Sample Mentor Texts to Teach Writing Grades 9-12

Ralph Fletcher explains that mentor texts are, "...any texts 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 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 Culhum

*The following cards can be printed back to back and placed on a ring to be left at a guided reading table for discussion and writing to respond to text activities.
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**Sample 9th-12th 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument Texts</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Book of Bad Arguments</strong> by Ali Almossawi</td>
<td>Here are cogent explanations of the straw man fallacy, 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commentaries</strong> by Leonard Pitts</td>
<td>Leonard Pitts is a columnist for the Miami Herald and won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for commentary. <a href="http://www.miamiherald.com/living/columnists/leonard-pitts/story/1176645.html">www.miamiherald.com/living/columnists/leonard-pitts/story/1176645.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Song: Where is the Love</strong> by the Black Eyed Peas</td>
<td>Using the song Where is the Love by the Black Eyed Peas (and Excuse Me Mr. by Ben Harper) students will see how the words to the song conveys injustices that exist in our world. Ultimately, student writers could compose an essay/song or poem based on a persuasive argument using the song as a model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>George Bellows: Painter With A Punch</strong> by Robert Burleigh, Paintings by George Bellows</td>
<td>When students need a model for what an opposing viewpoint looks like, this biography of artist George Bellows would be ideal to study. There are other argumentative writing benefits to be mined from the text as well, such as critical reviews of Bellow’s work, which are opinion based and show the development of a strong review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Encounter</strong> by Jane Yolen</td>
<td>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. Years later the boy, now an old man, looks back at the destruction of his people and their culture by the colonizers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nobody Particular: One Woman’s Fight to Save the Bays</strong> by Molly Bang</td>
<td>This unassuming, working-class mom, a fourth-generation East Texas shrimper—turned her life upside down to fight against chemical plants that were destroying her livelihood and the bays she held dear. This comic-book-style biography of unlikely activist Diane Wilson follows her radical transformation, from the first days of pulling up nothing in her nets to her hunger strike, law suits, and run-ins with the EPA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Driving While Distracted (a political cartoon)</strong></td>
<td>Political cartoons are opinion pieces. They’re a rich resource for classrooms to understand how to convey a point of view with pictures and very few words. <a href="http://www.englishblog.com/2009/10/cartoons-for-the-classroom-distracted-driving.html#VOFTA_nF8c">http://www.englishblog.com/2009/10/cartoons-for-the-classroom-distracted-driving.html#VOFTA_nF8c</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>50 Successful Harvard Application Essays</strong> by Harvard Crimson</td>
<td>You’ve been told a million times how selective and random the college process is, how the personal essay is your one chance to speak directly to admissions officers and sway them in your favor. You have to be entertaining, persuasive, and passionate, while effectively conveying your personality, character, and ideals. And you only have five hundred words to accomplish this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The House That Crack Built</strong> by Clark Taylor</td>
<td>With a beat reminiscent of hip hop or rap music, a well-known nursery rhyme is brilliantly transformed into a powerful poem about the tragic problem of illegal drugs and its victims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arguably, Essays</strong> by Christopher Hutchins</td>
<td>Here, Hutchins supplies fresh perceptions of such figures as varied as Charles Dickens, Karl Marx, Rebecca West, George Orwell, J.G. Ballard, and Philip Larkin are matched in brilliance by his pungent discussions and intrepid observations, gathered from a lifetime of traveling and reporting from such destinations as Iran, China, and Pakistan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Just a Dream</strong> by Chris Van Allsburg</td>
<td>Walter is a litterbug who does not appreciate the beauty of nature, or understand his role in keeping the planet healthy... until a fantastic journey shows him the tragic fate that could befall Earth if humans like him are not more careful. Walter’s actions really helping his planet along the road to destruction, or is it all just a dream?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Mary Celeste</strong> by Jane Yolen</td>
<td>The Mary Celeste 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. Use the text to create an argument or thesis for what really happened.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Websites with Reviews**

- [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)
- [www.procon.org](http://www.procon.org)
Sample 9th–12th 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 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:

