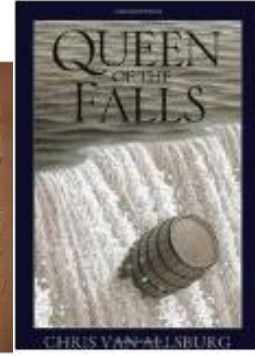
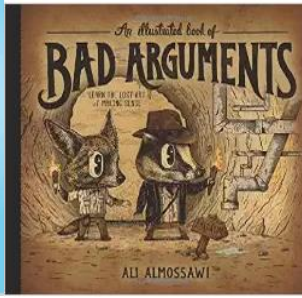
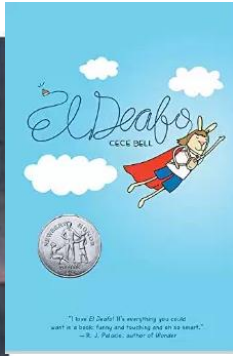
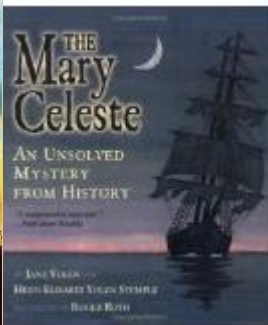
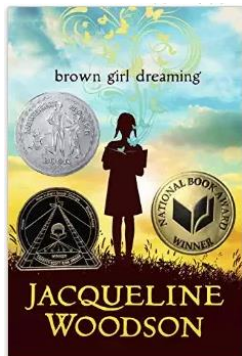




Sample Mentor Texts to Teach Writing Grades 6-8



Ralph Fletcher explains that mentor texts are, "...any text that you can learn from, and every writer, no matter how skilled you are or how beginning you are, encounters and reads something that can lift and inform and infuse into their own writing."

"By using mentor texts, the reader can virtually position him-or herself to sit beside the author and study how the text is constructed and how it communicates. It is a powerful teaching and learning strategy....."

The Writing Thief, Ruth Culham

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Sample 6th-8th Writing Argument Mentor Texts

Writing Standard #1

The mentor texts listed below are samples of picture books that could be used in the classroom when teaching students how to write an argument.

Using a specific set of questions to analyze the craft within a mentor text can open students to new ideas to consider in their own writing. The questions/prompts listed on the following page assists students with comprehension, analyzing and evaluating argument pieces as well as developing argument writing skills.

