

WRITING PICTURE BOOKS:



USING MENTOR TEXTS TO IMPROVE YOUR CRAFT

Introduction: one fave

Reverse Outlining

WHAT is a Mentor Text?

Time to Workshop

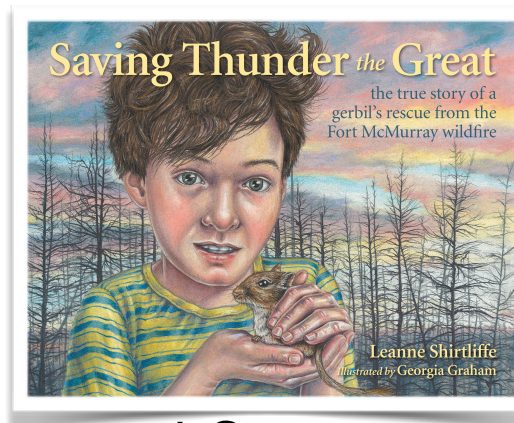
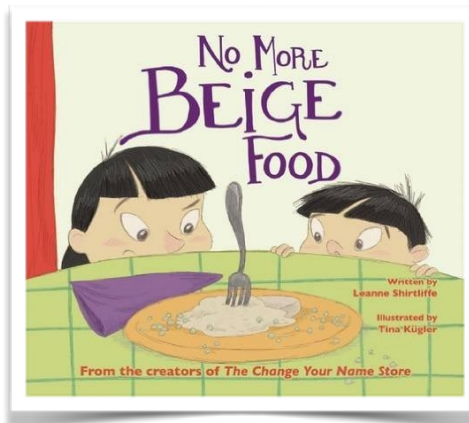
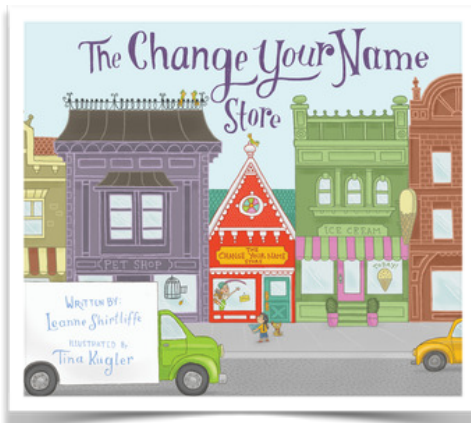
WHY Use Mentor Texts

AWCS Evaluation

WHERE to Find Mentor Texts

Questions (and maybe answers)

HOW to Use Mentor Texts



BY LEANNE SHIRTLIFFE, @LSHIRTLIFFE

INTRODUCTION

**Share your first name and
one favourite picture book
(title or author or genre)**

WHAT IS A MENTOR TEXT?

- It's a recently published text you wish to emulate.
- You do this by rereading and studying them for a specific purpose.

WHY USE A MENTOR TEXT?

- **BASIC:** It helps you find a comparative titles, which an agent and/or publisher may ask you for.
- **ADVANCED:** It is your own self-directed master class in craft.

WHY USE A MENTOR TEXT?

continued

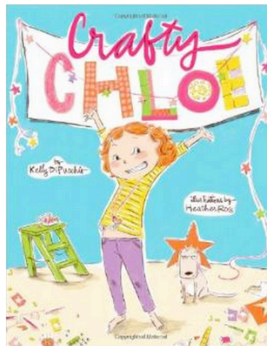
- **Comparative titles (published in past few years)**
 - **proves there is a market**
 - **shows where your book would fit in the market**
 - **shows your book is original**

WHY USE A MENTOR TEXT?

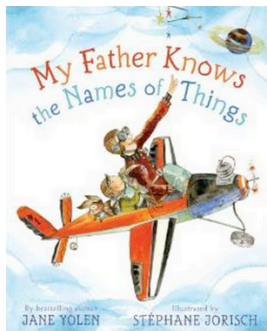
Comparative Titles continued

Competitive Analysis

A number of children's books in the marketplace include sharks, people who are experts in a specific area, or themes of unconditional love. Here is an overview of five of those titles:



Crafty Chloe by Kelli DiPucchio and Elizabeth Ross (Hardcover, 32 pages, \$16.99, Antheneum Readers for Young Books, 2013). Like Stevie in *I LOVE SHARKS TOO*, Chloe is an expert at something—in her case crafts—and this narrative is likewise an encouragement for children to pursue their passions.



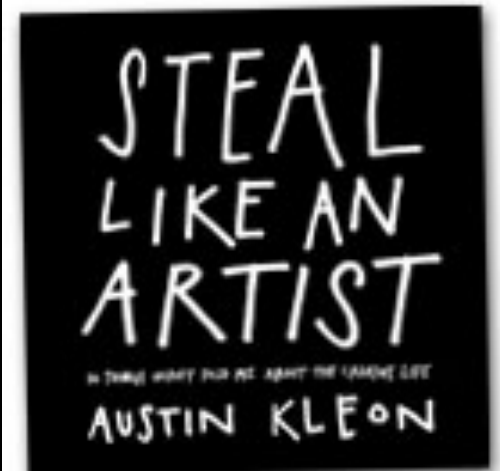
My Father Knows the Names of Things by Jane Yolen and Stéphane Jorisch (Hardcover, 32 pages, \$17.99, Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2010). In Yolen's story, the parent is an expert in obscure nomenclature. In *I LOVE SHARKS TOO*, it is the child, not the parent, who is the expert.

