

## Read Like a Writer

by Lisa Frase

"The sound of our writing voices is crafted by where we live our reading lives."

-Katie Wood Ray

Within every book lies a teachable moment, waiting patiently to be discovered. Classrooms and libraries have thousands of writing teachers on their bookshelves; storing their secrets between the pages. They are hidden treasures for the writer who understands the importance of reading to write.

Writer's read. Writers are "tuned in" to the possibility that awaits them. They understand the words offer more than a story, but also a gift to the writer in progress. Writers must first learn to become miners of words. Master writers leave treasure clues throughout their books. They are there for the writer to examine, to "play with" in their journals, to take into their own writing as they find their own voices.

Reading children's literature has redefined the power of language in this writer's heart. Reading has made a difference in my writing, and I know, it makes a difference in my student's writing as well.

Reading is the doorway, and reading like a writer is the open window. Sunlight bounces through the window, off the dew, and into a prism of colors. In this place, a new dawn has given life to my writer's soul, and has raised a toast to the breadth of possibilities. Suddenly, the world is opening up and sharing its secrets. As I find myself awakening to the writer within, I am finding that my students are also awakening, and together, we have embarked on a joyous journey that has taken us to all that is promising.

"Flip" to the other side of your reading lesson, and teach your children to read like a writer reads. Writers read in the same way a person who is planning to landscape their front yard "notices" the landscape of other yards. The landscaper drives down the road completely in tune with the flowerbeds and shrubs. Their eyes are drawn to appealing yards. They notice the types of plants used, and the arrangement of the plants. They look and say, "That is a good idea."

Writers read in the same way a person who plans to decorate their house examines pictures of rooms. They study the light, color, and symmetry, and try out different arrangements in their imaginations and on paper.

Writers read in the same way a future ballplayer might study their sports heroes. They watch the athlete with intensity. They notice how the athlete stands, moves, holds the ball, and follows through on technique.

Writers read in order to “notice” what the author does, and how he or she does it. That is what writers do. Listen to authors. Hear their voices. They repeat the same message over and over again. They are all readers. They read. They notice. And then they take newfound treasures into their own writing, and explore the parts as if they are a tiny piece to a large puzzle.

Listen to Jane Yolen. Hear her rhythm; notice her pacing; pay attention to how she repeats words, uses three prepositional phrases in a row, and writes prose with the power of poetry.

Listen to Ralph Fletcher. He gives writers the gift of figurative language. Notice how he uses similes and personification. Listen to the poetry in his words. Revel in the language. Explore his books on writing as well.

Listen to Chris Van Allsburg. Feel the pace of his stories; examine the surprise of his endings; analyze the depths of his imagination.

Listen to Mem Fox. Hear the comfort of her voice. Notice the simplicity of her words. Pay attention to the flow of her sentences.

Listen to Gary Paulson. Notice how he knows all of the rules, and breaks all of the rules. Feel the tension in his fragments; notice how he repeats short words or phrases; experience the depth of his thoughts.

Listen to Cynthia Rylant. Analyze the structure of her stories. Learn from the depth of her characters. Picture her settings in your mind. Follow her into your own plots. Listen to the music of her words.

The talent of children’s authors constantly amazes me. Lead your students into their world, and help them to see beyond the story, and into the writer’s heart. Imagine where they might have found their ideas, notice how they organize their writing, give attention to how they craft their words, listen to the flow of their sentences, and even notice how they use punctuation to signal the reader.

Let the master writers guide you and your children into the world of writing. Embrace children’s literature as a gift to your young writers. Guide your students to

a deeper level where the reader and writer meet. Let the masters mentor your students as they discover how to put their own secret treasures on the page.