Argument Texts	Additional Information
<p><i>The Book of Bad Arguments</i> by Ali Almosawi</p> 	<p>Here are cogent explanations of the straw man fallacy, the slippery slope argument, the ad hominem attack, and other common attempts at reasoning that actually fall short— plus a beautifully drawn menagerie of animals who (adorably) commit every logical faux pas.</p>
<p><i>Roanoke: The Last Colony: An Unsolved Mystery from History</i> by Heidi E. Y. Stemple and Jane Yolen</p> 	<p>In 1587, after bringing many men, women, and children to the new land, John White went back to England to gather to discover on his return that all of the colonists had vanished. The only signs of life left were the letters CRO carved into a tree and the word CROATOAN carved into one of the fort's posts. No one knows for sure what happened. Use the clues to create an argument for what may have occurred.</p>
<p><i>Dear Mr. President: Letters to the Oval Office from the Files of the National Archives</i> by Dwight Young and Brian Williams</p> 	<p>Over the years countless people have taken pen or keyboard in hand and begun a letter with the words, "Dear Mr. President." The 87 letters showcased here have been culled from the National Archives collection and span a wide range of topics and emotions. A black soldier writes Lincoln requesting fair pay; Upton Sinclair advises Teddy Roosevelt on inspecting the meatpacking industry; John Glenn e-mails Bill Clinton from space.</p>
<p><i>Encounter</i> by Jane Yolen</p> 	<p>When Christopher Columbus landed on the island of San Salvador in 1492, what he discovered were the Taino Indians. Told from a young Taino boy's point of view, this is a story of how the boy tried to warn his people against welcoming the strangers, who seemed more interested in golden ornaments than friendship. Years later the boy, now an old man, looks back at the destruction of his people and their culture by the colonizers.</p>
<p><i>Thank You, Sarah! The Woman Who Saved Thanksgiving</i> by Laurie Halse Anderson</p> 	<p>This tale of a little-known historical heroine touts the power of the pen and persistence. Chart the progress of Sarah Hale, whose relentless letters and 38 years of petitioning presidents, secured Thanksgiving's status as a national holiday.</p>
<p><i>Who Was First?</i> by Russell Freedman</p> 	<p>Many generations of American schoolchildren were taught that Columbus discovered America, and a holiday reminds us every October. But historical investigation in recent years has shown us otherwise. Russell Freedman brings his legendary skills as researcher and storyteller to this fresh and intriguing look at the American past.</p>
<p><i>No Lie, I Acted Like A Beast</i> by Nancy Loewen</p> 	<p>This retelling of the classic story Beauty and the Beast, told from the Beasts point of view, paints a picture of a kind-hearted prince who wants nothing more than his turn on the stage. A fun ride that flips what you know of the fairy tale on its ear.</p>
<p><i>George vs George</i> by Rosalyn Schanzer</p> 	<p>The book presents George Washington and King George that compares the man with the monarch, the American and British governmental forms, views on taxation, the Boston Tea Party, and coverage of most of the major battles of the Revolutionary War.</p>
<p><i>The Mary Celeste</i> by Jane Yolen</p> 	<p>The <i>Mary Celeste</i> was discovered adrift on the open sea by another ship in 1872 -- with no sign of captain or crew. What happened? Inside this book are the clues of what people think happened aboard that ship. Become a detective, study the clues, and see if you can help solve this chilling mystery from history. Use the text to create an argument or thesis for what really happened.</p>
<p><i>Have I Got A Book for You</i> by Melanie Watt</p> 	<p>Mr. Al Foxword is one persistent salesman! He will do just about anything to sell you this book. Al tries every trick of the trade. But just when you're ready to close the book on him, he comes up with a clever tactic you simply can't refuse!</p>
<p>Examples of book reviews http://www.tms.org/PDFs/12%20Book%20Talk%20v001%20(Full).pdf</p>	<p>Author Steve Peha has several documents available on his site "Teaching That Makes Sense". One in particular entitled "What Can You Say About a Book?" contains student samples of book reviews and argument writing for popular titles such as <i>Harry Potter</i>, <i>The Giver</i> and <i>Holes</i>.</p>
<p>Websites with Reviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.kidsfirst.org • www.amazon.com • www.procon.org • http://www.toyportfolio.com/ 	<p>The links to the left provide teachers with other resources that can be mentors for argument writing.</p>

Sample 6th-8th Argument Mentor Text Questions/Prompts

Check grade level reading/writing standards when choosing which questions/prompts to address. Create additional prompts/questions based on the standards for your grade level.

To answer the questions or address the prompts, students should use evidence from the text to support their answers.

Sample Questions:

- What is the central theme of this piece?
- What are the issues being raised in this text?
- Can you tell how the author feels about the topic? How?
- How does the author introduce the piece? Does the introduction begin to draw the reader toward the argument? How? If not, what other ideas could the author try?
- How is the argument stated or shown? Is there significant evidence to support the claim?
- What key words or phrases are used to express the claim of the author or characters?
- What reasons are given or shown for the argument? Are there other reasons or details the author could include?
- Is the reasoning sound? Is the evidence relevant and sufficient? Is there irrelevant information introduced?
- How did the author conclude the piece? If the closing doesn't move you, what other ideas could the author try?
- Were credible sources were used in constructing the argument?
- How is this piece organized?
- What was the author's purpose for writing this text? How do you know?
- How did the author achieve his or her purpose(s)?
- How did the author set tones, convince, or create a sense of urgency for the reader that would enhance the message of this argument?
- What important principles might be learned or what are some important questions that are raised from the argument(s) presented?
- Who might dislike or disagree with what is presented in this text? Why?
- Who do the concepts in this text benefit? not benefit? Defend your answer using the text.
- What other aspects of everyday life are affected by the concepts presented in this text? Why?

Sample Prompts

- I changed my mind about _____ based on what the author stated about _____. The most convincing piece(s) was _____.
- One thing I've noticed about the author's style is...
- I think the main thing the writer was trying to say was...
- I agree/disagree with the writer about...
- The most important (word, sentence, paragraph) in the piece would be...

Resource questions were adapted from:

Boyles, N. (2004). *Constructing meaning: Through kid friendly comprehension strategy instruction*. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House.

Himmele, P., Himmele, W., and Potter, K. (2014). *Total literacy techniques: Tools to help students analyze literature and informational texts*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Sample 6th-8th Writing Informative/Explanatory Mentor Texts

Writing Standard #2

Many of these mentor texts blend informative/explanatory writing with narrative elements.

