

The *7 Elements* of a Differentiated Writing Lesson

The Seven Elements

Skill/Trait Focus
Mentor Text
Graphic Organizer
Student Choice
Teacher/Student Writing Models
Students Talk about Process
Real Revision

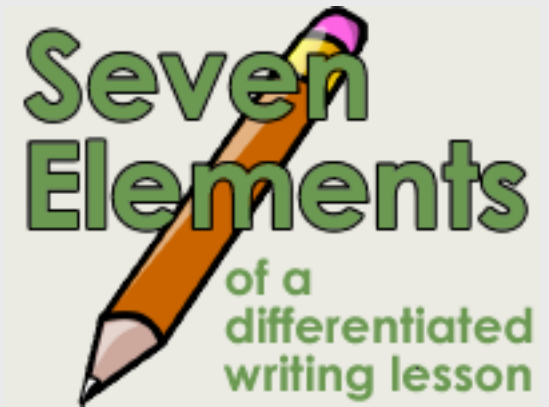


Mentor Texts:

One of the Seven Elements of a Differentiated Writing Lesson

This is a partial version of one of the seven PowerPoint lessons from my most popular two-day training and workshop. The entire workshop's materials can be purchased from our [Teachers Pay Teachers store](#) or from [this direct link](#). Thanks for looking.

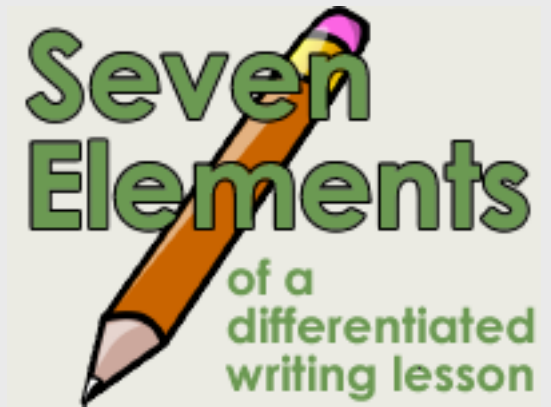
Essential Questions: What's the difference between an *idea* mentor text, a *structure* mentor text, and a *craft* mentor text? How can multiple mentor texts improve a writing lesson?



Mentor Text, a definition: a published piece of writing whose idea, whose structure, or whose written craft techniques can be discussed by student writers during a writing lesson for the purpose of inspiring them. I believe there are three types of these texts.

idea mentor texts	structure mentor texts	craft mentor texts
This mentor text's unique or interesting idea is used to inspire a fresh or unique idea from your student writers.	This mentor text provides a structure that student writers can "borrow" to write about their own unique ideas.	This mentor text contains well-crafted writing with techniques that can be discussed and imitated by student writers.

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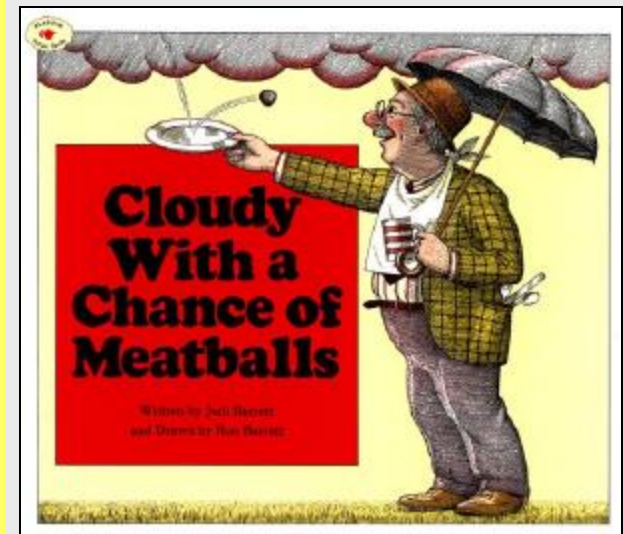
Here is my 1st example of an idea mentor text...

[Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs](#) is a fun story about the land of Chew-and-Swallow, where it rains different foods for breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day. This is a unique idea that can be used to inspire original ideas!

