HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

When laying out the idea for this book, I knew that there were many fantastic educators who had walked this road before me. As I designed the lessons, I was mindful of the fact that teachers who would pick up this book might very well have a curriculum already in place for informational reading and writing. For example, folks who use Lucy Calkins's and the Reading and Writing Project's *Units of Study for Writing* or *Units of Study for Reading* series (full disclosure, I coauthored four units in the series) were likely to be following those lessons very closely. Other teachers might have several excellent support materials such as *Nonfiction Craft Lessons* by JoAnn Portalupi and Ralph Fletcher (2001). Still others might have a basal reading program or use a curriculum they wrote. No matter what the case may be, the lessons from this book can be easily incorporated into your literacy teaching.

As I mentioned earlier, the reading and writing lessons are simpatico, but perhaps the most unusual feature of this book is that the writing lessons are designed for you to teach them before you teach the paired reading lesson. In fact, my main purpose for writing this book is that I believe that some of the toughest-to-teach skills in reading are best approached by teaching them in writing first. You might say the writing lessons set up a "slam dunk" in the paired reading lesson, like basketball players provide assists. So when teaching literacy, know that the lessons for both reading and writing were conceived together to make it easier for you to bring that coherence into your classroom. One wise way to use this book—and the other books in this series—is to identify reading skills your students need additional instruction in, whether whole class or small group, and then go about teaching their writing counterparts first, before looping back and trying the paired reading lesson.

In addition, I really want you to make the lessons in this book your own: from the order you teach them in to the specific examples you use. In order to support this customization, I purposefully highlight in blue parts of each lesson that you could easily replace with your own content, either because you have a topic that is especially exciting to your students or because you need more or less challenging texts. That way, while planning, you can quickly scan those parts of the lesson and decide if they need to be

replaced with your own material or if what I have used will work for you and your students.

You will also notice that I use the terms *information* and *nonfiction* interchangeably throughout the book, even though that is not precisely correct. This is because many teachers and schools use these terms interchangeably. For the record, I tend to see information writing and reading as any type of text whose primary job is to inform its readers about a particular topic. This writing tends to be expository in nature, with the organizing structure centered on the topic. Most of the lessons in this book assume that this is the type of reading and writing your students are engaged in. I tend to see *nonfiction* as a term that casts a wider net and encompasses a variety of different structures and genres, from expository all-about books to biographies to nonfiction poems to informative lectures, such as TED Talks, to lots of different things in between.

I see readers using this book in one of three main ways:

1. **Pick and choose lessons to complement your current nonfiction lessons or string a few together to create a small detour within a current unit, based on what you know your students need**. This should be fairly simple, since the majority of the lessons in this book, particularly those that focus on readers learning from their writing work, are unique and thus are not likely to be lessons that you have already planned to teach. This is especially true when considering teaching writing in support of reading and not the other way around.

2. **Use the lessons only for conferences and small-group work**. Because these lessons are fairly different than other curriculum, you are unlikely to have redundancy even if you are a service provider or an interventionist. However, the skills taught in this book are skills that will strengthen any reader and writer.

3. **Teach most of the lessons, in order**. It can be used as a complete curriculum for teaching the writing and reading of informational texts and will align with most state, national, and international literacy standards. You can alter and add as you see fit.

No matter how you decide to use this book, I recommend that you work within the framework of frequently teaching a writing lesson *first*, as a scaffold for a reading lesson. However, it does not matter whether you choose to teach your reading and writing units concurrently, teach the writing unit first, or stagger the writing unit a few sessions or weeks ahead of the reading work.

This approach might feel strange at first. Many of us, myself included, are used to teaching reading first, organizing our reading instruction and

curriculum to help improve student writing. And thanks to the brilliant work of Katie Wood Ray's *Wondrous Words* (1999), many of us came to understand the incredible power and opportunity afforded by studying mentor texts in reading in order to borrow craft, structure, and other writing moves from published writers. This is still fundamental and important work for teachers and young writers to engage in. I would be hard pressed to imagine an engaging and productive writing classroom that does not lean on the work the students have already done during reading instruction.