WHY USE A MENTOR TEXT?

A masterclass in writing

GOOD THEFT	VS.	BAD THEFT
HONOR		DEGRADE
STUDY		SKIM
STEAL FROM MANY		STEAL FROM ONE
CREDIT		PLAGIARIZE
TRANSFORM		IMITATE
REMIX		RIP OFF

STEALLIKEANARTIST.COM



WHY USE A MENTOR TEXT?

Deconstruct what works in slow-motion

- Coaches do this all the time
- So do the arts (study Monet, and then try to mimic pointillism or use of a limited palette)

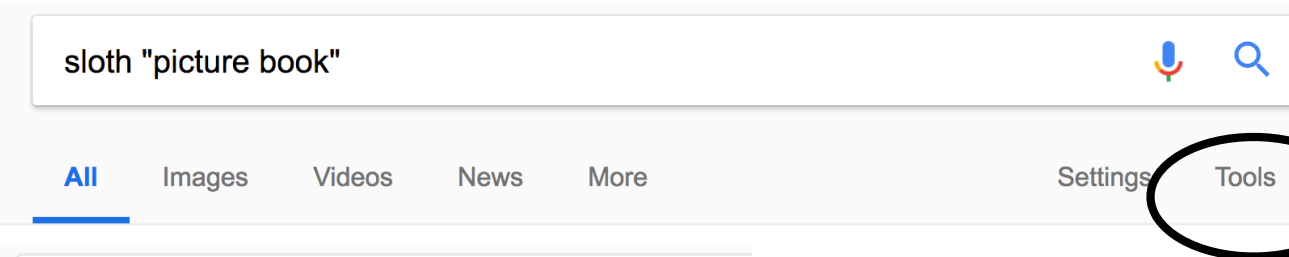


WHERE TO FIND MENTOR TEXTS

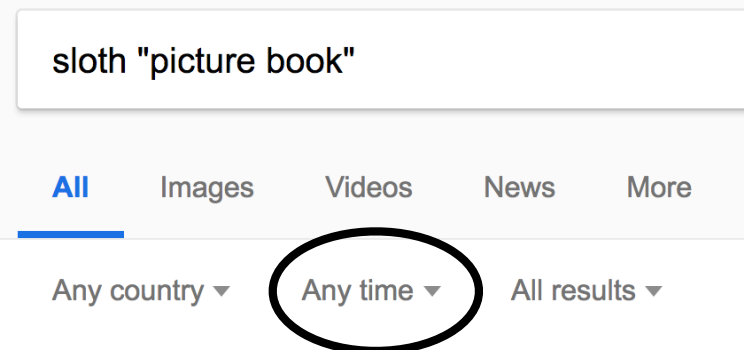
- Ask experts (Twitter, FB KidLit 411 community)
- Browse at bookstores (I highly recommend Owls Nest Books in Britannia or Monkeyshines in Marda Loop).
- Read end-of-year lists published, such as
 - School Library Journal
 - Booklist
 - Canadian Children's Book Centre
 - Betsy Bird's blog (Fuse 8)
 - Publisher's Weekly

WHERE TO FIND MENTOR TEXTS

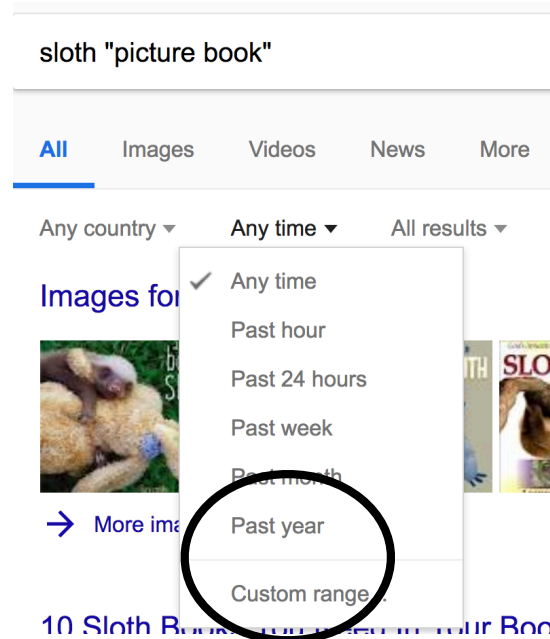
- Search using google, but limit search:



1. Click “Tools”



2. Click “Any time”



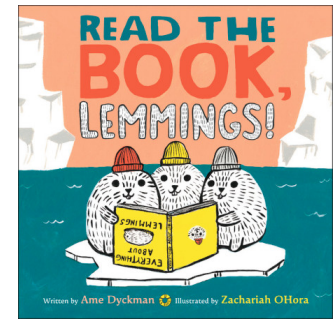
3. Click either
“Past year” or
“Custom range”