The mentor texts listed below are samples of picture books that could be used in the classroom when teaching students how to write informative/explanatory pieces.

Using a specific set of questions to analyze the craft within a mentor text can open students to new ideas to consider in their own writing. The questions/prompts listed on the following page assists students with comprehension, analyzing and evaluating informative/explanatory pieces as well as developing informative/explanatory writing skills.

Informative/Explanatory Text	Additional Information
<p><i>I Feel Better When There is a Frog in My Throat: History's Strangest Cures</i> by Carlyn Beccia</p> 	<p>Carlyn Beccia takes readers on a medical mystery tour to discover that while times may have changed, many of today's most reliable cure-alls have their roots in some very peculiar practices.</p>
<p><i>The New Way Things Work</i> by David MacCaulay</p> 	<p>The information age is upon us, baffling us with thousands of complicated state-of-the-art technologies. To help make sense of the computer age, David Macaulay brings us <i>The New Way Things Work</i>.</p>
<p><i>Children of the Dust Bowl: The True Story of the School at Weedpatch Camp</i> by Jerry Stanley</p> 	<p>This true story took place at the emergency farm-labor camp immortalized in Steinbeck's <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>. Ostracized as "dumb Okies," the children of Dust Bowl migrant laborers went without school--until Superintendent Leo Hart and 50 Okie kids built their own school in a nearby field.</p>
<p><i>If You Lived Here: Houses of the World</i> by Giles Laroche</p> 	<p>If you lived in the mountains of southern Spain, your bedroom might be carved out of a mountain. If you lived in a village in South Africa, the outside of your house might tell the story of your family. And if you lived in a floating green house in the Netherlands, you could rotate your house to watch both the sunrise and sunset.</p>
<p><i>We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball</i> by Kadir Nelson</p> 	<p>This story is narrated by an unnamed ballplayer who, according to Nelson, represents "the voice of every player." Nelson traces the start of the league by Rube Foster in 1920. The book features several players from the Negro Leagues and ends with Jackie Robinson as he joined the major league in 1947.</p>
<p><i>The Story of the Statue of Liberty</i> by Pegi Deitz Shea</p> 	<p>The Statue of Liberty stands as a powerful symbol of freedom to all. But what is her story? How did she come to be</p>
<p><i>Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass: The Story Behind an American Friendship</i> by Russell Freedman</p> 	<p>Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass were both self- taught, both great readers and believers in the importance of literacy, both men born poor who by their own efforts reached positions of power and prominence. Though their meetings were few and brief, their exchange of ideas helped to end the Civil War, reunite the nation, and abolish slavery.</p>
<p><i>The Camping Trip that Changed America</i> by Barbara Rosentstock</p> 	<p>In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt joined naturalist John Muir on a trip to Yosemite. Camping by themselves in the uncharted woods, the two men saw sights and held discussions that would ultimately lead to the establishment of our National Parks.</p>
<p><i>The Code Book: The Science of Secrecy from Ancient Egypt to Quantum Cryptography</i> by Simon Singh</p> 	<p>Simon Singh offers the first sweeping history of encryption, tracing its evolution and revealing the dramatic effects codes have had on wars, nations, and individual lives. From Mary, Queen of Scots, trapped by her own code, to the Navajo Code Talkers who helped the Allies win World War II, to the incredible (and incredibly simple) logistical breakthrough that made Internet commerce secure, <i>The Code Book</i> tells the story of the most powerful intellectual weapon ever known: secrecy.</p>
<p><i>Eye to Eye: How Animals See The World</i> by Steve Jenkins</p> 	<p>Steve Jenkins explains how for most animals, eyes are the most important source of information about the world in a biological sense. The simplest eyes—clusters of light-sensitive cells—appeared more than one billion years ago, and provided a big survival advantage to the first creatures that had them. Since then, animals have evolved an amazing variety of eyes, along with often surprising ways to use them.</p>
<p><i>Mr. Ferris and His Wheel</i> by Kathryn Gibbs Davis</p> 	<p>Capturing an engineer's creative vision and mind for detail, this fully illustrated picture book biography sheds light on how the American inventor George Ferris defied gravity and seemingly impossible odds to invent the world's most iconic amusement park attraction, the Ferris wheel.</p>
<p>www.wonderopolis.com http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ www.loc.gov</p>	<p>Websites that have an array of informational subject matter for teachers and students.</p>

Sample 6th-8th Informative/Explanatory Mentor Text Questions

Check grade level reading/writing standards when choosing which questions/prompts to address. Create additional prompts/questions based on the standards for your grade level.

To answer the questions or address the prompts, students should use evidence from the text to support their answers.

Illustrations

- Did the author include illustrations, maps, charts, photographs, etc., with the book? What kind? Who is the illustrator?
- Did the illustrations/media help to understand the text better? Why or why not?
- Were labels and captions used? If so, did they help to understand the information better? Why or why not?

Text Structure

- Did you use the table of contents or the index? For what? Was the information located quickly?
- Are there headings and subheadings in this text? What other types of formatting are used? Did they help you “see” how information is presented?
- What is the topic of this piece/section/page? Is it easy to locate?
- Are there other ways information is presented in the book, chapter, or passage? Examples include:
 - Information is chronologically ordered
 - Information is shown in comparison or contrasted
 - Information is written in cause and effect relationship
 - Information is narrated as a problem and solution
 - Information is presented as a main idea or topic and then has ideas have supporting details
- How does the author introduce the topic? What techniques does the author use to hook the reader?
- How does the author develop the topic? (With facts, definitions, details, questions or other information and examples?)
- How did the author close the piece?

Content

- What does the author teach about the topic? What questions were left unanswered?
- What are the bigger messages being conveyed in this text? How do you know?
- Is the information easy to understand? Why or why not?
- What would you strip or delete from the information to communicate the core meaning of the text?
- Did the book/chapter/passage give you enough information? If not, what else do you need to know?
- What is discussed through the whole piece, section, or chapter? What general subject spreads across the whole text? What details support it?
- Does this book provide recent information? Is there a better source of information?
- If the author wrote a follow up text that continued along this theme, what would be included? Why?
- What qualifies the author to write this information? What kind of research did that author have to do to write the text?

Style

- Do you understand what the author is saying? What information is the easiest/hardest to understand? Why?
- What could the author have done to make the information easier to understand?
- Would this book or information be different if it were written 10 years ago? Why?
- Is the information told straight to you or is it in story form? What is the evidence?

Resource questions were adapted from:

Boyles, N. (2004). *Constructing meaning: Through kid friendly comprehension strategy instruction*. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House.

Himmele, P., Himmele, W., & Potter, K. (2011). *Total literacy techniques: Tools to help students analyze literature and informational texts*. Alexandria, VA ASCD.

Wilhelm, J., & Smith, M. (2012). *Get it done!: Writing and analyzing informational texts to make things happen*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Sample 6th-8th Writing Narrative Mentor Texts

Writing Standard #3

The mentor texts listed below are samples of picture books that could be used in the classroom when teaching students how to write narrative pieces.

Using a specific set of questions to analyze the craft within a mentor text can open students to new ideas to consider in their own writing. The questions/prompts listed on the following page assists students with comprehension, analyzing and evaluating narrative pieces as well as developing narrative writing skills.