Sample 9th-12th 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informative/Explanatory Text</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monumental Verses by J. Patrick Lewis</td>
<td>Poetry is a “wonderful vehicle to deliver information with a powerful voice.” This is a book of poems about timeless monuments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Feel Better When There Is a Frog in My Throat: History’s Strangest Cures by Carlyn Beccia</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls Think of Everything: Stories Of Ingenious Inventions by Women by Catherine Thimmesh</td>
<td>In kitchens and living rooms, in garages and labs and basements, even in converted chicken coops, women and girls have invented ingenious innovations that have made our lives simpler and better. Their creations are some of the most enduring (the windshield wiper) and best loved (the chocolate chip cookie). What inspired these women, and just how did they turn their ideas into realities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles of the Week</td>
<td>Kelly Gallagher has collected a number of articles from newspapers that can be used as mentor texts. [<a href="http://www.kellygallagher.org/article-of-the-week/">http://www.kellygallagher.org/article-of-the-week/</a>]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank You Notes by Jimmy Fallon</td>
<td>Jimmy Fallon expresses his gratitude for everything from the light bulb he’s too lazy to replace to the F12 button on his computer’s keyboard. He thanks microbreweries for making his alcoholism seem like a neat hobby. He addresses some 200 subjects in need of his undying “gratitude.” Each page will feature one note and a photograph of its author.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball by Kadir Nelson</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Story of the Statue of Liberty by Pegi Deitz Shea</td>
<td>The Statue of Liberty stands as a powerful symbol of freedom to all. But what is her story? How did she come to be?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat This Not That by David Zinczenko</td>
<td>The revolutionary concept that the battle of the bulge is won not through deprivation and discipline, but by making a series of simple food swaps that can save you hundreds – if not thousands – of calories a day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cookbooks, Newspapers, Travel Guides, Internet Sites, etc.</td>
<td>A number of “real-world” texts are excellent examples of informative/explanatory texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dangerous Book for Boys by Conn and Hal Iggulden</td>
<td>The book is a collection of expository writing intended to teach boys skills to keep from being bored. The book’s text explains how to identify things in nature, tie knots, fold paper boats and hats, and countless other tasks that all boys should learn to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malala Yousafzai: Warrior with Words by Karen Leggett Abouraya</td>
<td>The inspiring, true story of Malala Yousafzai, a young Pakistani girl who stands up and speaks out for every child’s right to education. Though she and two of her schoolmates were targeted by a Taliban gunman, a life-threatening injury only strengthened her resolve. Malala spoke at the U.N. on her 16th birthday in 2013, nine months after she was shot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Ferris and His Wheel by Kathryn Gibbs Davis</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emails, Technical Manuals, Directions etc.</td>
<td>Technical Writing is writing that all students will need to use in any career. Find real world technical texts to bring into the classroom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sample 9th–12th 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 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 visualize 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?

Resource questions were adapted from:
Sample 9th–12th 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.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Narrative Mentor Texts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced by Nujood Ali and Delphine Minoui</td>
<td>Nujood obtained her freedom—an extraordinary achievement in Yemen, where almost half of all girls are married under the legal age. Nujood's courageous defiance of both Yemeni customs and her own family has inspired other young girls in the Middle East to challenge their marriages. Her story is an unforgettable story of tragedy, triumph, and courage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesdays with Morrie by Mitch Albom</td>
<td>Tuesdays with Morrie is a memoir by American writer Mitch Albom. Maybe it was a grandfather, or a teacher, or a colleague. Someone older, patient and wise, who understood you when you were young and searching, helped you see the world as a more profound place, gave you sound advice to help you make your way through it. For Mitch Albom, that person was Morrie Schwartz, his college professor from nearly twenty years ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Boy on the Wooden Box: How the Impossible Became Possible . . . on Schindler's List by Leon Leyson</td>
<td>Leon Leyson (born Leib Lezjon) was only ten years old when the Nazis invaded Poland and his family was forced to relocate to the Krakow ghetto. With incredible luck, perseverance, and grit, Leyson was able to survive the sadism of the Nazis, due to the generosity and cunning of one man, a man named Oskar Schindler.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oh the Places You’ll Go by Dr. Seuss</td>
<td>From soaring to high heights and seeing great sights to being left in a Lurch on a prickly perch, Dr. Seuss addresses life’s ups and downs with his trademark humorous verse and illustrations, while encouraging readers to find the success that lies within.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milkweed by Jerry Spinelli</td>
<td>Chapter 1 of Milkweed After discussing memories and memoir writing by discussing chapter one of Milkweed by Jerry Spinelli, students can plan their own memoirs based on a specific memory from their past or current life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes by Eleanor Coerr</td>
<td>Japanese legend holds that if a person who is ill makes a 1,000 paper cranes, the gods will grant that person's wish to be well again. Beautiful illustrations by Caldecott-medalist Ed Young enhance the story of Sadako, a young girl dying of leukemia as a result of the atom bombing of Hiroshima.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confessions of a Former Bully by Ken Mochizuki</td>
<td>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 bullyier rather than the bullied, Confessions of a Former Bully provides kids with real life tools they can use to identify and stop relational aggression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore by William Joyce</td>
<td>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 a story that we truly celebrate—and this story, no matter how you tell it, begs to be read again and again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The One and Only Ivan by Katherine Applegate</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball Saved Us by Ken Mochizuki</td>
<td>Narrative story of a boy’s family’s move to and time in a Japanese internment camp during World War II. Carries reader through time when baseball unified the group and offered opportunity for personal growth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Websites that have sample texts:
www.poetryfoundation.org
www.achievethecore.org

The Poetry Foundation houses many resources along with free texts for teacher use. Achieve the Core houses a tool called The Anthology Alignment Project that not only has free texts but teaching resources as well.
Sample 9th–12th 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 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?

**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: