in on details that show (a narrative skill that is often used in argument); the dash creates emphasis)
    ▪ I stared at my father’s photograph—his thin face stern, lips latched tight, his eyes peering permanently to the right. “Paul Fleischman, Seedfolks.
    ▪ I walked to the run-down market—dirty white walls, roof sinking in, the door constantly swinging against the wall, and wondered why this was the only place to buy milk within a mile of the school.
• Strong opening and closing lines—collect, practice, share
• Study frames for essays (images, ideas, questions)
• Transition phrases and sentences

Mentor Texts:
• It makes a difference when a student (or the entire class) chooses a text as a mentor—makes the deliberate decision to mentor their writing to the model
• Choose anchor texts for whole class to read closely together that are good models of the argument you want students to write
• Mix published author texts with grade level strong student texts
• Your process in writing an argument including your rough draft (even unfinished) can be an anchor text for the class to study, best if created recently
• Consider the study one author’s work through several texts = Mentor Author
• Teach students how to annotate what they see in a text by showing them how you annotate the craft of a mentor text
• Read, analyze (study), write and share together—your model is critical at every stage of the process

Goals for collaborative writing or independent practice:
• When in the unit will students be ready for independent/collaborative work time?
• How many days per week/minutes per day for this writing time?
• What are your exit tickets or other expectations for productivity?
• Structure and manage individual & small group conferences so you can teach into the intentions of individual students—your most powerful teaching opportunity
• Define your expectations for peer work, lead students in this work

Assessment opportunities:
• Quick writes/notebook grades = good faith effort to write & revise
  o Evidence of revision, sentence imitations, write the entire time to build stamina
• Annotations on a mentor text can highlight particular understandings
• Collaborative work on sentence imitation, revision, or annotation of texts
• Exit slips at the end of class to clarify learning: one sentence to show...
Deepening Understanding of Content & Increasing Independence in Writing

**Goal:** Develop writing that is informative and persuasive, complete, supported with evidence, clear, smart, and balanced. It advances the conversation within the discipline and demonstrates facility with its conventions... confidence in writing is demonstrated in word choice, tone, and clarity in multiple genres (from feature articles to essays and arguments).

**In writing process this means:** how a student develops an idea, understands what information is needed to support it, then organizes, analyzes and refines writing in response to the needs or questions of a real or imagined audience with limited teacher direction.
The Art of Writing Story:
increasing skills & learning to trust the writing process of discipline & struggle

**Process**

**Volume:** words in, words out (You have to read a lot to write well. There is no substitute. Also, the more you write, the better you write.)

**What writers need:** time (use it wisely), choice, response (learning to set direction in a conference, collaboration, self-reflection)

**Conditions of a writing workshop:** independence & deadlines, resources, and respect for our writing community

How writers find ideas: Daily notebook writing beside beautiful words + rereading our writing to listen to it & finely tune it for clarity and voice.

**Study models of writing:** read like a writer; study author’s craft moves; emulate the moves of other writers; write (& punctuate) with intention

**Study models of process:** class feedback conferences, multiple drafts, writing groups, analyzing your process over time

**Imagine readers:** analyze your audience; revise structure, tone, & craft to engage readers; read your work aloud to others, listen to response

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**Skills**

- effective voice(s), point of view/multiple narrators
- sensory details which add clarity & precision
- skillful, fluid dialogue /what is & isn’t said
- show and tell/when to show, when to tell
- scenes work together within a logical, coherent structure
- sentence structure is fluid, rhythmic
- smooth transitions between scenes
- controlling time in a story: zoom in/zoom past

- read like a writer
- text study & annotation of pace
- story + ‘so what?’ resolution in conclusion
- subtlety & clarity with language
- rereading your work like a reader, anticipate Qs & respond
- use of flashbacks in a smooth progression of events
- character development like a reader, anticipate Qs & respond
- developing theme: interpretation & elaboration of big ideas

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**Products**

- scenes/narrative: fiction or memoir
- Q1: reading ladder
- storyboard ideas
- extended, annotated narrative + digital story
- Q2: reading ladder
- FX: portfolio/class book
- storytelling
The Art of Writing Research:
increasing skills & learning to trust the writing process of discipline & struggle

**Process**

*Volume:* words in, words out (You have to read a lot to know enough about your topic to write well. There is no substitute.)

*What writers need:* time (use it wisely), choice, response (learning to set direction in a conference, collaboration, self-reflection)

*Conditions of a writing workshop:* independence & deadlines, resources, and respect for our writing community

How writers find & develop ideas: *Daily notebook writing* beside *information crafted skillfully* + *rereading our writing* to *listen & finely tune it for clarity.*

*Study models of writing:* read like a writer; study author’s craft moves; emulate the moves of other writers; write (& punctuate) with intention

*Study models of process:* how/where to find info, class feedback conferences, multiple drafts, writing groups, analyzing your process over time

*Imagine readers:* analyze your audience; revise structure, tone, & craft to engage readers; read your work aloud to others, listen to response

**Skills**

- precise writing from charts/tables/graphs/primary sources
- read like a writer: text study & annotation of organization
- skillful introduction of topic (blending genre: story, information)
- find well-chosen, relevant and sufficient facts & details
- use of formal style & objective tone
- sentence structure is fluid & rhythmic
- smooth transitions to clarify relationships among complex ideas
- concluding statement or action motivates/inspires readers

- skillful, fluid blending of well-chosen quotations or facts w/researcher’s voice
- organizes complex ideas & concepts
- reread your work like a reader, anticipating Qs & responses of readers
- develops sub-topics with clear relationship to central idea
- use varied transitions to link sections of the text, clarify relationships
- anticipate audience’s lack of knowledge & provide appropriate info/examples
- use precise language & topic-specific vocabulary
- annotated bibliography to demonstrate credibility of research

**Products**

- evidence writing
- feature article:
  - from timeline/events
  - multimedia
- Q1: reading ladder
  - portfolio reflection
- extended research of 10-20 pages
- Q2: reading ladder
  - revision unit of study
  - digital information/advertisement

Penny Kittle
The Art of Writing Argument: 
increasing skills & learning to trust the writing process of discipline & struggle

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Penny Kittle