A mentor text is any text that can be used as a model to teach students about some aspect of an author’s craft and thereby inform their writing. Highly able readers can use the author’s craft to understand his/her message and then make text-to-self and text-to-world connections. During instruction, you can show children how to think about the author’s craft for a work of fiction in terms of the use of narrative elements (things like setting, foreshadowing, characterization, theme, plot, conflict, and point of view) and literary devices (such as alliteration, personification, simile, metaphor, parallel structure). For a non-fiction text, you can focus on informational text structures, such as cause and effect, comparisons, and chronology.

Choose a mentor text carefully that establishes a model of quality writing that is appropriate for guiding students. Selecting a book that can be used to illustrate multiple characteristics of an author’s craft is ideal. Important criteria for choosing a mentor text are:

- **Matches objective:** Is the text a good match for addressing the objective? Are you focusing on a single aspect of an author’s craft, or multiple ones?
- **Relatable:** Depending on what type of writing you want the children to do, select a text that relates to a gifted individual or that features a gifted protagonist.
- **Quality model:** Think about how the author uses language. Is it an exemplary model for the aspect of writing you are trying to teach?
- **Multiple examples:** The author uses the component that you wish to address multiple times.
- **Sufficiently engaging:** This ensures students are eager to read it multiple times.

Consider some of the texts you have used with your gifted students. How do they address the criteria listed above? Take the following steps to confirm that the text is suitable for use as a mentor text:

- **Read the text.** Read the text again, reading it as a writer and consider how the author uses the narrative elements and literary elements. If you are selecting a non-fiction text, look for informational text structures.
- **Read it a third time,** making notes about the specific aspects of the author’s craft that can be addressed by using the text.
- **Plan your lessons!**

A mentor text is any text that can be used as a model to teach children about some aspect of an author's craft and thereby inform their writing. Highly able readers can use the author's craft to understand his/her message and then make text-to-self and text-to-world connections.

During instruction at school, a teacher will show children how to think about the author's craft for a work of fiction in terms of the use of narrative elements and literary devices; the selection could be a book, short story, or poem. For a non-fiction text, the teacher will focus on informational text structures, such as cause and effect, comparisons, and chronology; the selection could be something like a magazine article or biography.

When working at home with your child, you may want to have a different focus, such as the use of illustrations to complement the text or the author's use of vivid language.

A mentor text must be chosen carefully to ensure that it establishes a model of quality writing that is appropriate for guiding students. Important criteria for choosing a mentor text are:

- Consider your goal. Is the text a good match for what you want to accomplish with your child?
- When appropriate, try to select a text that relates to a gifted individual or that features a gifted protagonist. You may find that a reading a text like this together will inspire a conversation about some of your child's concerns.
- Read like a writer. Think about how the author uses language. Think about the illustrations or diagrams that are included. How do these elements enhance the text?
- The text should be so interesting that your child is willing to read it multiple times.

Consider some of the books or articles that you have read. How can you determine if they address the criteria listed above?

- Read the text. Read the text again, reading it as a writer and considering how the author uses the elements you want to address with your child.
- Read it once more, making informal notes about the specific components you want to use.
- Read the text with your child and start the discussion! Serve as a mentor yourself by pointing out various features of the text and trying to emulate them through including them in a short piece of writing or in your discussion.
- Have fun with this activity! Your response to the selection is likely to influence your child's reaction and use of the selection as a mentor text.

A mentor text is any text that could be used as a model to teach children about some aspect of an author’s craft and thereby inform their writing. Highly able readers can use the author’s craft to understand his/her message and then make text-to-self and text-to-world connections.

NOTE: See the At School Practices Brief for more information about what mentor texts are and how to select them.

A mentor text must be chosen carefully to ensure that it can establish a model of quality writing that is appropriate for guiding gifted students. For schools, it is important to consult the grade level standards to ensure that texts are being chosen with a consideration of the English language arts standards being addressed. In selecting texts, it is essential to find materials that are sufficiently challenging for gifted students, including complex and exciting language, role models, open-endedness, and opportunities for problem-solving (Baskin & Harris, 1980).

An example of an excellent mentor text for use with elementary gifted students is *Weslandia* by Paul Fleischman. It features beautiful illustrations and the main character is a highly gifted boy. For its use as a mentor text, it includes the following components that can used as the basis for writing lessons or as an example of well-written text:

- Descriptive language
- Word choice
- Effective use of dialogue
- Use of context clues
- Use of strong verbs
- Use of parallel structures

School library media specialists often have access to journals or databases that can assist in finding books that are suitable for use as mentor texts. As you search for materials, it is important to find both fiction and non-fiction texts to be emulated.

- The Writing Thief: Using Mentor Texts to Teach the Craft of Writing. Author: R. Culham (2014).