

# Loving Mentor Texts

By Larissa Juliano

*“The books transported her into new worlds and introduced her to amazing people who lived exciting lives”*

*Matilda by Roald Dahl*



Reading aloud to children is one of the fundamental necessities of being a parent and a teacher. Childhood memories should be filled with going to the library, snuggling with a bedtime story and having a selection of books tucked under their bed. Transporting little ones to Corduroy's department store, or going on a field trip to the Land of Oz, exploring nooks and crannies of a sunken treasure ship, and a little seed's journey as he overcomes obstacles to become a gigantic sunflower are journeys that must be had. Watching my story-time readers not simply engaged but CAPTIVATED, enthralled, eyes pacing back and forth between the pictures, then glancing at me when I enunciate certain words or phrases – is what keeps me inspired to read, write, share, and read some more these creations by authors and illustrators we call books.

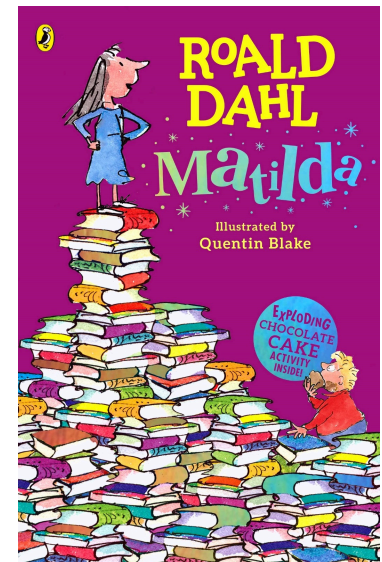
Along with reading for pure enjoyment (the best kind of reading of all), I often find myself reading books to my children's and students while thinking of the author's message (an all time favorite teaching theme) and how that particular book can be used as a MENTOR TEXT- or a text meant to inspire and guide children in the writing process. This is not meant to be a super analytical process, but rather a more organic unpeeling of layers in a story and what ideas we can derive from the author's craft to incorporate into our own writing. The other fun part is differentiating the writing craft conversations based on children's age.

Within my own experience, some key components in children's literature that immediately make me want to share a piece of literature with students are specific text features, and also overarching themes and ideas – depending on what you want to focus on with writing! For younger students, I really love texts that have a **clear structure** for students to emulate on their own lined canvas. Laura Numeroff and her beloved “If you give a ...” mouse series, Mike Thaler and the Black Lagoon hysterics are some classics that come to mind, but also any kind of fractured fairy

tale follows a fairly straightforward plot line and is always a riot to come up with unexpected villains and heroes in distress!

With older students I just love immersing into an author study and having THEM come up with features they notice in text. Heavy description? Rhetorical questions? Rhythmic language? Circular text? Lots of dialogue? Cynthia Rylant, Jane Yolen, Jon Klass, Giselle Potter, Chris Van Allsburg, Patricia Polacco, Emily Arnold McCully, Amy Krouse Rosenthal are all such favorites and HUGE inspirations to me. And how thankful are we for Pinterest where a simple search will give us a list great mentor texts all in one adorable diagram!

One new mentor text I've just discovered through doing book reviews for Story Monsters (a phenomenal literacy magazine for children with editor in chief Cristy Bertini) is **If I had a little dream by Nina Laden**. I had to read this book several times before I was able to digest and then explain how divinely written it was. So original – which reminds me why authors have such an ingenious 'je ne said quoi' that makes certain books stand out among others. Besides the fact that this story had exquisite pencil colored illustrations by illustrator **Melissa Castrillon**, the words are so cleverly written. On each page, a child names different objects, creatures, and peoples – basically all her favorite things (cat, sister, bed, chair, pond) and gives them different names... The gem in the writing are the names she gives the objects- words that are powerful, embody an attribute that comforts us. **If I had a little dream** is the epitome of a mentor text for children and teachers... Not simply to dissect and pull apart, but truly appreciate the simplicity of words, adjectives, nouns and presentation of nature... and create our own writing masterpieces describing our world- and what we think is most important in it.



Ultimately, when we love a book, our children and students tend to love the book as well- even if it's not something they might initially pull off the shelves. What an awesome privilege we have to share these imaginative works from so many creative and artistic people and watch how it transforms our children into becoming better readers and writers. ☺