The Writers Read Better series builds off a body of research that suggests writing instruction and writing process may be the "alpha dog" after all; in fact, it may be better suited than reading to help learners develop craft and comprehension holistically. Research shows that not only are reading and writing inextricably connected, but also, the teaching of writing—and specifically, the linking of writing skills to reading work—is a powerful move for deepening comprehension (Burns, Roe, & Ross, 1992; Calkins, 1983; Chew, 1985; Gentry & Peha, 2013; Graham & Hebert, 2010; Hornsby, Sukarna, & Parry, 1988). Furthermore, teachers who have piloted the work in this book have reported that by flipping the order of instruction to begin with writing before the connected reading lesson, and then explicitly making those connections for students, teachers have greatly enhanced the students' depth as well as speed of understanding. This has proved to be especially the case for students who initially found the reading skills being practiced to be particularly challenging, obtuse, or abstract.

Key Components of the Reading and Writing Workshop

The basic ideas and philosophical underpinnings of the work in this book are based on the reading and writing workshop model. I am a long-time member of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project Community and serve there as the Director of Innovation. It is the educational community where I grew up as an educator, and much of the thinking and my personal interpretation of the workshop model comes from that community's influence, which leans on the work of such esteemed educators and researchers as Donald Graves, Donald Murray, Lucy Calkins, Marie Clay, Irene Fountas, Gay Sue Pinnell, Stephanie Harvey, Nancie Atwell, and Richard Allington, to name a few.

You do not need to have a reading or writing workshop in your classroom to teach the lessons from this book. However, the following section highlights the key components of the workshop model that are assumed in the lesson write-ups.

The Workshop Model Structure

Most days a workshop session, whether it is reading or writing, include the following elements.

1. A short lesson, approximately seven to fifteen minutes in length, in which the teacher teaches a strategy that the students might use during their work time.

2. Independent work time, which takes from twenty to forty minutes. Students work independently, in partnerships, or in small groups. During the independent work time, the teacher also works with some of the students in conferences or small groups to support and guide as needed.

If you do not currently teach using the workshop model, note that it involves less whole-class instruction from the front of the room and much more teaching to small groups and individuals. Consequently, the lessons in this book are designed to be short to allow students maximum amounts of time to practice their reading and writing skills.

The Importance of Choice

In the typical workshop classroom, students are not assigned particular books to read or topics to write about. Instead, workshop teachers instruct students in making their own book and topic choices.

If your students will be reading from a textbook, whole-class novel, or other teacher-selected text, you might want to supplement that material with highly engaging, student-selected texts. If your students write primarily to assignments and prompts, you may want to give topic choice a try. (There are a few places within the book where strategies for managed topic choice is taught—so class topics can very much work.) Alternately, you might consider skipping ahead past the generating ideas lessons and into the planning and drafting ones.

Individual Levels of Reading and Writing

It's important to have students access work at their own level. When students are reading, encourage them to read books that they can read independently most of the time. If they do want to try to read books above their comfort zone, make sure to provide them with scaffolds. For example, if a student wants to read a fairly complex text on a topic of interest, it helps to explain that content knowledge can often lift our ability to read at higher levels than we typically can with an unfamiliar text. So we can help students build a text

set for themselves, starting with very accessible texts, perhaps lower than their current reading ability, to help build foundational knowledge and vocabulary, then helping students to create stepping stones of other books on the topic, gradually building in complexity. As the student makes her way through each text, she gains content and vocabulary know-how that will help buoy her as she attempts to tackle the more complex syntax, text features, and concepts at higher levels. This work can also be supplemented with images, videos, and virtual trips to museums to add another layer of content knowledge with more modalities than the printed word.

