

Micro Mentor Texts

Using Short Passages from Great Books to Teach
Writer's Craft

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I write to hold my life in my hands
and to declare it a treasure.
~Lucy Calkins

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.

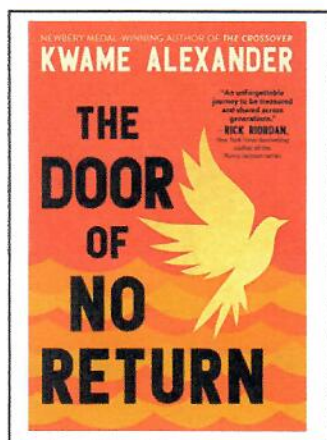
~ William Zinsser

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



The Door of No Return by Kwame Alexander

In his village in Upper Kwanta, 11-year-old Kofi loves his family, playing oware with his grandfather and swimming in the river Offin. He's warned though, to never go to the river at night. His brother tells him, "There are things about the water you do not know." "Like what?" Kofi asks. "The beasts," his brother answers.

One fateful night, the unthinkable happens and in a flash, Kofi's world turns upside down. Kofi soon ends up in a fight for his life and what happens next will send him on a harrowing journey across land and sea, and away from everything he loves. From Amazon books

WHERE I GO

each day
after school
is both hideout
and oasis.

It is where I am student
and king.

A place that holds me
and my destiny safely
in its deep-blue arms.

The river
 where I splash
 and splish
 and kick

into twilight

until the stars emerge
or Kwasi
comes growling
like a hippo.

Kwame Alexander, p. 21

*KOFI, OUT OF THE WATER, NOW!
IT IS ALMOST DARK!*

Sometimes
I pretend to not hear
him telling me
what to do
just because
he is older
and bigger,
but when it comes
to swimming,
I have to listen,
because all the elders
in my family
and mostly all
the old people
in our village
say that the river
is cursed
at nighttime.

HERE IN THE DARK

the trees grab for me
like thieves snatching
and I can see nothing
not the rocks underfoot
not the crushed toad
not the wind on my trail,
but I have to keep moving.

Here in the chilling dark
everything is louder
each trembling leaf
each whistling branch
the hard, hurried thump
inside my chest
even the rush and the clump
of my own feet
scares me.
I am alone
and I have to keep moving.

Here in the dark
I am blind to the unknown
running fast far away
from the shots
that grow frenzied
and furious.

Here in the dark
I am hoping
and praying
wishing
this is a dream.

But. . .

Kwame Alexander, pp.218-219

THIS

is not a dream.

This. Is. Not. A. Dream.

is not you running
from a leopard
or becoming one

is not a spider
being chased
by a crocodile
or a cousin
or a snake

is not you riding
a blue whale
into the night

is not you perched
on a branch

is not Ebo playing
a joke on you

is not your maame's voice
in the morning

is not the touch of Ama's hand
in yours
or a smile
or a kiss.

This is not you tripping
or sinking
like a ship.

This is you moving.
And then not.

This is you falling
up.

Kwame Alexander, pp. 220-222

WHAT I KNOW:

I know my school's shiny floors
a broken water fountain
and boxed chocolate milk
I buy for fifty cents.

I know Ms. Martinez
and her
happy handshakes
at her door
before each fourth grade
morning.

I know how to write
and draw picture poems
Ms. Martinez taught us
to paint our feelings.

I know to never forget
to scribble my name and date
at the bottom.

I know the recess on the blacktop
and the length of my golden
brown crane wings
in the desert sun.

I know my BFF, Amparo
climbs los columpios like wind.

I know aftercare until six p.m.
when Papi comes to get me
between
his two jobs
and carries me home
on his
strong shoulders
so high I find
flight.

~from *Land of the Cranes* by Aida
Salazar

WAITING

On Monday

Papi must be late. It's six p.m.
and aftercare closes at six fifteen.

The ticks on the clock
and honey-slow tocks

I try not to count.

I wonder if Papi's broken a wing
on the skyscrapers he helps build
with hammers and steel?

I wonder if Papi forgot

I am waiting and rushed
to the restaurant with too
many dishes to wash?

But that has never happened.

Ms. Cassandra, the teacher's aide,
bends the creases of her forehead
near her phone when Papi doesn't
answer so she calls Mami, who is the
nanny of toddler twins with bright red
cheeks who can't fly.

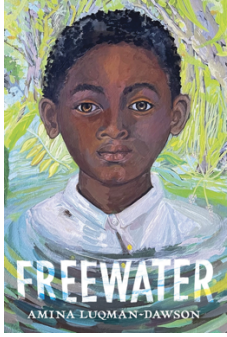
Ms. Cassandra gives me a tissue
to soak up my teariness because Mami
can't come for me right now either.

She can't leave those babies
until *their* parents get home.

Papi is coming, I whisper to myself.

I'll tuck my wings close and wait.

~Aida Salazar, *Land of the Cranes*



Prologue

SANZI HAD BROKEN YET ANOTHER RULE, BUT she didn't care. It was night, and she was alone and on the forbidden edge. To make matters worse, despite her mother's numerous warnings, Sanzi crossed right over, leaving behind the safety of her swamp island home. Just a peek, she thought. That's all she wanted, then she'd go back. Down the muddy hillside she slid to a single tall tree. She climbed it, hopping from one craggy branch to the next, higher and higher.

On the highest branch, moonlight hit Sanzi and made her nutmeg skin shine silver. From her perch she looked out. A sea of swamp mud, muck, and tangle lay before her. To her disappointment, fog rolled in from the east, covering her view like a white feather blanket.

She strained to see beyond the muck and fog to the plantation lands. She was a free child of the swamp and those lands were a mystery to her. It was a miracle her parents and the others had run from there and found this piece of elevated swamp land, small and dry. Their own secret island in an ocean of mud.

Tales had spread among the swamp island children like herself about what lay in plantation lands: two-headed men, turtles without shells, and skeletons that rose from the dead. Although she was twelve and almost grown, at least in her mind, Sanzi still wasn't sure how much of it was true, but she did believe that dangers lay out there.

As Sanzi contemplated that danger, she took a walnut-shaped stone from her sack, placed it in the well of her sling, and spun it overhead. The whirl of the leather sling whispered in the air like children sipping hot soup. Sssip, sssssip, ssssip. She aimed toward the plantation lands. With a dream of adventure and a flick of her wrist, she released the sling and watched the stone soar high in the air, catch the moonlight, and disappear into the cauldron of fog below.

~Amina Luqman-Dawson, *Freewater*, winner of the 2023 Newbery Medal

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~Amina Luqman-Dawson, *Freewater*, winner of the 2023 Newbery Medal

Homer

“HE SCARED OFF STOKES,” BREATHED ADA. NO one scared Stokes—it was Stokes’s job to do the scaring. But the flying man was unconcerned about what he’d done. Instead, he came down from that tree, tied his long, locked hair in a knot, pulled a small ax from his pouch, and started cutting a path through the plants, heading deeper into the tangled thicket.

He turned back, seeing that we weren’t following him.

“How’d you learn to do that?” Ada called after him.

“Who are you?” I asked. “What are you doing in this here swamp?”

He shook his head and kept hacking away. Then he stopped and for the first time he stared right at me. A chill ran down my spine. He saw me.

“None of those are good questions,” he said. “Here are some questions: Can you spot bear tracks in mud? Do you know how to keep snakes off you at night? Do you know how to hunt?”

“He doesn’t know any of those things,” chimed in Ada.

“Hush up!” I said, knowing she was right.

“Well, you don’t,” insisted Ada.

“Then you best follow me,” said the man, and he went right back to his hacking.

Follow you where? Who knew where this man would take us? If Stokes had found us, as soon as Mama got away she could, too. Staying meant we’d be here when Mama came for us. This was all too much to explain to this snake-shooting, fire-starting man, and even harder to explain to Ada.

“We might as well go on,” said Ada, and off she went running behind him.

“Ada!” I called.

I saw the man’s head bobbing up and down in the bush, and right before he went out of sight, he said, “Suleman. My name is Suleman.”

~Amina Luqman-Dawson, *Freewater*, winner of the 2023 Newbery Medal

Nora

THAT SAME RAINY MORNING, NORA HAD GONE back to the quarters to peek at Rose through the cabin slats. Rose was deep in sleep with Petunia at her side. Not wanting to be heard, Nora backed away from the cabin and caught wind of bickering coming from Stokes's shed. Peering in she saw Rick and Ron, the two men responsible for Rose's pain.

"You carry the water jug!" said Rick.

"Why do I always have to carry the water jug? You carry it, and I'll pack the pocketknife," said Ron.

"You're the one who's gonna be complaining about thirst as soon as we step foot in that swamp," said Rick.

Back and forth they went as they prepared for their return to the swamp to catch Homer and Ada. They'd never chased runaways deep in the swamp, and Nora watched as they packed just about anything they could think of. Some matches, string, a blanket, a towel, a hat, a rifle. They'd probably need a long knife for cutting wood and other swamp things. They'd have to get a proper one from the toolshed. That would take some doing.

Nora went to the kitchen in search of something fitting for Rick and Ron's first runaway-hunting trip. After all, they'd hurt Rose. Mrs. Petunia didn't see and Anna didn't comment when Nora reached for two fist-sized cuts of raw meat awaiting the evening meal. She wrapped them each in an old sock and as Rick and Ron were commandeering a long knife, Nora stealthily placed a meat-filled sock in the bottom of each of their packs. Nora had her octopus ways.

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