

"Be a lamp, or a lifeboat, or a ladder. Help someone's soul heal. Walk out of your house like a shepherd." - Rumi

We have begun our biography unit at school by reading the book, "Who is Malala Yousafzai?" by Dinah Brown and Andrew Thomson. An insert in the book contains quotes by the ancient philosopher Rumi. As we read the quotes together, the students were especially interested in his statement to "Be a lamp, or a lifeboat, or a ladder." They eagerly discussed how each type of help looked different and when you might be one of these things to someone else.

As teachers, we have also been reflecting on how we are each of these things to our students. We are a lamp when we ignite their interest in a new topic or in a new way of accomplishing a task. Often we come along side a struggling student—whether academically, socially, or emotionally—as a lifeboat, offering support when the waves seem to be crashing around them. As we encourage our students to take risks, attempt new learning and do their best, we serve as a ladder. Our roles continually change as we all work with students to help them achieve their very best.

Revision—The Art of Making It Better

If you ask students what it means to revise their writing, you often hear: *Revision means to check your writing for capitals, punctuation and spelling. Revision means to make your writing neater. If you revise your writing, it means you type it.* While none of these actions are bad, they are also not revising. Revision is defined as *a change or a set of changes that corrects or improves something.* When writing is revised, it does not become only **neater**, but rather becomes **better**.

To begin our focus on **revising**, we first read the poem "Harvest Home" by Arthur Guiterman. (See a copy of the poem at the end of the newsletter.) Focusing in on word choice, we highlighted all the subjects in the poem in yellow, then returned to the text and highlighted the verbs in blue. Using context clues, we predicted the meaning of unknown words, such as foxglove, woodchucks, and gentians.

To practice revision skills, I wrote the line "The mouse runs" taken from part of the poem. After determining if it was indeed a complete sentence, we began to revise this simple sentence. First we changed the **verb** to make it more interesting.

The mouse **scampered**.

Next, we answered the question "**Where?**"

The mouse **scampered across the field**.

Revision . . .

The next addition was **Why**.

The mouse **scampered across the field** to find seeds for his breakfast.

When did this happen?

As the sun began to rise, the mouse **scampered across the field** to find seeds for his breakfast.

What words could we use to **describe** the mouse?

As the sun began to rise, the **tiny, brown** mouse **scampered across the field** to find seeds for his breakfast.

The students were off and writing, composing their own mouse sentences. Everyone was engaged in the revision process. After we have practiced revising sentences, we will be ready to transfer this skill to our own writing.

Book Nook



Echo by Pam Munoz Ryan

This favorite author has written a novel that older readers will love! This haunting story intertwines the tale of a prophecy, a promise, and a harmonica. Mystically woven together, readers will appreciate the way in which the author pieces together the story. While the plot requires the reader to pay close attention to fully grasp the story which covers a decade in time, the conclusion is well worth the wait. A 2016 Newberry Honor book, adults and children will enjoy this new novel. https://www.amazon.com/Echo-Pam-Munoz-Ryan/dp/0439874025/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1478390376&sr=8-1&keywords=echo+by+munoz

Are We There Yet? By Dan Satat

This picture book by Caldecott Medalist Dan Satat is the story of a boy and a very long car ride. Bored with the ride and wondering if they will ever reach their destination, the young passenger begins to let his imagination take over. Either as a read aloud or a spring board for "What if . . ." writing, young and old will enjoy this book! (It even turns upside down in the middle!) https://www.amazon.com/Are-There-Yet-Dan-Satat-ebook/dp/B014Q0VULW/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1478403845&sr=1-1&keywords=are+we+there+yet

Well, that didn't work!

We've all experienced it. We planned a lesson, gathered the materials, explained the learning engagement to the students, and looked out at a group of confused faces. Even after the students get busy, the results are far from what we were hoping. What has gone wrong?

Whether in our own classrooms or when working with teachers, we ask the following questions when planning instruction.

- 1) What do I want the students to learn? Whether the goal be writing a variety of topic sentences, independently editing a short answer, or explaining their mathematical thinking, what do I want students to be able to do?
- 2) Why do I want the students to learn this skill or concept? How does this skill fit into a pathway of learning and standards?
- 3) How do I want my students to demonstrate their learning? Will they discuss their thinking with a partner, write an answer independently, color code answers from the text?
- 4) What prerequisite skills do the students need to know to accomplish this task? This may be the most frequently skipped over component. In order to be successful, what skills must my students already possess? Am I asking them to attempt too many new things at once? When too many new skills are demanded at once, it becomes difficult for the teacher to determine where the students' understandings fell apart. This leads to confusion on the part of the student and frustration on the part of the teacher.
- 5) What supports can I put in place for students who are struggling? How can I help everyone be successful.
- 6) What additional activities can I provide for those students who have already mastered this skill and move more quickly than other students?

The October 2016 issue of Educational Leadership is titled *Powerful Lesson Planning*.

<http://www.educationalleadership-digital.com/educationalleadership>

Combining Lessons on Format and Content

With the vast amount of standards teachers are responsible for in class, it is essential we look for ways to combine as many subject areas as possible. It is also best practice. The use of poetry and picture books are a valuable way to teach both writing formats and content. The following resources can be used in teaching a space unit.

The Universe by Mary Britton Miller

Use this poem to teach comparisons. What is the author comparing in the poem? What is her feelings toward the universe?

Faces of the Moon by Bob Crelin

This picture book, with cutouts for the moon, visually displays the changing phases. The text is written in rhyme, helping students memorize the names of the phases. https://www.amazon.com/Faces-Moon-Bob-Crelin/dp/157091785X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1478459296&sr=8-1&keywords=faces+of+the+moon

Ladder to the Moon by X.J.Kennedy

This poem takes the reader on an imaginary trip to the moon. <http://gottabook.blogspot.com/2009/04/x-j-kennedy-ladder-to-moon.html>

Constellation Art Project

Check out this website for a constellation art project. <http://babbledabledo.com/>

The Universe

There is the moon, there is the sun,
Round which we circle every year,
And there are all the stars we see
On starry nights when skies are clear.
And all the countless stars that lie
Beyond the reach of human eye,
If every body on every tree,
All the birds and fireflies and bees
And all the flowers that bloom and die
Upon the earth were counted up
The number of the stars would be
Greater they say, than all of these.

Taken from the Random House Book of Poetry

We love to talk writing! Additional ideas and activities can be found in the *Write Now - Right Now Writing Program*.

To view grade level samples, locate additional newsletters and read blog posts, visit:

<http://www.writenow-rightnow.com>

The Write Now—Right Now Writing Program is now being used in 34 states and four provinces. How can we be of help to you in your classroom?

“Harvest Home”

By: Arthur Guiterman (1871—1943)

The maples flare among the spruces,

The bursting foxglove spills its juices,

The gentians lift their sapphire fringes

On roadways rich with golden tinges,

The waddling woodchucks fill their hampers,

The deer mouse runs, the chipmunk scampers,

The squirrels scurry, never stopping,

For all they hear is apples dropping

And walnuts plumping fast and faster;

The bee weighs down the purple aster-

Yes, give your honey, little hummer,

The woods are waving, “Farewell, Summer.”