Another way to help give students more access to nonfiction reading is to offer digital tools, such as e-books, apps that read aloud texts when needed, or help to easily find definitions or pronunciations of words. This works best when students are reading several titles on the same topic so that students can transfer their knowledge as they move from text to text, developing more and more independence as they go.

When considering individual support for writing, I always choose options that allow for the maximum level of independence and agency. So for example, instead of scribing for a student, I will work to teach the student how to use a keyboard, specialized word processing software such as Co:writer, or speech-to-text software so that the student can record his own writing. Rather than handing a student who needs support with organization a graphic organizer, I will show him options that he can make himself or else introduce a digital tool that he can use to choose his own graphic organizers. At every turn, I want to consider what obstacles might be getting in the way of my writers and what tools or scaffolds I can offer to help students move over those obstacles with maximum independence.

This also might be a nice time to try some small-group reading or writing work to support student learning goals as well. Since so many students will be invested in the work they are doing, teaching them specific strategies and skills that allow them to access the texts they most want to read will be highly engaging work.

If your students are reading textbooks or whole-class books, there's a fairly decent chance that some students might find the texts too challenging or too easy. However, since the reading strategies work on any text, you can likely teach them within textbooks or whole-class novels. You might also consider teaching them within a content area—such as science or social studies—whether you have trade books and choice or not. Additionally, you might find that teaching informational reading and writing can offer an opportunity for you to supplement your current reading and writing instruction with accessible texts, even as a short two-week detour from the textbook.

It is equally important to honor students' individual levels as you are teaching writing. Their development as writers is paramount. Even if there are grade standards in mind, it is important to recognize that some students develop more quickly or slowly than their peers. Instead of insisting that students hit a prespecified level of writing, teachers should work with students individually to design personal goals.

Additional Components

Most workshop classrooms also include additional components outside of the workshop time, which cover other important literacy areas. Elements such as read aloud, word study, and even cursive writing are touched upon and utilized within the workshop, but more time is allotted to them outside of the workshop. Some of the lessons in this book contain references to additional components, such as texts read aloud to students prior to the lesson.

If you currently are not teaching using the workshop model, you might wish to consider dabbling in some of those additional components. The chances are good that you probably already read aloud to your students, but perhaps you could more actively link that read-aloud work with your reading and writing lessons. You might already incorporate spelling, conventions, vocabulary, and the like into your day, but perhaps as you are working through some of the ideas in this book, you might consider more closely aligning the work between the study of words and the study of reading and writing those words.

Preparing for Writing . . . *First*

Okay, so what does it mean for us when we prepare for the writing work first, with an eye to how it will also feed the reading work? To begin with, you will want to decide what sort of writing you want your students to do. The lessons in this book will support the following:

- Nonfiction/informational books of personal expertise

- Content area (social studies, science, etc.) books

- Research reports

- Articles

- Oral reports

Of course, you can revise any lesson, material suggested, or book referenced to have it better suit your needs. The assumption in the lessons is that

students are picking their own topics, even in cases where the students are writing within a class topic, such as electricity. In that case, the students might choose a subtopic, such as currents or light. This is because research (Bonyadi & Zeinalpur, 2014; Graves, 1983; Kohn, 1993) and personal experience show that students write best when they have an element of choice and agency in their projects. When students receive topic choice, whether writing in their dominant or even a new language (Bonzo, 2008), they are more likely to write with more volume, fluency, and intentionality. One of the easiest ways to improve student writing quality is to allow them to choose their topic (or in some cases, subtopic).

Next, after you have chosen the type of writing, you will want to choose mentor texts—that is, texts written by professional authors in the *style* and *form* you would like your students to write. Many educators in the writing workshop community have come to believe that the best mentor texts are on a topic *different from* the one the student is writing on. This is because it lessens the chances students will feel compelled to over-rely on (and perhaps unintentionally plagiarize) a mentor text.