Narrative Mentor Texts	Additional Information
<i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i> by Jacqueline Woodson 	Raised in South Carolina and New York, Woodson always felt halfway home in each place. In vivid poems, she shares what it was like to grow up as an African American in the 1960s and 1970s, living with the remnants of Jim Crow and her growing awareness of the Civil Rights movement.
<i>Ruth and the Green Book</i> by Calvin Alexander Ramsey 	1950's Jim Crow laws were unkind to many African Americans who traveled. The Green Book is given to Ruth and her family as they traveled south from Chicago to Alabama and she realizes the kindness of strangers can be relied upon. Although this book is fictional, the Green Book and indignities of the Jim Crow laws are historical fact.
<i>El Deafo</i> by Cece Bell 	Going to school and making new friends can be tough. But going to school and making new friends while wearing a bulky hearing aid strapped to your chest? That requires superpowers! In this funny, poignant graphic novel memoir, author/illustrator Cece Bell chronicles her hearing loss at a young age and her subsequent experiences with the Phonic Ear, a very powerful—and very awkward—hearing aid.
<i>Queen of the Falls</i> by Chris Van Allsburg 	Annie Taylor, a short, plump and fussy sixty-two year old widow, runs a charm school, right by Niagara Falls. When this starts to fail, she resolves to find fame and fortune by being the first person to ever to go over the thundering waters of Niagara Falls in a barrel. Readers of all ages will warm to this inspiring story of bravery, as they take the roller coaster ride of a lifetime over the falls.
<i>The Lorax</i> by Dr. Seuss 	Long before saving the earth became a global concern, Dr. Seuss, speaking through his character the Lorax, warned against mindless progress and the danger it posed to the earth's natural beauty.
<i>The Butter Battle Book</i> by Dr. Seuss 	The Butter Battle Book, Dr. Seuss's classic cautionary tale, introduces readers to the important lesson of respecting differences. The Yooks and Zooks share a love of buttered bread, but animosity brews between the two groups because they prefer to enjoy the tasty treat differently. The timeless and topical rhyming text is an ideal way to teach everyone about the issues of tolerance and respect.
<i>Milkweed</i> by Jerry Spinelli 	Chapter 1 of Milkweed After discussing memories and memoir writing by discussing chapter one of Milkweed by Jerry Spinelli, students will plan their own memoirs based on a specific memory from their past or current life.
<i>Confessions of a Former Bully</i> by Trudy Ludwig 	After Katie gets caught teasing a schoolmate, she's told to meet with Mrs. Petrowski, the school counselor, so she can make right her wrong and learn to be a better friend. Told from the unusual point of view of the bullier rather than the bullied, Confessions of a Former Bully provides kids with real life tools they can use to identify and stop relational aggression.
<i>Percy Jackson's Greek Gods</i> by Rick Riordan 	In <i>Percy Jackson's Greek Gods</i> , the son of Poseidon adds his own magic--and sarcastic asides--to the classics. He explains how the world was created, then gives readers his personal take on a who's who of ancients, from Apollo to Zeus; Percy does not hold back.
<i>Wonderstruck</i> by Brian Selznick 	Ben and Rose secretly wish their lives were different. Ben longs for the father he has never known. Rose dreams of a mysterious actress whose life she chronicles in a scrapbook. When Ben discovers a puzzling clue in his mother's room and Rose reads an enticing headline in the newspaper, both children set out alone on desperate quests to find what they are missing. (Brian Selznick also wrote <i>The Invention of Hugo Cabret</i>).
<i>The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore</i> by William Joyce 	The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore is a modern masterpiece, showing that in today's world of traditional books, eBooks, and apps, it's story that we truly celebrate—and this story, no matter how you tell it, begs to be read again and again.
<i>The One and Only Ivan</i> by Katherine Applegate 	Inspired by the true story of a captive gorilla known as Ivan, this illustrated novel is told from the point of view of Ivan himself. Ivan spends his life painting behind glass walls at the mall until Ruby a baby elephant, enters the enclosure. An unlikely friendship develops.

Sample 6th-8th Narrative Mentor Text Questions

Check grade level reading/writing standards when choosing which questions/prompts to address. Create additional prompts/questions based on the standards for your grade level.

To answer the questions or address the prompts, students should use evidence from the text to support their answers.

Author/Illustrator

- Who are the characters or people in the piece? How does the illustrator show this?
- How does the author help us get to know the characters?
- What might the author had to have known to write this book?

Setting/Tone

- Where does this story take place? Is there more than one place?
- What is the place like?
- When and where did this story take place? How do you know?
- Could there be a place like this? What evidence/proof/background knowledge do you have?
- Which part of the story best describes the setting?
- If you were to read the book aloud, what section would evoke the most vivid images? Why did you select this section?

Characters

- Who are the main characters in the story?
- How did the author introduce the characters or narrator?
- Do any of the characters change in the story? How? Support with evidence from text.
- Did the author use dialogue? Did this help develop the character, events or experiences? If yes, how?
- Choose a character. Why is the character important to the story? Use the text to support answer.

Plot/Problem/Solution

- What are the main things that have happened in the story? How does the illustrator show this? How does the author show this?
 - Are there various story lines? Do they affect each other?
- How does the author feel about what happened? How can you tell?
- Is there a challenge/goal/problem? Is there more than one problem?
- What do the characters/people do to solve the challenge/goal/problem?
- How do you know that the problem was solved in this way?
- What would you have done differently if you had been one of the characters?
- Can you think of another way that something in the story might have happened?
- What might have happened if a certain action had not taken place?
- How did the author close the piece? Was it effective? Why or why not?

Theme/Tone

- What theme(s) are illustrated in the story? What evidence is there of them?
- Why did the author write this book? Use evidence from the text.
- Does the book make you feel a certain way? Are there words that the author uses that make you feel that way?
- Is there a part of the story that describes the atmosphere? How does the writer do that? (words)

Resource questions were adapted from:

Boyles, N. (2004). *Constructing meaning: Through kid friendly comprehension strategy instruction*. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House.

Himmele, P., Himmele, W., & Potter, K. (2011). *Total literacy techniques: Tools to help students analyze literature and informational texts*. Alexandria, VA ASCD.