WHERE TO FIND MENTOR TEXTS

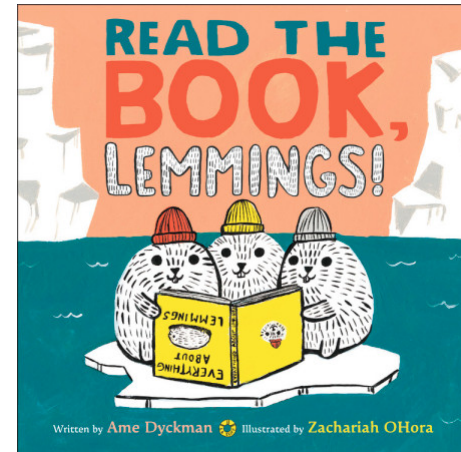
- Ask a librarian, or do an advanced search at your public library (same search principle as Google)
- My search for “How To” picture books at the CPL:

How to Be Friends With A Dragon	Gorbachev, Valeri
How to Lose A Lemur	Preston-Gannon, Frann
How to Train A Train	Eaton, Jason Carter
How to Wash A Woolly Mammoth	Robinson, Michelle
How to Share With A Bear	Pinder, Eric
How to Find A Fox	Magruder, Nilah
How to Surprise A Dad	Reagan, Jean
How to Babysit A Grandma	Reagan, Jean
How to Build A Snow Bear	Pinder, Eric
How to Put Your Parents to Bed	Larsen, Mylisa
How to Be A Dog	Williamson, Jo
How to Bake A Book	Burfoot, Ella
How to Hide A Lion	Stephens, Helen
How to Dress A Dragon	Godin, Thelma Lynne
How to Babysit A Grandpa	Reagan, Jean
How to Eat An Airplane	Pearson, Peter
How to Draw A Dragon	Florian, Douglas
How to Catch A Mouse	Leathers, Philippa
How to Grow A Friend	Gillingham, Sara
How to Cheer up Dad	Koehler, Fred
How to Teach A Slug to Read	Pearson, Susan
How to Behave at A Tea Party	Rosenberg, Madelyn
How to Be A Cat	McClure, Nikki
How to Mend A Heart	Gillingham, Sara
How to Become A Perfect Princess in Five Days	Dubé, Pierrette

OUR SHARED MENTOR TEXT



HOW TO USE MENTOR TEXTS at the global level



- Type it out in Times New Roman 12, double spaced—the industry standard (yes, the whole thing)

READ THE BOOK, LEMMINGS!

Amy Dyckman and Zachariah O'Hara

Foxy found a quiet spot to read his book about lemmings.

"Huh!" Foxy said. "Says here, lemmings don't jump off cliffs."

"Jump? I'll jump!" said a lemming.

"Me too!" said a second.

"Ditto!" said a third.

Geronimo-o-o-o-o-o.

"Huh!" said Captain PB. "Guess they didn't read the book."

Foxy looked.

"Wet! Very wet!" called the first lemming.

"Me too!" called the second.

"Ditto!" called the third.

Foxy sighed. "Sir?" he asked. "May I borrow your bucket?"

"Fine," said Captain PB. "But your lemmings better not eat my fish."

Foxy pulled. Foxy dumped. Foxy gave his lemmings names—and hats—so he could scold them properly.

"Focus, Jumper!" Fox said. "You too, Me Too! Ditto...Ditto!/"

Foxy opened his book. "Read the book, lemmings!"

"Huh!" said the lemmings.

"Exactly!" Foxy said. "The book says you *don't*."

"Don't?" asked Jumper. "Don't what?"

"Jump off cliffs," Foxy said.

"Jump? I'll jump!" said Jumper.

"Me too!" said Me Too.

"Ditto!" said Ditto.

Geronimo-o.

"You know..." said Captain PB. "I don't think they read the book."

"Help! Need help!" called Jumper.

"Me too!" called Me Too.

"Ditto!" called Ditto.

Foxy groaned. "I hate to ask again...."

"Oh take it!" grumbled Captain PB. "My fish already taste like lemmings!"

Foxy dumped the lemmings out a little less gently than before.

"Falling! I'm falling!" said Jumper.

"Me too!" said Me Too.

"Fell!" said Ditto.

"What were you thinking?" Foxy yelled. "The book says you *don't* j—" Foxy stopped. "Just read the book, lemmings."

"Ahhhhhhh!" said the lemmings. They took a look and returned the book.

"Huh!" said Captain PB. "Good thing you didn't say 'jump!'"

"Jump?/"

Geronimo-o-o-o-o-o-o-!

"Nope!" said Captain PB. "They definitely didn't read the book!"

"Sinking! Sinking fast!" cried Jumper.

"Me too!" cried Me Too.

"Glub!" glubbed Ditto.

There was no time to use the bucket.