Many of the texts you choose for the reading component could be good candidates for mentor texts. A few key features of strong mentor texts include the following:

- Demonstrates the *qualities* of writing that will be taught

- Is about the length that students will write

- Is slightly above students' current writing abilities

- Will be readable to many students

- Is a text that you and your students like and will find engaging through repeated readings

- Could be a text written by current or previous students

You will also want to gather any supplies necessary for students to use while writing and for you to use while teaching. For the students, you will want to be sure they have the following:

- Writing notebooks

- Plenty of loose paper

- Folders

- Pens (ideally, a variety of colors available)

- Sticky notes

- Highlighters

If you plan to have students work and publish digitally, you will want to organize those tools as well. (See the description of digital options discussed later in this chapter.) Additionally, some of the lessons use building blocks such as Snap Cubes, unit blocks, or LEGO bricks. They can be helpful manipulatives for writing instruction. If you plan to teach research as part of this unit, you might want to consider gathering paper, digital, and artifact-based research materials (such as objects, photographs, etc.) into baskets, bins, or other easy-to-navigate containers.

For yourself, you will want to gather chart paper or whatever tools you plan to use in order to visibly record your writing instruction. You will also want to think about—and perhaps prepare—a demonstration text you will use throughout the lessons. I have a demonstration text threaded through many of the lessons that you can certainly use, or you can revise it to more closely match what you and your students need. Some teachers like to closely model their demonstration text off their individual class's needs. I think this is a wonderful idea and can be easily done by gathering a few samples of a range of your students' initial informational writing tries.

Preparing for Reading

As you may have imagined, preparing for reading will require a bit more legwork. Perhaps the biggest bulk of preparation will go into gathering texts for students to read. In the appendix, you will find a list of recommended texts as a good starting place.

The reading work in this book can be done in a variety of ways with any number of text types or situations. You might wish to teach the lessons in a pure workshop model where students choose the texts they are reading. You might want to teach the lessons as a unit, as an overlay to a content-specific unit. You might also teach many of these lessons while students are using a textbook. A few possibilities for texts that can be used for the reading components in this book include the following:

- High-interest trade books at accessible reading levels for each student

- Trade books organized around a class content area (such as medieval Europe or human anatomy)

- Articles and permission-granted photocopied material

- Online resources

- Textbooks

- E-books or apps or websites connected to digital libraries

You will also want to gather read-aloud texts, independent reading texts, and additional reading tools. Since these components are so essential, let's look at each category in more detail.

Read-Aloud Texts

This book does not directly address read alouds. However, many of the lessons assume that books have previously been read aloud to students, and these books are mentioned directly. Ideally, most workshop teachers have additional time outside of the workshop time to read aloud selected texts to their students. This period can take anywhere from five to thirty minutes, and it usually includes discussion time.

It is not possible to overstate how important reading aloud to students on a daily basis is to their language, reading, and social-emotional development. Additionally, daily read alouds of texts that are the same genre the students are writing allow students to get a deep sense of how informational texts can be written, as well as to help them envision what is possible for their own writing.

Select possible read-aloud texts that will become touchstone texts that you and your class will refer to again and again throughout the unit. Some authors such as Melissa Stewart, Steve Bloom, and Penny Colman particularly lend themselves to being read aloud.

Some of the best read-aloud books are ones that lend themselves to being performed by a reader (you) and lead to a shared experience with an audience (the students). Specifically, they possess the following:

- Have language that sounds good orally

- Contain engaging content

- Allow teachers to demonstrate to students how to orchestrate skills by showing how in one page a reader might predict, synthesize, question, and determine importance in concert

Some efficient teachers can double-dip their reading and writing texts, opting to read aloud a text that will be used as a writing mentor but also allows for reading work. Throughout this book, whenever possible, I recommend texts that will work for both reading and writing instruction and are particularly fun or lyrical when read aloud.