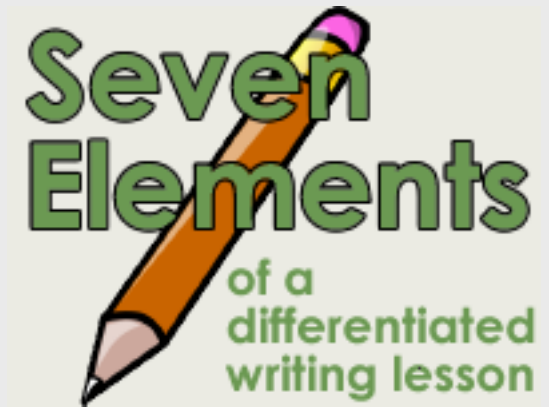
idea mentor texts

This mentor text's unique or interesting idea is used to inspire a fresh or unique idea from your student writers.

You might, for example, challenge your students to write about an original day in the land of Chew-and-Swallow, using foods that were not used in the original text. Or you might invent an original land where something *else* unusual rains from the sky.



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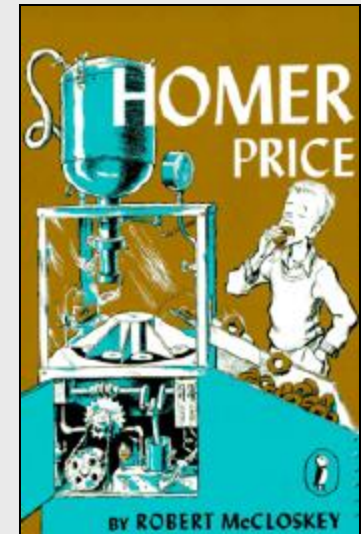
Here is my 2nd example of an idea mentor text...

**idea
mentor texts**

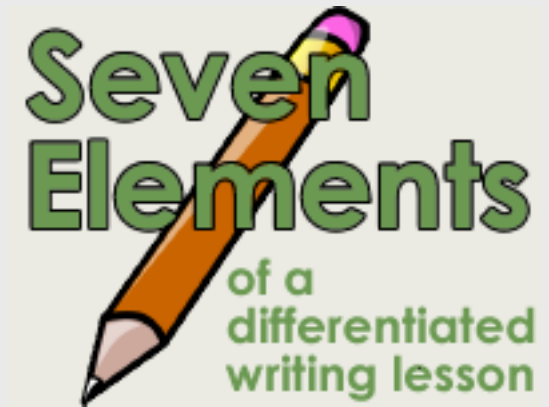
This mentor text's unique or interesting idea is used to inspire a fresh or unique idea from your student writers.

The most memorable chapter from [Homer Price](#) has to be the chapter about the automatic doughnut machine that goes a little haywire, making way too many doughnuts. An automatic food-making machine is a unique idea!

You could have your students create original written descriptions about automated machines that they wish they owned. You could even have kids draw and then "market" their original machines to each other!



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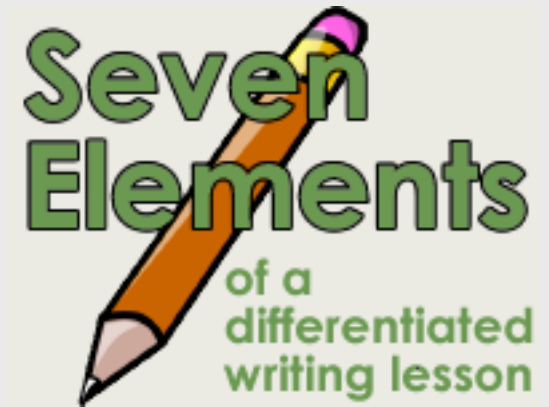
This mentor text's unique or interesting idea is used to inspire a fresh or unique idea from your student writers.

In chapter 3 of [Lord of the Flies](#), two characters describe the same exact same setting (the unexplored jungle); one sees the jungle as a dangerous place; the other describes the jungle as a beautiful and mysterious place. Unique!

Students could think of a setting—a real one or an imaginary one—and then think of two characters who would feel different about the place. They could write about the same setting from two different perspectives, showing how differently the two see things.



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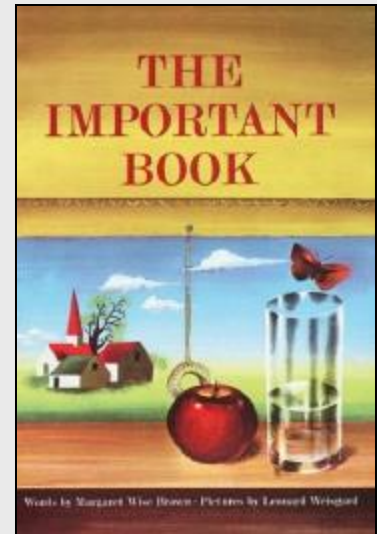
Here is my 1st example of a structure mentor text...