"Watch my book," Foxy said.

Cannonball!

Foxy scooped. Foxy swam. Foxy flopped.

"Saved! I'm saved!" said Jumper.

"Me too!" said Me Too.

Ditto opened his mouth. "I love you!"

Foxy blinked. "Um, thank you," Foxy said.

"Ditto."

"Question...?" Foxy asked. "Why didn't you read the book, lemmings?!"

"Can't! Can't read!" said Jumper.

"Me neither!" said Me Too.

"I can burp the alphabet!" said Ditto.

"Huh!" said Captain PB. "That's a good start."

"I'll teach you to read, lemmings," Foxy promised.

They practiced reading all afternoon. Until.../

"Lemmings."

"Don't jump."

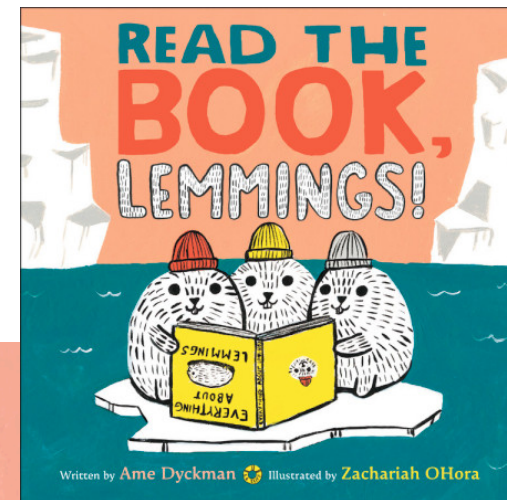
"Off cliffs!"

Foxy finally returned to his reading.

But Captain PB could not. "Where's my paper?"/

"We fly!/"

So this...



Foxy found a quiet spot to read his book about lemmings. "Huh!" Foxy said. "Says here, lemmings *don't* jump off cliffs."

JUMP?
I'LL JUMP!

said a
lemming.

ME TOO!

said a
second.

DITTO!

said a
third.



...becomes this:

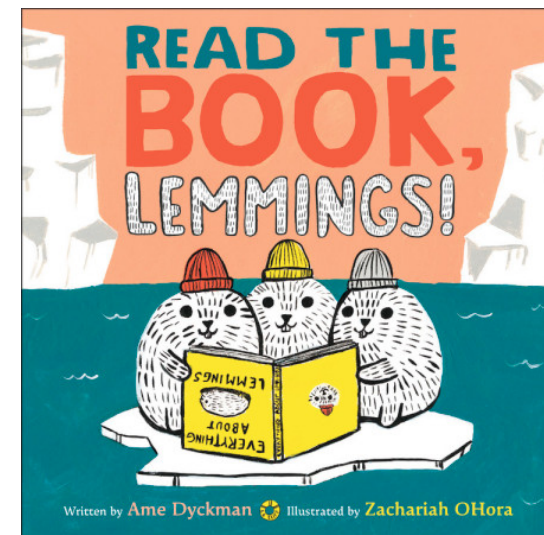
Foxy found a quiet spot to read his book about lemmings.

“Huh!” Foxy said. “Says here, lemmings don’t jump off cliffs.”

“Jump? I’ll jump!” said a lemming.

“Me too!” said a second.

“Ditto!” said a third.



HOW TO USE MENTOR TEXTS for STRUCTURE

POSSIBLE NARRATIVE STRUCTURES

Refer to this handout:

SINGLE SENTENCE	THREE-ACT (ARISTOTLE)	HERO'S JOURNEY	FREYTAG (PYRAMID GUY)	MACON, BEWELL, & VOGT	BLAKE SNYDER (SAVE THE CAT)	SEVEN-SENTENCE STRUCTURE	MATT BIRD
This is the story of _____ who wants to _____ and must overcome/learn _____.	BEGINNING	The Call	Exposition	Somebody	Opening Image	Who, what, where, & when.	An old problem intensifies, a false philosophy, a dangerous opportunity, a false goal is formed
		The Threshold	Initial Incident	Somewhere	Set Up	Balance of life upset. Attempt to fix fails.	
					Catalyst		
					Debate		
	MIDDLE Overcoming obstacles: up the stakes— problem/solve/ new problem/ repeat	Challenges	Rising Action	Wanted	Fun and Games	Second attempt to fix problem.	Try it the easy way (assumptions unquestioned, having fun) Midpoint disaster (loss of safe space) *** Try it the hard way, assumptions questioned, painful lessons (Spiritual Crisis; hard-won power)
		Abyss	Crisis	But	False Victory or False Defeat	Attempt makes situation worse.	
		Revelation & Transformation	Climax	So	Dark Night of the Soul	Third and final attempt to accomplish goal.	
		END	Atonement & Return	Falling Action; Resolution	Then	Finale, problem resolved	

Remembering Freytag's Pyramid:

FREYTAG'S PYRAMID

Climax:

The most suspenseful part of the plot. The turning point for the protagonist's character.

Falling Action:

Three events (or less) that unravel the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist that lead to the resolution.