Independent Reading Texts

It is also essential to gather texts for the students to read independently and with their partners or clubs. If you decide to have your students read their science or social studies textbook, it is still a good idea to make a variety of trade books, magazines, and online resources available to complement that content. Ideally, you will have enough texts to keep students reading independently the entire time, but if this is not possible, you might wish to organize your texts in such a way that students can swap with each other or else partner with another class and swap. Some teachers ask students to lend texts from home; others use a teacher library card to check out books from the local library. In any event, you will want to be sure students have enough to read through the course of the unit.

Additional Reading Tools

You will also want to gather other reading tools for you and your students. For your teaching, these might be many of the same tools you use in your writing instruction, including chart paper, sticky notes, highlighters, and chart markers. As well, your students will need the following:

- Reading notebooks

- Sticky notes

- Index cards

- Highlighters

- Reading logs

- Book sleeves or another way to keep the books they are currently reading together

You might also consider investing in baskets that can help store and organize books. What is most important is that students have ready access to a variety of reading materials that they can easily access independently.

Timing and Scheduling

In general, many workshop practitioners recommend forty-five minutes or more for writing workshop most days of the week and approximately sixty minutes or more for reading workshop most days of the week. Depending on your school schedule and situation, this may be way too much or not nearly enough. However, the lessons and activities in this book are designed around

those guidelines, so if you have less or more time available, you will want to shrink or expand accordingly.

As noted, this book is designed for the writing lesson to be taught before the paired reading lesson. This can happen on the same day, but it is also possible to give the writing lesson a day or two ahead of the reading lesson. In some cases, I could even imagine the writing lessons being taught weeks or months before and simply referred back to explicitly when the paired reading lesson comes up. If you are teaching a particular subject or discipline, you might teach several other content-specific lessons in between the writing and reading paired lessons.

Note: Even though daily read-aloud time is not specifically mentioned in these lessons, it is absolutely essential to your students' development as readers and writers and for their overall academic success. Even though this book does not specifically call out read aloud, please know that there is very little that we can do that has greater impact on our students' literacy.

Digital Considerations

In each section of this book, you will find lessons that are specifically aimed at classrooms where digital tools will be utilized. While the rest of the book is not written specifically for schools that are using digital tools, there is no reason why all of the non-digital-specific lessons could not be entirely taught using digital tools. In fact, if your school is a one-to-one school, you will likely find many of the lessons intuitively easy to teach digitally, or at least you will find it simple to offer digital options to your students. There are many different ways this can look, and if you are already digitally savvy, it is likely that you already translate work to digital options pretty regularly.

For those of you who would like some ideas to start with, here are a few options you might consider.

1. Choose the form of the writing notebook. Many teachers like the portability and inexpensive nature of the paper notebook, which allows students to take it anywhere from the soccer field to the swimming pool. Other teachers swear by the generative powers of the old-fashioned pen in hand. However, you might decide to go with a digital platform if your students have access to portable digital devices that are able to travel back and forth from home to school. There are many notebook applications that students can use for generative work, such as Evernote and Noteshelf. Some teachers prefer students stay in the same word-processing application

throughout the writing process—including what is commonly called the "notebook phase." This is definitely an option; however, many teachers find that moving from one format to the next is helpful to symbolically differentiate between the generative and drafting process. You could, of course, also give students the choice of what tool works best for them.

2. Choose a word-processing program that allows students to track changes or to save multiple versions of drafts so that revision and editing moves can be easily tracked. Some teachers like Google Docs because of its history features. Others prefer to use Word and insist that students use the track changes feature.

3. Have students read online as well as e-books. There are a multitude of texts and endless libraries available. Most popular nonfiction books have a digital component that can be found on your local public library's site (or use a site like Overdrive to allow even easier access to public library sources). Popular websites that include great digital reading for students, such as *National Geographic for Kids* and *Time for Kids*, are worth bookmarking, as well as linking to specific article sites that are written for adults but sometimes have kid-accessible articles, such as *The Smithsonian*, CNN.com, and the *New York Times* Science section. One of the huge advantages of having access to digital tools is the ability to access multimodal texts involving hyperlinks, video, infographics, and the like. It is important to note that current research also suggests that reading comprehension is affected by the use of digital tools. Because of that, teachers should actively teach reading comprehension specific to reading e-books, as well as online texts that are multimodal. In other words, while digital reading is important, so is our active monitoring of and teaching into it.

