The Read Like a Writer Strategy

A mentor text is any piece of writing, partial or complete, that can be used to teach a writer about some aspect of the craft of writing. A mentor text can be a picture book, a line, a passage, a chapter from a novel, a feature magazine article, a news article, an op-ed/editorial, a recipe, a brochure…anything that would serve as a model for what students might wish to write.

A question that is often used to connect how authors work to structure a text is: What are you reading that will help your writing?

Fortunately, the idea of mentor texts has really taken hold in the profession with regard to teaching writers. There are many resources available that help teachers to teach writing strategies through published texts so that students can emulate the writer's craft and begin to read texts as both a reader and a writer.

What does it mean to read like a writer? It means to read the text through the lens of the author, noticing all aspects of how the writer crafted the text. Use the following six traits of writing that are part of the Read like a Writer strategy to help your child learn from texts he or she is reading for the purpose of developing better writing skills.

Read Like Writers to Discover…

1. Ideas:
The decisions writers make about how they will communicate their ideas affect the way readers interpret their ideas. What you can observe about the author's intended message based on the way(s) the author chose to convey ideas? If fiction, how does the writer reveal the plot (the events that happen in the story)? If nonfiction, how does the writer reveal the information (chronologically, by key concepts, big ideas first followed by details, etc.)? If poetry, how does the author express key ideas and emotions through elements such as rhythm, imagery, metaphors, etc.? What kinds of decisions do you think the writer made in how to best convey his or her ideas and why? Could you also make these kinds of decisions as you write?

2. Organization:
How do you move through the text as a reader? What decisions did the writer make about how to put this text together? If fiction, what is the plot line? If poetry, what form was used? If nonfiction, how is information sequenced?

3. Voice:
Voice is what writers use to keep us reading. How does the writer keep you engaged and interested? Can you find the "voice" in this piece? Could you use some of the things this writer did to also write with voice?

4. Word Choice:
Word choice affects the meaning in text. Writers use literary devices such as simile, metaphors and onomatopoeia strategically. Writers use strong verbs to build drama into a piece. How does the writer use specific language? Can you find words that really worked for you? Can you imagine the decisions the writer made to make that happen? Of all the other words the writer could have used, why do you think the writer chose a specific word?

5. Sentence Fluency:
Sentence fluency is the fluidity or the rhythm of sentences that keep us reading. Sometimes writers will change up or determine sentence patterns to achieve this: long sentence - short sentence - long sentence, etc. What did this writer do to achieve this feeling as you read this text?

6. Conventions:
How does the writer use conventions (punctuation, text styles, placement of text on page, grammar) to make meaning for readers? Think of punctuation as road signs that tell us how to read this work. How does the writer do this? What decisions did the writer make?

Adapted from: http://readingandwritinginthemiddle.wordpress.com