

**MRA**  
**Title I Special Interest**  
**Council 2006-2007**  
**August**



 WELCOME ☺  
 TOUCHSTONE TEXT  
 CONFERRING  
 WEBSITE  
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**WELCOME:** It's a new year and the MRA Title I Special Interest Council would like to welcome back returning members, as well as our new members. We look forward to providing current educational information and networking opportunities to all Title I Special Interest Council members during the 2006-2007 school year. Current members will continue to receive monthly e-newsletters on a variety of educational topics and strategies.

We encourage MRA Title I members to show your support to literacy with your attendance at the MRA 2007-*Literacy Changes Everything* conference. Title I day is tentatively scheduled for Monday, March 12, 2007. MRA is currently calling for program proposals (postmarked no later than September 8, 2006). You may access this document, along with more up-to-date information, through the MRA website: [www.michiganreading.org](http://www.michiganreading.org)

**TOUCHSTONE TEXT:** Can you imagine having Ralph Fletcher, Christopher Paul Curtis, Patricia Polacco, Mem Fox, or Eve Bunting as your teacher? With *touchstone text*<sup>1</sup> as your co-teacher, it is possible! *Touchstone text* is commonly defined as any piece of literature used by a community of writers to study craft (*craft*- any technique used to make writing better). When selecting touchstone text for your writing workshop mini-lessons, keep in mind that the best touchstone text is one that has the potential to be used numerous times throughout the

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<sup>1</sup> Mentor text is different than touchstone text. Mentor text is a piece of literature that is chosen and used by an *individual* to study craft.

school year for MANY different mini-lessons in craft and even conventions.

Current experts support the touchstone text model and add that a minimal number of short texts are needed to be highly effective (National Writing Project). The secret is to select genre specific texts for your grade level that can be used over and over for numerous mini-lessons during your writing workshop. Through the use of touchstone text, we can get our students to start reading like writers so they mimic the craft they see in their written pieces.

Inexperienced writers often place a high value on the mental pictures in their head vs. the text on the page. Our challenge as teachers is to help our students transfer the meaning of the pictures or mixed ideas in their heads into flowing words on the page. One of the best ways to get this done is through conferencing.

**CONFERRING:** As students immerse themselves in the writing process, it is critical that we meet or confer with students to help them build a large repertoire of writing skills. Revising at the end is a logistical nightmare and an impossible feat, so the first tip is to begin conferring right away with students (you will need to meet with every student at some point, but you will not see writing for each child at every step of the process). On the following page, you will find Carl Anderson's explanation of the teacher's role during a writing conference.

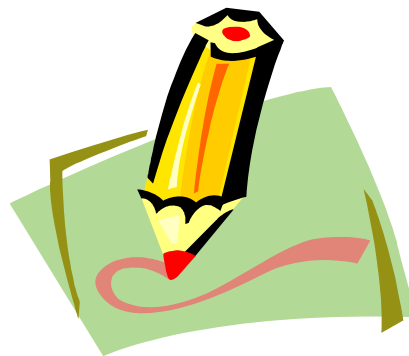
Anderson, Carl. How's It Going?  
Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000.

### **Grade Level Content Expectations k-8**

R.NT.00.04, W.PS.00.01, W.AT.00.01, S.DS.00.01  
R.NT.01.04, W.PS.01.01, W.AT.01.01, S.DS.01.01  
R.NT.02.04, W.PR.02.01, W.PS.02.01, W.AT.02.01, S.DS.02.01  
R.NT.03.04, W.PR.03.01, W.PS.03.01, W.AT.03.01 S.DS.03.01,  
R.NT.04.04, W.PR.04.01, W.PS.04.01, W.AT.04.01 S.DS.04.01,  
R.NT.05.04, W.PR.05.01, W.PS.05.01, W.AT.05.01, S.DS.05.01  
R.NT.06.04, W.PR.06.01, W.PS.06.01, W.AT.06.01, S.DS.06.01  
R.NT.07.04, W.PR.07.01, W.PS.07.01, W.AT.07.01, S.DS.07.01  
R.NT.08.04, W.PR.08.01, W.PS.08.01, W.AT.08.01, S.DS.08.01

### **High School Content Expectations**

CE 1.2.4, CE 2.3.1, CE 3.1.1, CE 3.1.4, CE 3.2.1, CE 3.2.3, CE 3.2.4



**T**each students to be dissatisfied with their first writing attempts.

~Carl Anderson ~

# The Teacher's Role in a Strategy/Technique Writing Conference

## In the 1<sup>st</sup> part of the conference...

- Invite the child to set the **agenda** for the conference by asking, “What are you doing as a writer today?” (get the child to name what strategy/skill they are doing...probably based on the touchstone mini-lesson) *Other prompts:* What is your vision? How's it going?
- Ask **research questions**:  
Tell me how you're using the \_\_\_\_\_ strategy. Why did you use \_\_\_\_\_ there? Who is the audience? Where are you at in the writing process? Ask specifics if you're looking for certain things (Be curious...follow up with WHY when appropriate. Also, ask the question and then be quiet and allow a response.)
- **Look** at the child's writing:  
Notice what strategy was employed or trying to be used
- Make a teaching **decision**:  
What do you need to focus on, *select ONE thing!* (Base decision on child's input and take into consideration mini-lessons taught and the touchstone text you have)

## In the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the conference...

- Give the student **feedback**:  
Tell the child what you like or notice about piece than name and point to a strategy to focus on using touchstone text (YES, you must have a copy of the touchstone text with you...and YES students should have copies of it too for reference while they write!)
- **Teach** the student:  
Use touchstone text to review and explain the strategy that you want the child to use in their writing
- **Guide** the student as s/he “**has-a-go**” with the strategy you've taught him/her:  
Child orally demonstrates how strategy could be used. Follow up with “Where can you try this in your piece?” Leave them with a plan of attack!
- **Link** the conference to the **student's ongoing work**:  
Student is left alone to write strategy into piece as orally rehearsed with teacher

## TIPS...

- Research questions should lead you to talking points that help narrow your focus
- It's most easy to take a clipboard to the child's seat where s/he is working to conference (Keep with you: touchstone texts, post-its, records of who you met with (class roster) and the focus)
- Using touchstone text or mentor text in a conference can help the child literally see what craft technique you're talking about... making our explanations concrete. The “I'm done!” child can examine the touchstone text with you for more crafting techniques to employ.
- Once you gain confidence in the conversational procedures above, Carl Anderson suggests an average of **5 min.** of conferring per conference.