Rising Action:

Three major events that add suspense or tension to the plot (complications or frustrations) that lead to the climax.

Resolution:

The conflict is resolved and we discover whether the protagonist achieves their goal or not.

Dénouement:

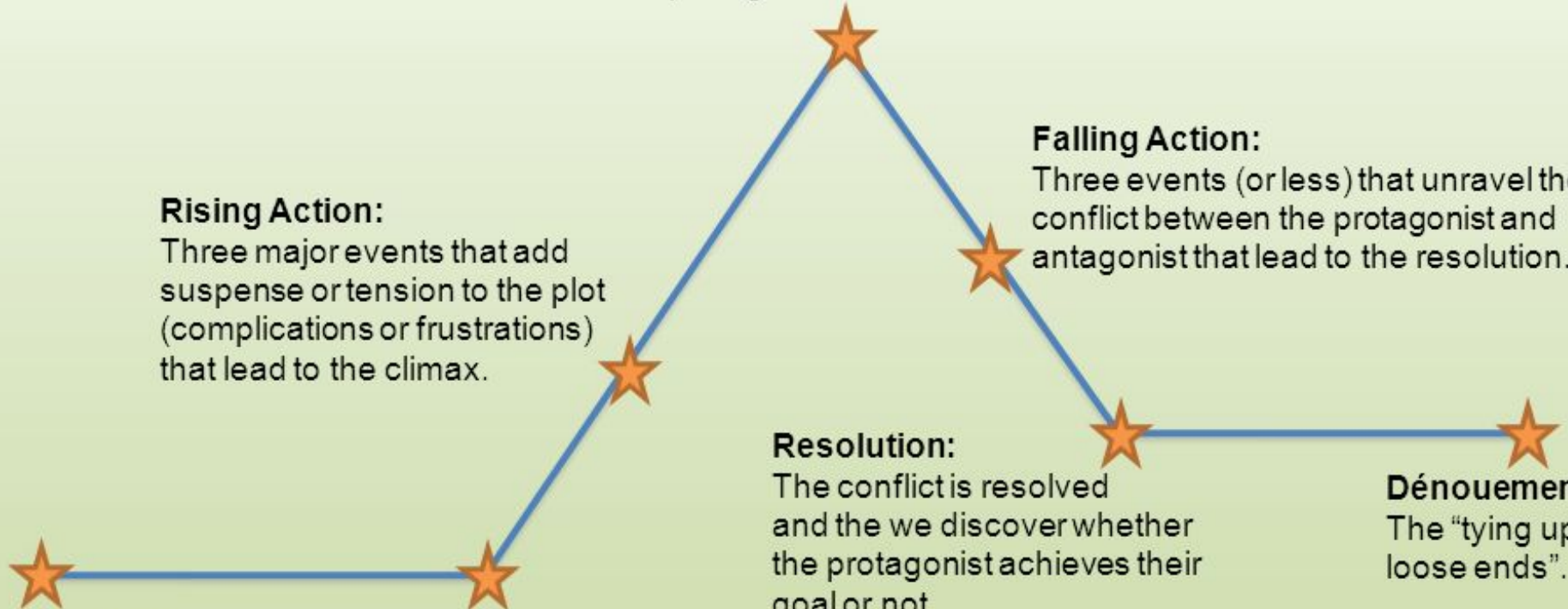
The "tying up of loose ends".

Exposition:

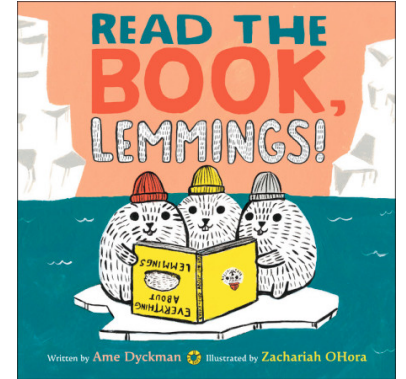
Background information of the plot that includes characters and setting.

Initial Incident:

The very first conflict that occurs in the plot.

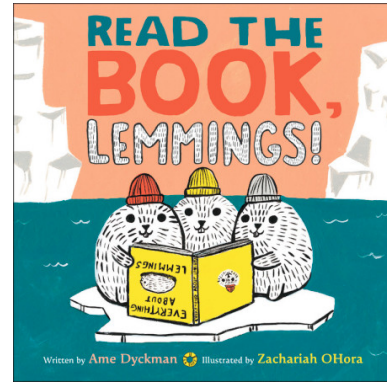


Sample Reverse Outline using Freytag's pyramid



- **EXPOSITION:** All First Mate Foxy wants to do aboard the S.S. Cliff in the Arctic is to read his book, *Everything About Lemmings*.
- **INCITING INCIDENT:** When Foxy reads this fact aloud, “Lemmings don’t jump off cliffs,” the three lemmings jump

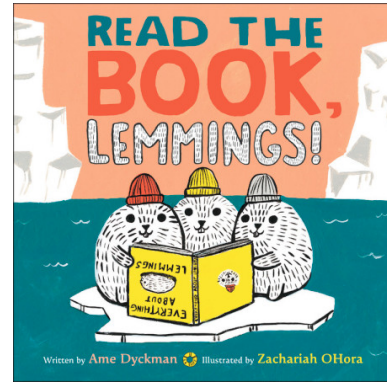
Sample Reverse Outline continued



- **RISING ACTION: (RESCUE 1):** Foxy rescues the lemmings by using a pail, then scolds them, telling them to read the book since they don't jump off cliffs. Upon hearing "jump," they jump overboard.