**structure
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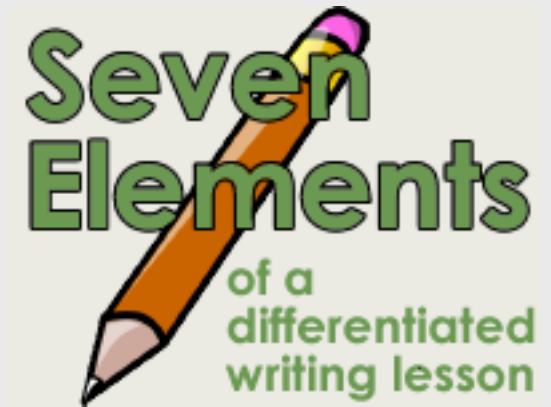
This mentor text provides a structure that student writers can “borrow” to write about their own unique ideas.

Margaret Wise Brown’s [The Important Book](#) is probably the most widely used “structure mentor text.” It provides a simple-to-follow pattern that is repeated on every page, each page exploring a different topic: wind, apples, etc.

Students can write “Important Book-inspired” passages about any topics of study—science, history, geography—or about more personal topics they have a connection to. The book’s very safe structure can be used to write about any topic. If you don’t know this book, ask a colleague.



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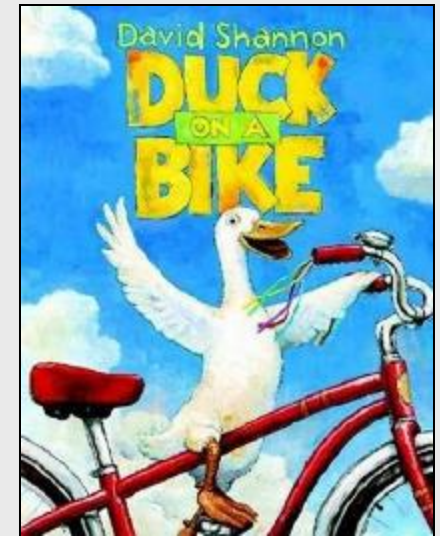
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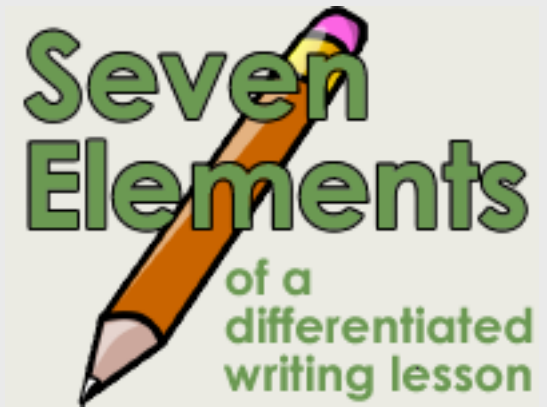
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Stories like [Duck on a Bike](#) utilize storytellers’ “series of three” pattern (remember Goldilocks?) In this story, a Duck rides a bike across the barnyard; 3 different animals each stop, observe, and make three different commentaries.

Students can use this story’s pattern to create an original story about pretty much anything: something unusual can happen, and three different animals or characters all have a moment to react to it. Add an introduction and a conclusion, and you have a complete story!



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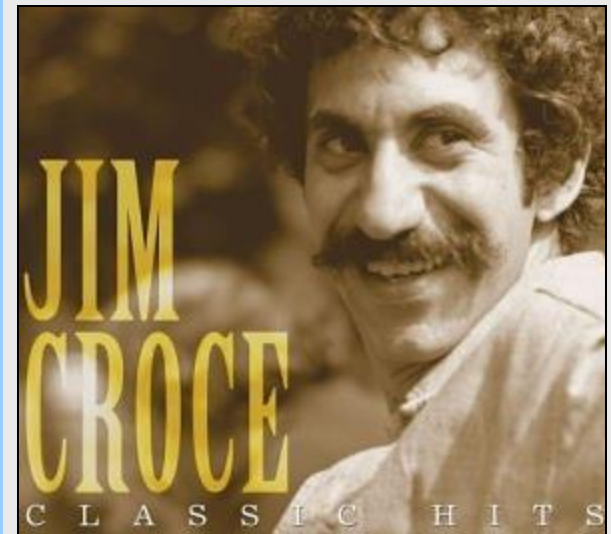
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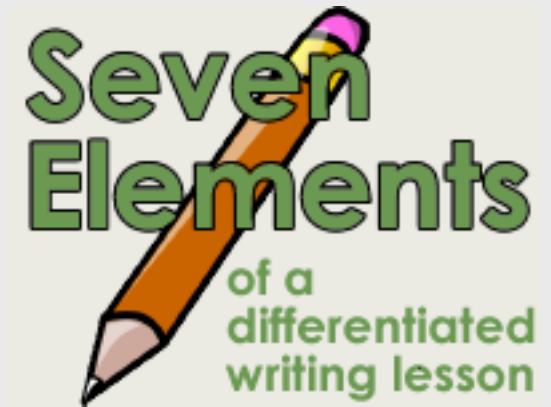
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Jim Croce’s song, “[I Gotta Name](#)” has three different stanzas. Each song stanza focuses on a different thing the singer carries around with him as he walks down the “road of life.” The three things are: a name, a song, and a dream.

Students can create original three-stanza poems about walking down “life’s road.” Each stanza of the poem can explore one important item the poet plans to carry with him/her as they “take on the world” when they become adults or independent.



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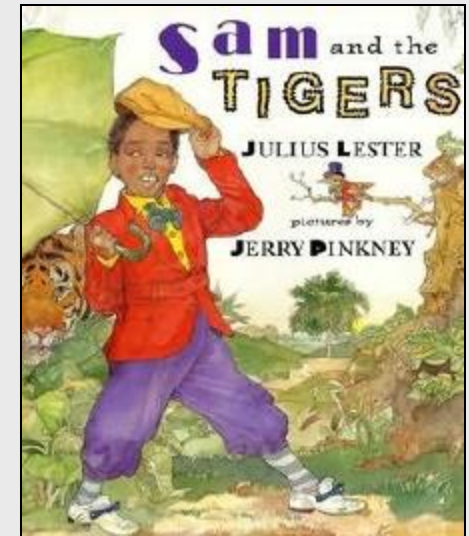
Here is my 1st example of a craft mentor text...

**craft
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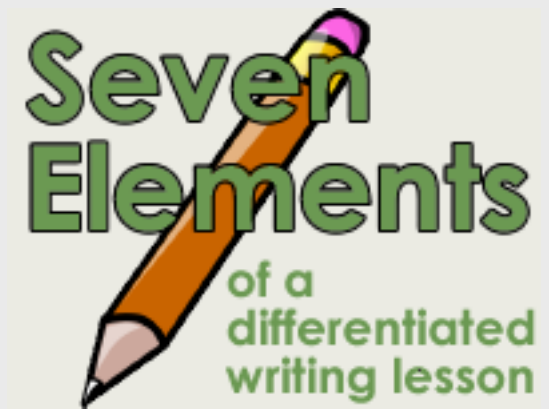
This mentor text contains well-crafted writing with techniques that can be discussed and imitated by student writers.

Julius Lester's [Sam and the Tigers](#) contains wonderful color similes, fresh and lively, not the forced similes our students sometimes write when we ask them to revise. Each piece of Sam's clothing is described with this type of simile.

Students can analyze and discuss what makes the similes in this book "fresh" and "not forced." They can then write something new (a color poem, perhaps) or revise a piece of writing, making sure to use fresh similes that Julius Lester would be proud to know he inspired from them.



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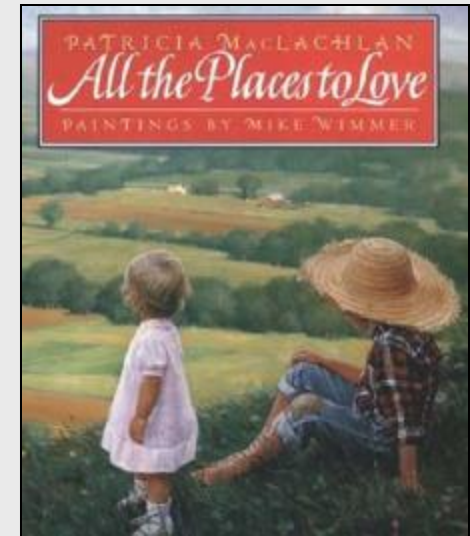
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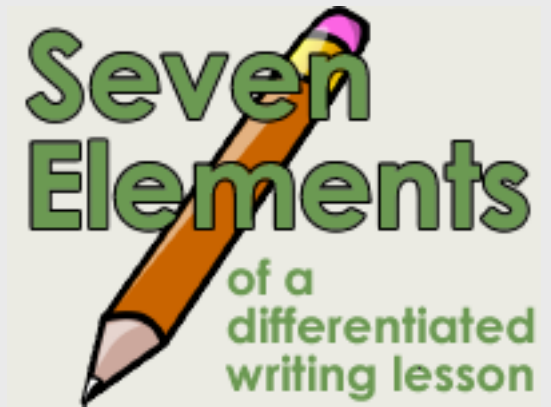
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Anything by Patricia MacLachlan is just amazingly well-crafted. In [All the Places to Love](#), one of the techniques used when describing her childhood home in the country is to begin her sentences with a variety of prepositions.

Students can analyze and discuss how beginning some sentences with prepositions (instead of using *I* and *the* all the time) can create a series of sentences that have more flow to them. Students can revise a setting description, changing just some of the sentences to begin this way.



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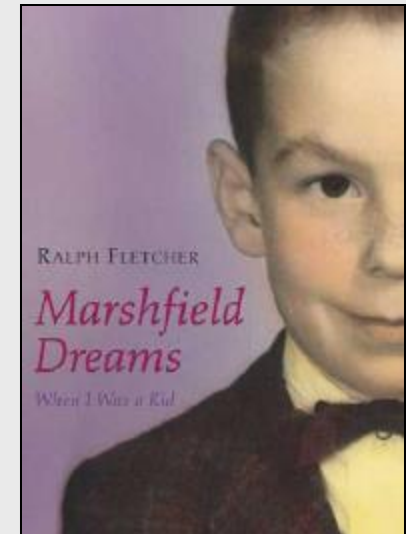
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Ralph Fletcher's [Marshfield Dreams](#) is his autobiography. One style technique Fletcher is so skilled with is his use of subtle alliteration. His descriptions very subtly place verbs and adjectives together so the sounds play off one another.

Students can analyze and discuss *any* of the short chapters from this book, looking for instances of subtle alliteration. They can then be prompted to look in their own writing for places where subtle alliteration would add to the writing, perhaps making it more fun to read aloud.



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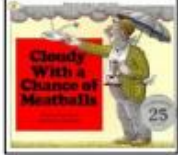
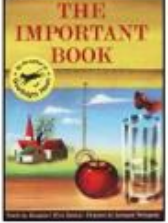


Have just a few minutes to explain mentor texts to your colleagues?

Here is the one page handout I last revised back in 2009 that I still receive the most requests to replicate.

Click [here](#) or on image to open the document as a PDF file.

“Mentor Text” Classification

What is a *mentor text*? A *mentor text* is a published book (or song lyric or magazine article or...?) whose **big idea** or whose **written craft** can easily inspire a student to write about a similar idea or to write with the same craft technique used by the author. The best mentor texts can be brought out over and over again throughout a school year. When students know they are going to be write like an actual author, their buy-in increases.

Idea Mentor Texts	Structure Mentor Texts	Craft Mentor Texts
<p>If you like a book’s idea and think students could create an original idea based on the one from the text, you are probably selecting an <i>idea mentor text</i>.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs</u> by Judi and Ron Barrett</p>  <p>In this book, food falls from the sky for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, so students can write about their own day, writing about unique foods not used in the original story.</p>	<p>If a published book presents a structure that can be easily impersonated with students’ original ideas, you are choosing a <i>structure mentor text</i>.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>The Important Book</u> by Margaret Wise Brown</p>  <p>Students create original “Important Book passages” about topics they’ve learned about in social studies, using the structure shared by Margaret Wise Brown on every page of this mentor text.</p>	<p>If the author’s writing style or his/her techniques with words, phrases, or sentences can inspire your students to write similarly, you are selecting a <i>craft mentor text</i>.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>All the Places to Love</u> by Patricia MacLachlan</p>  <p>Students study MacLachlan’s amazing use of prepositional phrases, then apply some of her techniques to a rough draft they have already created.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Daisy Comes Home</u> by Jan Brett</p>  <p>A thought: Most well-designed mentor text lessons borrow both ideas and structures from the books that inspire them. For example, in <u>Daisy Comes Home</u> by Jan Brett, a main character floats down a river past three animals, and the book very clearly gives equal amounts of details about each animal encounter as part of its structure, which is a structural example of good pacing. If you were to have students write about floating down a river past three different animals and to give equal details to each encounter, you are using this book as both an <i>idea</i> and <i>structure</i> mentor text.</p>	<p>A thought: A <i>craft</i> mentor text usually needs to be shared (or re-shared) after a rough draft has been written to prepare students for a revision tasks. Craft lessons have the most impact in between first and second draft.</p>	

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