



# Using Reading to Improve Writing

by LISA EICKHOLDT, Ph.D.

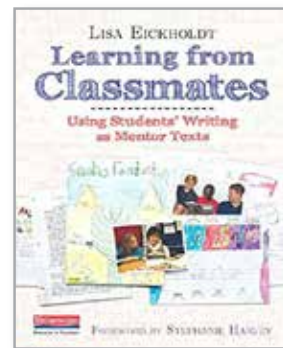
*Reading and writing are two halves of the same whole. Studying mentor texts with kids can dramatically improve their writing.*



## LITERACY CHAMPION: LISA EICKHOLDT

Lisa Eickholdt has spent over twenty-five years in education, teaching students and supporting teachers. Lisa is currently Associate Professor of Literacy Education at Georgia Gwinnett College. She also works as a literacy consultant in classrooms across the United States. Lisa

is the author of [\*Learning From Classmates: Using Students' Writing as Mentor Texts\*](#) (Heinemann, 2015). Her first book with Stenhouse on Writing Clubs will be released later this year. Lisa's second book with Heinemann, on writing minilessons, will be released in spring of 2022. When she's not teaching you can find her with her nose buried in a good book. You can follow Lisa on Twitter [@LisaEickholdt](#).



## One to Know: Why Mentor Texts Matter

One key to effective instruction is to provide students with a clear model. This is true in all subject areas, but especially writing. To this end, it is imperative that parents and teachers are the “lead reader” in their homes and classrooms. In this capacity, they spend time reading widely to keep abreast of the latest publications. This role is critical for many reasons, but in regard to writing, it aids in their ability to locate great books to use as mentor texts.

## What to Do: Analyze the Texts

Recognizing the beauty in a piece of literature is a great first step; however, teaching with a mentor text requires a deeper understanding. We must understand what makes the writing good so that we can articulate this to students. When we read a piece that we are contemplating using as a mentor text, we first consider what we notice, or what strikes us about it. Once we determine what it is we like about the piece, we need to name this writing quality. Naming is critical to teaching: when we name something, we make it repeatable. In addition to noticing and naming the beautiful qualities in a piece of writing, I believe we also need to consider how a particular writing technique helps a piece. We will want to explain to students why they might want to use a particular technique and make a note of why it works. I call this three-step process: notice, name, and note.

## More to Know and Do: Consider Student Mentor Texts

Children's literature is so powerful that it has become the primary source we turn to when teaching a new writing technique or strategy. In addition to using children's literature, I believe there is another type of writing that we should consider—writing that I call student mentor text. Student mentor text is beautiful writing by the underused experts in our lives: kids. The same three-step protocol of noticing, naming, and noting may be used to discover beautiful student mentor texts. An added advantage of using student writing is that kids are very engaged when studying their peers' work.

### How to Reach Lisa Eickholdt

Email: [leickholdt@gmail.com](mailto:leickholdt@gmail.com)

Twitter: [@LisaEickholdt](https://twitter.com/LisaEickholdt)