

GLOSSARY OF WRITING CRAFTS

Compiled by Rob Sanders

-A-

Alliteration—repetition of sounds in two or more stressed syllables (also see: *Assonance* and *Consonance*). See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/03/alliteration-and-asonancefabulous-fun.html>.

Antagonist—a character who is opposed to, struggles against, or competes with the protagonist (main character). Not only might the main character have a human antagonist, he/she might also have to fight against an internal struggle, the weather or another force of nature, and so on.

Anthropomorphism—giving human characteristics to non-human things, usually animals. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/06/anthropomorphic-main-characters.html>.

Assonance—takes place when two or more words close to one another repeat the same vowel sound but start with different consonant sounds. Examples: We light fire on the mountain; I feel deressed and restless; Go and mow the lawn. Sometimes called *vowel rhyme*. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/03/alliteration-and-asonancefabulous-fun.html>.

Attempts/Failures—refers to the main character's/protagonist's attempts to solve his/her problem. The attempts/failures make up the rising action of the story. Often each attempt is funnier, bigger, or more dramatic than the one before, and each often ends with a more spectacular, hilarious, or gut-wrenching failure. The attempts/failures help us relate to and bond with the main character.

Attributes—describing the qualities and/or characteristics of people, places, things, ideas, and objects. Attributes could include size, color, shape, movement/action, symmetry, texture, number, composition, smell, taste, function, location, habitat, direction, orientation, temperature, weight, age, and so on. Attributes are more than adjectives. Attributes seek to describe with details, while adjectives are usually used to merely list characteristics. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/02/forget-adjectives-think-attributes.html>.

-B-

Backstory—the events that occur before, lead up to, or precede the actual plot of the story. Most backstory is not needed in order for the story to be told. (But the backstory may be necessary for the writer to know in order to write the story.) Only tell the backstory information that is essential for the plot; and that moves the plot forward.

Board book—a type of book printed on thick paperboard. The paperboard is printed and used for both the cover and the interior pages. Board books are durable and intended for young

children. Some board books are written specifically for board book publication, others are concept books, and many others are reprints of existing picture books.

-C-

Character—an individual (usually a human) in a story. Characters can be animals (see: *Anthropomorphism*); or objects (see: *Personification*).

Character-driven story—describes stories where the emphasis is on characterization, inner conflict, and relationships. Such stories can have a goal that is more internal, such as changing an attitude or becoming something.

Circular ending—ending the story in the same way that you began it, or ending where you began. For instance, with the same onomatopoeia, same phrase, same details, and so on. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/02/effective-endings.html>.

Climax—the turning point of the story that leads to a change either for the better or for the worse for the protagonist. In a comedy (and in most picture books), the protagonist positively faces his obstacles and there is a great chance that things will turn out well.

Concept—the general notion or idea behind a piece of writing.

Concept book—a special type of picture book and a very common format for toddlers and younger children. A concept book explores a concept (colors, numbers, shapes, spirals in nature, and so on) rather than telling a story. In a way, concept books are nonfiction for the very young.

Conflict—the problem/situation the protagonist/main character must face/deal with and overcome.

Consonance—repetitive sounds produced by consonants within a sentence or phrase. This repetition often takes place in quick succession such as in *pitter-patter*. The words *chuckle*, *fickle*, and *kick* have a common interior consonant sound (/ck/). Consonance is used in both poetry and prose.

Conventions—commonly accepted rules of edited American English (e.g., spelling, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and sentence structure).

Cover letter—a letter that accompanies a manuscript submission. Since picture book writers usually submit their entire manuscript, they often use cover letters more than query letters.

-D-

Dark moment of the soul/Dark moment—the culmination of the rising action when the protagonist/main character has tried repeatedly to solve his/her problem and failed every time, and all hope now seems lost. The dark moment precedes the climax.

Defining terms in context—defining a word within the context of writing. For instance: *The Smack Down, an exciting wrestling event, occurs once a month at the arena.* OR *That yellow flowering shrub is a forsythia.*

Defining terms in parentheses—this technique can add sentence variety while also providing a definition. For instance: *The in-the-park homerun (a homerun where the ball never leaves the playing field) won the game.*

Denouement—the final resolution of the intricacies of a plot. The *ah-h-h-h* moment at the end of a story. The denouement may also be an unexpected twist or surprise.
See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/07/heart-gravitas-denouement.html>.

Dialogue (purposeful)— dialogue that moves the action of the story forward, adds details, gives insight into characters, and so on. Writers should avoid chit-chat or he-said-she-said writing with long sections of dialogue. A good rule of thumb is to insert action or details between each exchange of dialogue. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/dialogue-vs-voice.html> and <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/dialogue-tags.html>.

Draft—preliminary version of a piece of writing that may need editing and revision of details, organization, and conventions.

Dummy—a mock-up of a book that allows the writer to place text (and sometimes the illustrations) into place in order to examine the flow of the story. A dummy can also help a writer see if page turns are working, on which pages text might be too heavy, and/or if any part of the story is getting too much or too little attention. See:
<http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/its-all-about-dummy-dummy.html>

-E-

Edit—to correct or “clean up” a draft. Usually includes correcting spelling, word usage, capitalization, and punctuation.

Explode the moment— this type of writing has been described by Barry Lane in his books *The Revisers Tool Box* and *After the End*. Think of how a snapshot freezes a moment in time with all the details of that moment captured for all to see. NOTE: This technique is also called Snapshot Writing.

Exposition—the introduction of a manuscript that presents the setting (time and place), characters (protagonist and antagonist), and the basic conflict; it also establishes the mood or atmosphere of the story.

-F-

Falling (descending) action— coming just after the climax and before the conclusion, the falling action signifies that the main action is over, the climax has come, and the story is heading towards the end. All loose ends in the story need to be wrapped up during the falling action.

Figurative language—language used to produce images in readers’ minds and to express ideas in fresh, vivid, and imaginative ways. The opposite of *literal language*, figurative language requires the reader to do more “figuring out” to understand the writer’s meaning. Figurative language may include similes, metaphors, hyperbole, alliteration, personification, idioms, onomatopoeias, and so on.

Focus—staying focused on one central idea and excluding extraneous information.

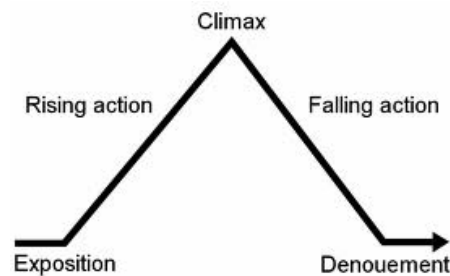
Foot—the basic unit of metric measurement; number of stressed beats per line.

Foreshadowing—to show or indicate beforehand.

Forward momentum—the feeling that a plot is pulling the readers forward, causing them to turn pages and continue to read.

Freytag’s Pyramid—a dramatic structure diagram showing rising action on the left side of the pyramid, up to the apex (which represents the climax), and falling action on the right side of the pyramid leading to the conclusion and denouement of the story.

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/10/dramatic-structurefreytags-pyramid.html>.



-G-

Golden thread—a technique where a recurring theme, phrase, or set of words flows throughout a piece of writing. The thread helps “tie” together the writing and gives a feeling of completeness. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/02/golden-thread.html>.

-H-

Hyperbole—an exaggeration or extravagant statement or figure of speech that is not intended to be taken literally (such as: *The pizza was so hot it burned my tongue off!*)

-I-

Idiom—a figure of speech in which the meaning cannot be understood simply from the actual meaning of the words (for instance: *Keep tabs on him.* OR *It’s raining cats and dogs.*).

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/03/idioms-familiar-wise-and-fun-sayings.html>.

Insider vocabulary—vocabulary associated with a certain job, hobby, sport, and so on. For instance, ballet has its own set of vocabulary, as does skateboarding, soccer, and instant messaging. The use of some insider vocabulary (and the inclusion of necessary definitions) can add interest and variety to writing.

Interactive book—books that allow for interaction and participation. Participation can range from feeling textures and pressing buttons with sounds to play with, moving parts, pop-ups, flaps, pull tabs, and so on. Other books (such as *PRESS HERE* by Herve Tullet), ask the reader to move the book (or themselves) and in so doing, the book becomes interactive.

Internal dialogue—the character’s inner thoughts, feelings, and emotions. You can also think of internal dialogue as that little voice that is always playing in a character’s head. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/internal-dialogue.html>

-J-

-K-

-L-

Leave room for the illustrator—allowing space within the telling of a story for the illustrator to show his/her half of the story; not overly stating the details of a story; writing an active manuscript that can be illustrated. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/01/illustrations-other-half-of-story.html>

-M-

Main character—See: *Protagonist*

Meaningful list (or purposeful list)—meaningful lists include details, move action along, or otherwise enhance writing. (For instance: *Twelve Clydesdale horses, two Dalmatians, and four firefighters rode Engine #49 in the parade.*)

Metaphor—a comparison of two different things that does NOT use *like* or *as*. (For instance: *The sun is an orange basketball bouncing through the sky.*)

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/03/similes-and-metaphorscomparisons-r-us.html>.

Meter—basic rhythmic structure of a verse or lines of verse.

Modifier—a word, phrase, or sentence that limits or qualifies the sense of another word, phrase, or sentence. Often modifiers are two hyphenated words used to qualify something about another word or phrase. (For instance: *Jake was a first-time award winner.*)

Moral/lesson ending—when a moral or lesson ends a story. A moral/lesson ending may be obvious and stated (for instance: *I sure learned a lesson that day, and from now I will think before I speak*) or it may be implied and subtle. NOTE: Picture books generally avoid being preachy, didactic, or moralistic. The readers may imply lessons or morals from what they read, without the writer overtly stating them.

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/02/effective-endings.html>.

-N-

-O-

Onomatopoeia—the use of words that sound like the noise they make. Also known as sound effects (such as *cuckoo* or *boom*).

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/03/onomatopoeias-i-love-sound-of-it.html>.

-P-

Pacing—the speed at which a story progresses. The rate of pacing can change throughout a story—from fast to slow and vice versa. Pacing can communicate tone, emotion, and more.

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/bit-about-pacing.html>.

Perfect rhyme—rhyme between two words or phrases, satisfying the following conditions: (1) the stressed vowel sound in both words must be identical, as well as any subsequent sounds. For example *sky* and *high*; *skylight* and *highlight*. (2) The articulation that precedes the vowel sound must differ. For example, *green* and *spleen* is perfect rhyme, while *leave* and *believe* is not. Picture books use perfect rhyme.

Personification—giving human characteristics to non-human, inanimate objects. (For instance: *The car wipers batted away tears.* OR *The tree stretched its arms to the sky.*)

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/03/personificationgiving-legs-to-words.html>.

Picture Book—a book in which the illustrations are as important as (or even more important than) the words that tell the story. Picture books are generally 32 pages long, although they can be longer or shorter. In picture books, there are illustrations on every page or on every pair of facing pages. Most picture books are written for young children, but there are exceptions.

Plot—the sequence of events that happens to the protagonist (main character) in the timeline of the story.

Plot Clock—created by Joyce Sweeny and Jamie Morris, this plotting strategy is more circular, than linear. To learn more about the Plot Clock read the posts listed below. Think of the Plot Clock as a circle divided into four equal quadrants making up four acts. See:

<http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2012/05/plot-clock-another-planning-tool.html>,

<http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/08/plot-clock-in-picture-books.html>, and

<http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/08/plot-clock.html>

Plot-driven books—describes stories where the emphasis is more on plot twists, external conflict, and action rather than characters. Often the story goals are more external such as obtaining and accomplishing something, winning, escaping, or changing a situation.

Plot point—a story event that spins the action in a new, unexpected direction. Plot points serve to keep the action moving forward and to keep the story fresh. Plot points raise the stakes for the protagonist as the story moves toward the climax.

Point of view (POV)—the way a story is told and who tells it. The two most common POVs used in picture books are first-person POV (when the narrator speaks as “I” and is the protagonist/main character in the story) and third-person POV (when the narrator seems to be standing outside the story and refers to all the characters by name and uses *he, they, she*, etc.). An omniscient narrator who sees all and knows all can often work in a picture book as well. Point of view can also refer to the perspective from which the story is told. For instance, “The Princess and the Pea” could be told from the perspective of the princess, or the prince, or the queen, or the pea, and so on.

Problem—the situation or challenge (no matter how big or small) that the protagonist must successfully solve/resolve (most often by himself/herself) for the story to come to a satisfactory conclusion.

Prose—the ordinary form of spoken or written language, without meter; not poetry or verse.

Protagonist—the main or leading character, hero, or heroine. The protagonist possesses a problem to be solved, actively works to solve the problem himself/herself, and ultimately does solve the problem (at least in most picture books). See:

<http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/06/finding-great-main-characters.html>,

<http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/06/flawed-main-characters.html>,

<http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/06/relatable-main-characters.html>, and

<http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/06/active-main-characters.html>

-Q-

Query letter—a formal letter sent to magazine editors, literary agents, and sometimes publishing houses or companies. Writers write query letters to propose writing ideas. The query is designed to “sell” your manuscript, concept, or idea to a publishing decision-maker.

-R-

Raising the stakes—increasing what is at stake for the protagonist; making things worse for the protagonist. Raising the stakes is usually done in degrees, step by step. (See: Rising action)

Repetition (purposeful)—using a word, phrase, or sentence (such as *Crash! Bang! Boom!* OR *But the best was yet to come*) several times to intentionally add interest to a story, to move the action along, or to allow the reader to participate by repeating the word or phrase. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/lists-rule-of-three-and-repetition.html>.

Resolution—the point in the plot when the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist is resolved and/or the problem is solved. There are often unexpected incidents that make the final outcome suspenseful.

Revise—to alter something already written in order to improve, change, or clarify. Revision is a more involved process than editing since the writer is looking not for minor errors to correct, but ways to improve the writing as a whole.

Rhyme—matching similarity in sounds in two or more words, especially when the accented vowel and the consonants that follow are all the same. (For instance: *mall/fall*; *core/more*, *babble/dabble*.) Picture book authors strive for perfect (exact) rhyme (see: Perfect rhyme). See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/04/rhyming-poems-in-picture-books.html>.

Rhythm—refers to the speed, intensity, and tone of a piece of writing. Think of this as the heart rate or heartbeat of the story. (All stories can have rhythm, but rhythm is especially a part of poetry and rhyming stories.)

Rising (ascending) action—the place in the plot where the basic conflict is brewing and the reader is beginning to feel the rising tension associated with the conflict. The basic conflict is further complicated by the introduction of obstacles frustrating the protagonist. Picture book writers often think of the rising action as containing the protagonist's attempts and failures to solve his/her problem.

Rule of three—using words, phrases, sounds, etc. in groups of three. Three of anything seems to provide a pleasing, comforting feel for the reader. This rule could refer to repeating a sound three times (*Whack! Whack! Whack!*), three details (*She was hungry. She was tired. She was lonely*), or even three attempts/scenes of the main character attempting to solve his/her problem. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/lists-rule-of-three-and-repetition.html>.

-S-

Scansion—the metrical analysis of verse. Rhyme should “scan” smoothly and not cause the reader to lose the meter; nor should it otherwise interrupt the flow of the piece.

Sensory details—using the five senses—hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, and touching—in one's writing. Sensory details bring a realness to details, and add a dimension to a story that can access the reader's knowledge and personal experience.

Sentence fragment (purposeful)—a meaningful sentence fragment can add sentence variety to a piece of writing. Sentence fragments are intentional and should appear in a limited number in a piece of writing. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/sentence-variety.html>.

Sentence variety—literally varying the length, structure, and complexity of sentences. Sentence variety can change the mood, tone, and pace of a story and add interest for the reader. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/sentence-variety.html>

Setting—the world of the story. The setting is the location where and timeframe during which the action of a narrative takes place. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/01/settings.html> and <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2012/04/lack-of-setting.html>

Shouting caps—writing a word or phrase in all capital letters. This technique can add interest, communicate emotions, and emphasize a word or phrase. Shouting caps may be part of dialogue, but does not have to be. (For instance: *I saw the moving van pull away. YES! YES! YES! My dream had finally come true.*)

Show don't tell—instead of telling the reader what has happened, the writer SHOWS what has happened with details. Instead of “She screamed,” the author could write: “The old woman flung her cane into the air and let out a blood-curdling scream.” Mark Twain said, “Don't say the old lady screamed—bring her on and let her scream.” In other words,

Simile—a comparison of two dissimilar things using *like* or *as* in the comparison. (For instance: *The clouds were fluffy like cotton candy.* OR *He was as smelly as a trashcan.*) See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/03/similes-and-metaphorscomparisons-r-us.html>.

Slice-of-life story—a short vignette without a plot and without conflict. A story where there is nothing at stake for the character. While there might occasionally be a slice-of-life story that is worthy of publication (or that is published), most need to be fully developed, plotted, and written into a story.

Snapshot writing—this type of writing has been described by Barry Lane in his books *The Revisers Tool Box* and *After the End*. Think of how a snapshot freezes a moment in time with all the details of that moment captured for all to see. Snapshot writing does the same thing. It freezes the moment and helps the reader see all the details before moving on. NOTE: This technique is also called Exploding the Moment.

Specific nouns—all authors use nouns (names of people, places, and things) in their writing. Good writers make the nouns specific. Instead of *store*, they write *grocery store*. Great writers use even more specific nouns. Instead of *grocery store*, they write *Winn Dixie*. Instead of *dog*, they write *Yorkie*. These specific nouns add details to the writing and show the reader what the author is writing about. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/09/secrets-to-specific-nouns-and-vivid.html>.

Speech tags—something that labels a bit of dialogue, says who's speaking, and sometimes tells *how* they're speaking. Also called an *identifier*. While it is fine to use *said* as a speech tag,

there are other verbs that might more vividly describe what is happening—such as: screamed, whispered, whined, or purred.

Stakes (Raising the stakes)—what the protagonist stands to lose if he/she doesn't solve the central problem presented in the plot. Stakes create tension. If the stakes are low, then the tension is weak. Stakes need to climb higher and higher throughout the rising action of a story. (See: Problem)

Start in the middle—avoiding backstory and launching a story where the action begins; immersing the reader immediately into the story. As an example, think of how *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White begins: "Papa, where are you going with that ax?" See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/start-in-middle.html>

Stilted language—stiff, artificially formal word choices and sentence structures.

Subplot—a secondary strand of plot that supports and/or connects to the main plot. Subplots often involve supporting characters. Subplots take up less of the action and have fewer significant events occur. Note: Subplots are generally not used in picture books due to their short length and the age of the target audience.

Support (supporting details)—details that work to support the topic sentence or provide more detail about the topic sentence and also make the main idea stronger. Supporting details could be facts, personal experiences, examples, descriptions (using similes, alliteration, and other figurative language), or arguments for or against something. In every case, supporting details should directly connect with the topic sentence of your paragraph.

Supporting characters—other characters in a story in addition to the protagonist and antagonist. A supporting character must have a reason to exist. Too many supporting characters can overly complicate a plot.

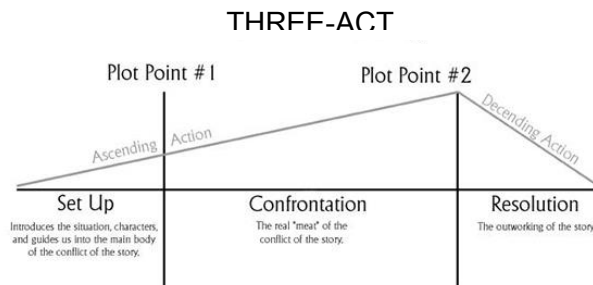
Surprise ending—surprise endings (also known as twisted endings) are unexpected and can catch the reader off guard. The surprise ending may include irony or cause the reader to reevaluate the story. The writer must be careful to make the ending logical even though surprising. (For instance, introducing a character or super hero suddenly in order to solve the story's problem may not seem logical to the reader.) See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/02/effective-endings.html>.

-T-

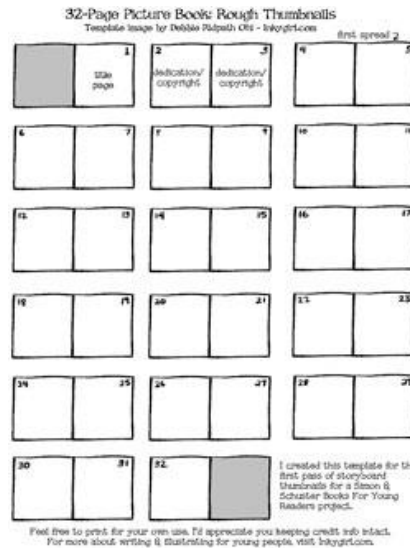
Theme—the central idea(s) or message(s) explored by a literary work; what the author is trying to tell the reader. For example, the belief in the ultimate good in people, or that things are not always what they seem. Some fiction contains advanced themes like the need for equality, or the universal desire for acceptance, while other stories may have no theme, or a very shallow one.

Three-act structure—often used in screenwriting. Act One is the Set Up and includes an Inciting Incident that leads to the first turning point of the story. Act Two includes Confrontation/Development with trials and errors, and attempts and failures to solve the problem of the story. Turning Point 2 concludes Act Two and seems to make the situation even worse (the dark moment). Act Three moves quickly taking us to the Resolution of the story and all the way to the end.

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/01/screenplay-approach.html>.



Thumbnail—a thumbnail is a one-page view of an entire book. Illustrators often begin their work with small, rough sketches. A writer can also use a thumbnail to map out the plot of the story and to ensure no part of the plot is getting too much or too little attention. (The attached thumbnail example was created by Debbie Ohi.)



Transitions—words and phrases that move the reader from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, idea to idea, or time to time. Examples of transitional words and phrases include: *suddenly*, *out of the blue*, and *within minutes*. Onomatopoeias, ellipses, alliterations, questions, and other techniques may also be used as transitions. Writers should be cautioned to not overuse any transition word or phrase, especially the common *then*, *first*, *next*, and *finally*. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/transitions-and-time-compression.html>.

-U-

Use binocular vision—this term used in the writings of Barry Lane reminds writers to clarify and focus their writing. Just as a pair of binoculars has to be focused in order to clearly see, so writing has to be focused with additional details to focus the reader on what the writer is trying to communicate.

-V-

Verse—non-rhyming poetic writing.

Vivid verbs—choosing verbs that accurately describe the action in a story. For instance, an author may write that “the boy sat down”, when actually the boy *pounced*, *slumped*, or *perched*. The same is true for the word *said*. While it is fine to use *said* as a speech tag, there are other verbs that might more vividly describe what is happening—such as: *screamed*, *whispered*, *whined*, or *purred*. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/09/secrets-to-specific-nouns-and-vivid.html>.

Voice—the entire way in which a writer uses language. Writing with voice can show the author’s personality and that the author is writing honestly and from the heart. Voice helps the reader “see” the person behind the writing and feel what the writer is feeling. Voice adds style and flavor to an individual’s writing. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/dialogue-vs-voice.html>.

-W-

Whispered parenthesis—after saying something, a person sometimes raises a hand to his/her mouth to whisper his/her true feelings behind the raised hands. Katie Wood Ray introduced the idea of whispered parenthesis in writing. Placing those behind-the-hand comments within parenthesis can be one way to add voice to writing. For instance: *I’m sorry, little brother. I’ll never do it again (until no one is looking)*. NOTE: Also known as Thought shot.

Writers Workshop—Writers Workshop is the strategy many teachers use for daily writing instruction. Writers Workshop includes four components:

Read Aloud from a variety of genres (about 5 minutes)

Modeled/Shared Writing (10-15 minutes)

Independent Writing (35-45 minutes)

Sharing Session (5 minutes)

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-Y-

-Z-