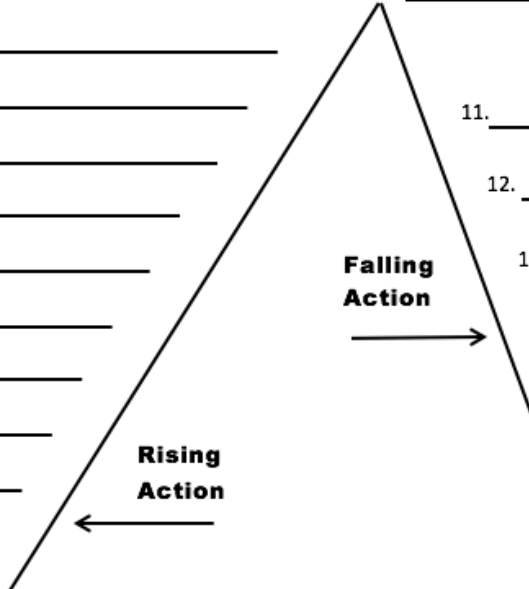
(RESCUE 2): Foxy rescues the lemmings using a crane and a pail, and again tells them to read the book. Captain PB accidentally says "jump," so the lemmings go overboard for a third time.

Sample Reverse Outline continued



- **CLIMAX:** Lemmings are sinking deep into ocean. Foxy jumps in ocean to rescue them (RESCUE 3).
- **FALLING ACTION:** Foxy asks the lemmings WHY they didn't read the book. Lemmings say they don't read. Foxy teaches lemmings to read.
- **RESOLUTION:** They learn to read "Lemmings don't jump off cliffs." They fly off on a paper airplane they've constructed.

Outline handout

Title: _____		This is the story of _____ who wants/desires to _____, but _____ _____	
10. _____		11. _____	
9. _____		12. _____	
8. _____		13. _____	
7. _____		14. _____	
6. _____			
5. _____			
4. _____			
3. _____			
2. _____			
1. _____			
Few Characters: Setting (Time): Setting (Place):		Single Emotional Effect: First Sentence: Satisfying (but not squeaky-clean!) resolution:	

(adapted slightly from KidLitSchool A to Z Revision, run by author Sudipta Bardhan-Quallen)

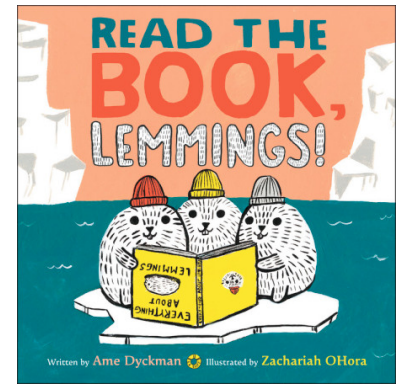
HOW TO USE MENTOR TEXTS at the local level for craft

Choose something you'd like to get better at:

- beginnings/endings
- dialogue
- humour
- voice
- lyrical
- syntax
- page turns
- repetition
- point of view (first/second/
third)
- rule of threes
- escalation of conflict

Reread and study mentor text(s) for that specifically.

How conflict is escalated in *Read the Book, Lemmings!*



WHY LEMMINGS GO OVERBOARD	LEVEL OF DISTRESS	HOW THEY'RE RESCUED
Foxy reads aloud: "Says here, lemmings don't jump off cliffs."	Close together: "Wet! Very wet!" "Me too!" "Ditto!"	A pail lowered by rope.
Foxy scolds them using book, reminding them that lemmings don't "jump off cliffs""	Separated further. "Help! Need help!" "Me too!" "Ditto!"	A pail lowered by crane.
Captain tells Foxy: "Good thing you didn't say 'jump'!"	Deep in ocean. "Sinking! Sinking fast!" "Me too!" "Glub!"	Foxy cannonballs into ocean.