4. Make paper books and texts available and accessible as well. Even if your school has decided to be all digital all of the time, it is important that there is some time for students to work with analogue materials as well. We want them to notice the differences between reading paper and digital texts—both the pros and the cons. Because the research is still ongoing around reading and writing digitally, we want to make sure our students are able to fluently move between both.

Providing Access to All Students

Lastly, you will notice as you make your way through these lessons that a majority of them should be accessible to most students. This is by design.

I have a particular passion, developed over years of being an educator and a parent, to make learning accessible to as many students as possible. Luckily, the workshop model is naturally accessible because students always have choice, and we end lessons by reminding students that they have a repertoire of strategies they can choose from. However, if you do not typically use the workshop model or if you are trying it for the first time, this can feel very different from assigning something and expecting that all students will be working on the same goal and activity for an entire class period. The good news is that many of the techniques described in this book that make the lessons accessible are also techniques that can be applied outside of the workshop model.

Since the lessons rely on students' own writing pieces and independent reading texts, the strategies should be applicable to most situations. For lessons with concepts that are particularly challenging, I have included additional scaffolds, such as the following, to offer more access.

- Heavy use of teacher demonstration

- Guided practice whenever appropriate

- Plenty of opportunities for talk, sketching, using manipulatives and other ways of practicing skills

- A strong emphasis on engagement

- Use of multilevel texts

If you or your school employs the Universal Design for Learning Framework, you will find that most of the lessons align well or can be easily aligned with that framework.

How the Book Is Set Up

Each section in this book is set up to support a different part of the writing process.

Part 1: Lessons for Generating Ideas—and Interpreting Author's Purpose. The lessons in this section help you guide students to choose and rehearse their best informational writing ideas alongside interpreting an informational book's purpose in their reading life.

Part 2: Lessons for Drafting—and Understanding Author's Craft. This section contains a variety of techniques for drafting in compelling ways, as well as early front-end revision work paired with

one of the trickiest things for students to understand as readers: an author's craft moves.

Part 3: Lessons for Revising for Power, Craft, Analysis, and Critique. Here, the lessons get meatier as the writing work takes on more importance and students learn to transfer their own choices as writers to the task of judging the choices of the authors whose work they are reading.

Part 4: Lessons to Prepare for Publication and the Scholarly Study of Texts. As you might imagine, these lessons are geared toward teaching students strategies for reflection as both writers and readers. Students see how their final decisions as writers have a direct effect on how their audience takes in their work. They also see how texts can be studied deeply long after they are finished and then use this study to make plans for future reading work.

My Hopes for This Book

First, it is my fondest hope that you and your students will walk away with the deep understanding that strong and aware writers become stronger and more aware readers. It is easy to go through life simply consuming at a surface level, whether it's a quick Internet read or a text from a friend, but when students become aware that producing and consuming are interconnected, they cannot help but look differently—whether critically or appreciatively—at every bit of writing they make or read.

Second, I hope that on both the reading and writing sides of the equation, your students learn to pay more attention to author's intent, craft, and meaning in informational texts. Often, fiction and poetry get all of the love, but there is much to learn about and deepen with information writing, which not only helps us get smarter but also has a unique way of allowing us to view the world through more wondrous, fact-focused eyes.

Third, I hope your students will find themselves regularly transferring the skills they learn from these informational lessons to other subject areas, genres, and situations. Once writers see how much better their reading can be if they make that jump, I want them to make similar connections across their subject areas, disciplines, hobbies, activities, and relationships with the view of what it looks like to be on *both* sides.