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## Literacy Focus

<input type="checkbox"/> Before Reading	<input type="checkbox"/> Fluency
<input type="checkbox"/> During Reading	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Comprehension
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> After Reading	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Writing
	<input type="checkbox"/> Oral Language

## Modeled Writing

A good way for students to reflect upon or extend new information is to use it to create a new text. However, some students find it difficult to write about what they know in traditional types of writing assignments, either because these assignments are not particularly motivating, or students are uncertain about how to get their thoughts on paper. The difficulties associated with academic writing often mask what students actually know and prevent students from realizing that writing is a way of thinking more about a topic. As Kirby, Kirby, and Liner (2004) put it, "Somehow students get the notion that the form of what they have to say takes precedence over *what* [italics added] they say—that is, over content" (p. 196).

Books and other texts with unique and distinctive formats often provide good models and scaffolds for student writing (Fisher & Frey, 2003). The idea behind modeled writing is to take new information gained from one context (e.g., reading, listening to a lecture, watching a movie, conducting an experiment) and transform it into a brand-new text, using an already published or existing text as a model for style and format.

### STEP-BY-STEP

For modeled writing to be useful, students need access to a wide variety of books. From there, they need permission to use the structures they find in the books in their own writing. Beginning with a class discussion on the difference between plagiarism and modeled writing is helpful. Once these two steps have been completed, the use of modeled writing can be directly taught and encouraged.

1. Select a favorite text and read it aloud to students.
2. Show students the specific structures that the author used to create the text. This can be common text structures such as cause and effect or problem/solution or styles such as naming three items separated by commas.
3. Ask students to use the model and write their own pieces. Provide time for students to share their writing and reinforce that there is a wide range of writing possible from any given model.
4. Using sentence frames that you've created, encourage students to complete the writing. A sample frame, with a focus on the genre of fantasy, may read:

I was walking home when \_\_\_\_\_. I couldn't believe it! I was actually seeing \_\_\_\_\_.  
There they/it were/was. As I turned the corner, I \_\_\_\_\_. And then, \_\_\_\_\_. But that's  
not the end. Later, \_\_\_\_\_.

## APPLICATION AND EXAMPLES

After reading *Next Stop Neptune: Experiencing the Solar System* (Jenkins, 2004), Natasha decided to write what she learned about the planet Mars. Rather than having her write a traditional descriptive paragraph in which she would get caught up in the mechanics of writing, Natasha's science teacher helped her keep content at the forefront by providing a range of models for her writing. This student decided that Henry Cole's *I Took a Walk* (1998) would help her write about Mars, even though it dealt with a topic that differed from *Next Stop Neptune*. In this simple-to-read, but content-rich picture book, the narrator details his journey through the woods, into a meadow, and by a stream, stopping at each point to list his observations:

I sat quietly at the edge of the pond and peered through the tall cattails. I saw . . . a grebe on her nest, a heron, whirligig beetles, a bluegill, tree swallows, a rail, a painted turtle, a damselfly, a marsh wren's nest, yellow iris, a dragonfly, a minnow, water lilies. (pp. 19–20)

Because much of what she read about Mars was descriptive in nature, Natasha felt this pattern was a good fit for her writing that would make it easy to share what she knew. She wrote the following short piece:

### I took a walk on Mars

One spring morning, I took a walk on Mars.

I sat on a rock, and I saw . . .

Red, dusty soil

Craters

A big chasm called Valles Marineris

The Mars Rover

And the largest volcano on any planet

For Natasha, an inexperienced writer, this was the perfect scaffold. Modeled writing is particularly useful for crafting short pieces that highlight content, but it can also be used for writing longer texts (e.g., journal entry, memoir, newspaper article). The key to making models useful is to find texts that lend themselves to the content under consideration. Also, picture books in particular are good models because they often contain simple structures that inexperienced readers and writers would find both accessible and nonintimidating. Table 19.1 provides some additional examples of texts that can be used as models and that suit a range of topics.

**Table 19.1** Modeled Writing Book List

Book	Format/Uses
Gordon, S. (2004). <i>Guess what changes?</i> New York: Benchmark Books.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive hints on each page that lead to "Who am I?" (Answer: A butterfly)</li> <li>• Good model for describing a person (e.g., Andy Warhol), an event (e.g., Boxer Rebellion), a place (e.g., Japan), a concept (e.g., Pythagorean theorem), or a phenomenon (e.g., volcanic eruption).</li> </ul>
Dunphy, M. (1999). <i>Here is the African Savannah.</i> New York: Hyperion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cumulative text describing the relationships among plants and animals of the African Savannah.</li> <li>• Good model for writing about cycles (e.g., food chain) or sequences of events (e.g., connected events leading up to American Revolution).</li> </ul>

*Continued*

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Table 19.1 *continued*

Book	Format/Uses
Leedy, L. (1993). <i>Postcards from Pluto: A tour of the solar system</i> . New York: Holiday House.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Series of postcards sent home from a group of kids on a trip to the solar system; includes details of what they learned.</li> <li>• Student-authored texts might include, for example, <i>Postcards from the Oregon Trail</i>, <i>Postcards from a WWII Concentration Camp</i>, <i>Postcards from the Mojave Desert</i>, and so on.</li> </ul>
Wright-Frierson, V. (1998). <i>An island scrapbook: Dawn to dusk on a barrier island</i> . New York: Aladdin.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mix of narrative text, labeled sketches, lists, and observations.</li> <li>• Student-authored texts might include, for example, <i>A Japanese Internment Camp Scrapbook</i>, <i>A Metropolitan Museum Scrapbook</i>, <i>An Ellis Island Scrapbook</i>, and so forth.</li> </ul>
Janeczko, P. B. (2001). <i>A poke in the I: A collection of concrete poems</i> . Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each poem is written in the shape of the poem's topic (e.g., poem about an Eskimo Pie written in that shape).</li> <li>• Good model for writing about the concrete and visual (e.g., octagon, saxophone, kidney).</li> </ul>
Stamaty, M. A. (2004). <i>Alia's mission: Saving the books of Iraq</i> . New York: Knopf.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• True story told in comic strip/graphic format.</li> <li>• Good model for students with artistic strengths. Drawings serve as scaffolds for writing.</li> </ul>
Avery, P. (2003). <i>Letters from Korea: A story of the Korean War</i> . Kimberling City, MO: River Road Press.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fictional letters based on real people, events, and photographs.</li> <li>• Good model for writing firsthand accounts of events (e.g., Battle of Bull Run), phenomena (flood), or specific conditions (e.g., quality of Depression-era life).</li> </ul>

## References

- Cole, H. (1998). *I took a walk*. New York: Greenwillow Books.
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2003). Writing instruction for struggling adolescent readers: A gradual release model. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 46, 396–407.
- Jenkins, A. (2004). *Next stop Neptune: Experiencing the solar system*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Kirby, D., Kirby, D. L., & Liner, T. (2004). *Inside out: Strategies for teaching writing* (3rd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.