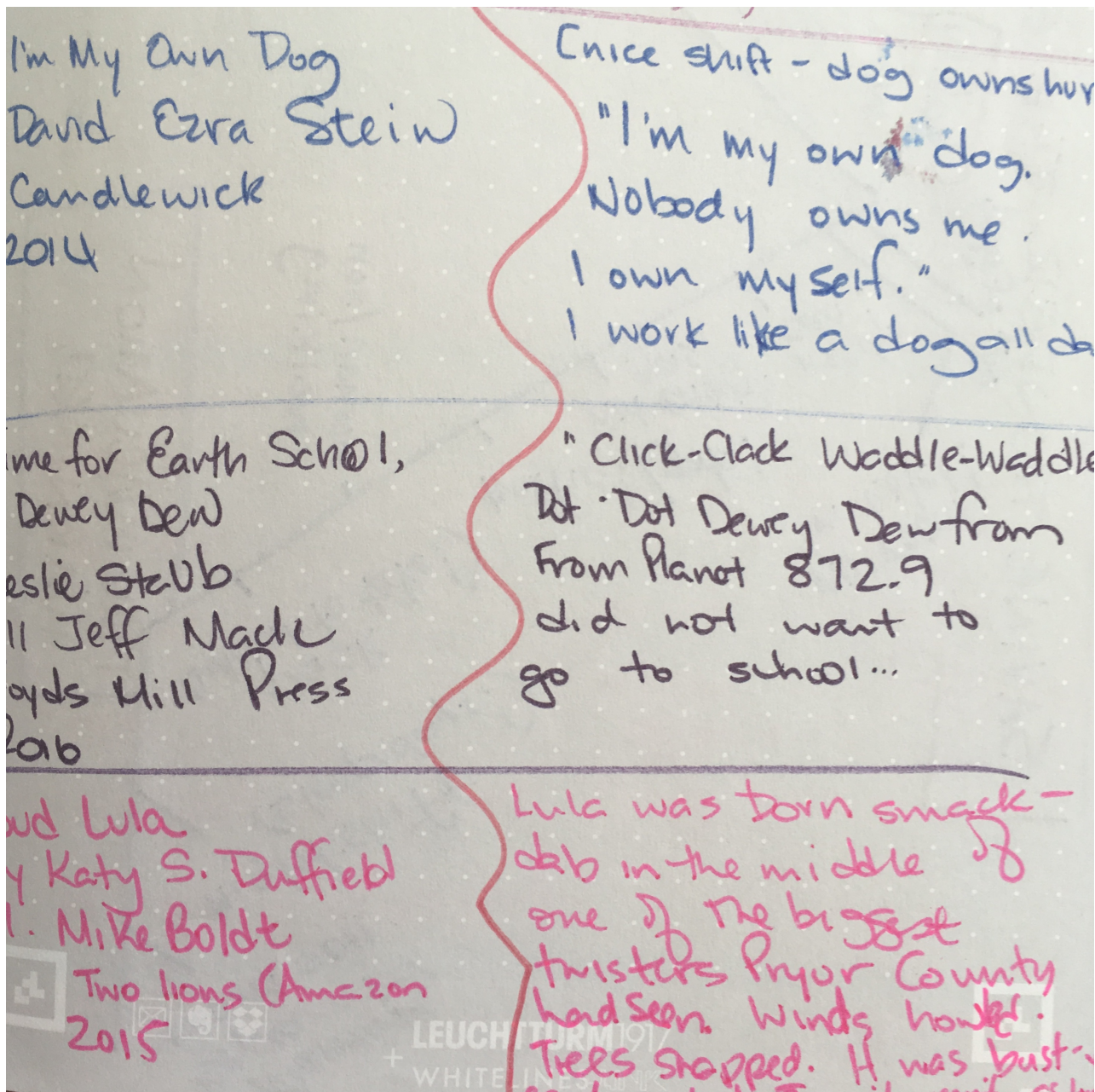
HOW TO USE MENTOR TEXTS

for theme, theme, character:

- Find books with similar TOPICS (e.g. friendship, first day of school, music)
- Find books with similar CHARACTERS (e.g. lemmings, sloths, ninjas, big sisters)
- Find books with similar SETTINGS (e.g. zoo, pirate ship, Arctic)
- Find books with specify STRUCTURES (e.g. full-circle ending, how-to)

Reread and study mentor text(s) for that. Ask: is yours different enough?

MENTOR TEXT EXAMPLE 1



OPENING LINES of Picture Books

MENTOR TEXT EXAMPLE 2

— was good. He liked to —
So when — asked if —,
— volunteered.
— wasn't just —, he was
— tried —
— was difficult
— was worse
— was a compl. disaster
Nothing worked
How could — ?
Luckily, he

Remain —
Do not —
This next part is —.
but they —
If they —,
You would think —
But this is when —
Their —
They want —
Their socks —
Tell yourself —

• If you want to A, first
need to...
• A A is so you can —
And sometimes a A is s
Some As are —

SYNTAX
(i.e. sentence
starters) in how-to
picture book
mentor texts

MENTOR TEXT EXAMPLE 3

WHO IS THE
PROTAGONIST IN
NONFICTION DISASTER
PICTURE BOOKS?

animal Penguin in N.O. = Patience

objective Two Bobbies
van (good language)

child Kenty but "based on" true story
(3rd p.)

A storm called Katrina (1st p.)

story w/ a story 2 Tell a "new story" Ending happy
starts 1st p. 2
story w/ = 3rd p.

