



"I can shake off everything as I write; my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn."

--Anne Frank

Five Writing Mini-lessons using Self-Selected Books

Beautiful sentences. A study in craft. Show a few sentences from popular YA fiction that are beautiful in craft/structure. Talk about the craft in the sentences. Now, instruct students to turn to their own books and find at least one beautiful sentence. Tell them they should be prepared to explain what makes the sentence interesting. Give them the challenge of imitating the sentence in their own piece of writing.

Leads. Introduce the idea of starting a piece with a great introduction. Read them a few opening lines from some engaging YA novels or other books. Discuss: How are these lines an invitation to the reader? Instruct students to turn to the beginning of their books and read the first few lines. Ask students to write the opening lines of their books on sticky notes. In small groups, instruct students to categorize the leads: dialogue, description, startling statement, setting, other. Create an anchor chart with these categories and have students put the sticky in the appropriate place. Encourage students to choose one lead structure to begin their drafts.

Sentence boundaries & structure. Ask students: What is the purpose of punctuation? Help them understand that punctuation dictates meaning. Turn to a random page in the book you are reading. Tell students what you notice about the punctuation, the variety in sentence structures, etc. Explain why all of these things are intentional moves made by the writer -- all in an attempt to convey meaning. Next ask students to turn to a random page in their independent reading books. Ask: What do you notice about the sentences? How many are long? How many are short? What is the purpose of the punctuation? Anything interesting in terms of punctuation, e.g., dash, semicolon, colon? Discuss the effect of varying the sentences. Encourage students to revise their drafts to show a variety of sentence structures.

Combining sentences. Show a complex sentence pulled from a popular YA novel. Model how this is really three sentences -- take it apart, and write it on the board. Discuss what varying the sentence length in a piece of writing does for the rhythm of the language and the meaning. Ask students to turn to a page in their books and find a sentence that is really three shorter sentences. Have them deconstruct it. Encourage students to revise their drafts to show they have combined sentences to create more complex ones.

Figurative language. Show a passage from a popular YA book that has fresh figurative language. Ask students to help you identify how the writer creates that imagery. Maybe he used a metaphor or personification or descriptive verbs. Discuss why imagery impacts meaning. Next, ask students to turn to a page in their books and find figurative language. Ask: How does the writer create that imagery? How does the imagery add to the meaning of the passage? Revise your draft to show the same kind of fresh figurative language.



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