MENTOR TEXT EXAMPLE 4

SETTING:

ZOO PICTURE BOOKS

(The original title/idea for
my upcoming
picture book

SLOTH SAVES THE DAY

was

THE ZOO GOES TO SCHOOL)

A SICK DAY FOR AMOS MCGEE (2010) (MC: Amos, an elderly)

- Amos visits animals every day, but ~~when~~ animals come to him when he gets sick. Animals keep his toes warm (penguin), read dark (owl).
- animals leave Sloth - Pat first day
- displaying char.

XANDER'S PANDA PARTY - Linda Sue Park (2013) (MC: Xander)

- 5 panda @ zoo. Decides to invite all bears to her party.

1 ZANY ZOO (No MC)

- Wt animals get up to before when zoo opens
- crazy antics in rhyming quatrains, for each number. (e.g. "2 sporty zebras in goggles + flippers...")

THE ZOO IS CLOSED TODAY! (2014) (MC: John)

- Wn John + Sue arr. @ zoo, it's closed bc animal have colds/sicknesses.
- Wn J + S get sick, animals come to them.
- Rhymes

THE VIEW AT THE ZOO (2011) (MC: Zoo keeper)

- Zookeeper bosses animals around in rhyme telling them to wake up + comb hair
- Then they observe the bizarre human who visits them.

ANIMALS STRIKE AT THE ZOO, IT'S TRUE (2006)

- animals strike @ zoo demands better cond'n (monkey wants pool...)

MENTOR TEXT EXAMPLE 5

How to write in
FIRST PERSON
POINT OF VIEW
(middle grade)

- The sidewalk lined
- The only thing
- Even when I...
- T. knew it was hard...
- But even without
- Her name was misspelled
- We called her parents
- Around adults, T...
- Since T was
- I'd begged Mom.
- The café door flew open
- The night before had...
- It looked as if
- When we took
- Now, every year
- On that calendar is
- Three hundred dollars isn't.
- Our furnace growled
- When A. left for college...
- But I'm not going to let..
- The flowers are back.
- My heart flutters
- The voice startles me.
- He makes a face...
- She's a retired teacher...
- D and his grandma head..
- Another half hour goes
- In Sept, when I...
- It was silly
- This now — is ...
- By the time...
- When I say goodbye
- There's a ting — or
- She opens the door
- In a minute, she...
- When class ends,
- — is —, so early.
- Monday morning...
- The first day back..
- Except for
- Now that — is over
- I figured when
- Before — or I...
- — is gone
- By the time I find
- As I settle in —
- My shirt's ironed
- As I get to —'s
- — lives by the
- It takes only —
- How can she...?
- Ms — holds 2...
- The first 2 m

MENTOR TEXT EXAMPLE 6

PACING:

The opening sentences
of CHAPTERS in first-
person POV
middle grade novels

"I'm thinking of —," I tell Mom + Dad a
breakfast the next morning."
"A's riding back to — with —, so early Mon
morning, she + Dad..."
"When I get home, Dad's dumping..."
"It's a week and a half before..."
"On Friday, I stay after school."
"School drags by on Monday."
"Mrs M's car is at D's house I like
every other —."
"By Thurs, I'm starting to think."
"When you're in English class —,
easy to —."
"So what ... " — says as we ..."
"All through school on Tues..."
"When we get home, Mom ..."
"After I finish my hw..."
"If you focus really hard..."
"The — scatter wh we pull into
— ..."
"That's —," — says, and I don't
know what to say back."
I wasn't looking forward to...
The next day, —

MENTOR TEXT EXAMPLE 7

How to write in the
VOICE of an 11 year old
(watch tween
YouTubers!)

I'm not talking about _ because
The thing I'm talking about
It annoys me when people..
Only in _____ have I ~~have~~ e
Bro...
This one dude commented...
Guess what.
Because I'm a girl... people
Make sure
Drop a like...
If you think I'm cool
or want to smash you
I don't know
I freaking love school
The switch to _____ really su
I was used to being reall
Tied to the same desk for 7 h
Anytime I'm _____, you

WORKSHOP TIME

1. Decide what you're looking for in a mentor text:

- structure
- manuscript set-up
- opening lines
- endings
- rule of 3
- dialogue
- endings
- humour
- lyrical
- specific character type / setting / theme / occasion
- point of view

2. Read, reread, study, analyze, take notes: “steal like an artist!”

QUESTIONS?

(and possibly answers)

My contact info:

Shirtliffe, Leanne AUTHOR	
LeanneShirtliffe.com WEBSITE	
DATE OUT	BOOK TITLE
MAY 2013	<i>Don't Lick the Minivan</i>
MAY 2014	<i>The Change Your Name Store</i>
NOV 2014	<i>Mommyfests</i>
JAN 2016	<i>No More Beige Food</i>
OCT 2016	<i>Saving Thunder the Great</i>
JUN 2017	<i>I Love Sharks, Too</i>
LEANNESHIRTLIFFE@GMAIL.COM	

*Don't forget to fill in an evaluation for AWCS

Upcoming AWCS workshops (summer picture book series):

- July 23: Strategies for Revising Picture Books
- July 30: Writing in Rhyme