

How to Steal From Famous Authors for Fun and Profit

T.S. Eliot is credited with saying, “Good writers borrow, great writers steal”. This aphorism reflects the inspiration for my unit. Who better to teach writing than famous and successful authors? I believe it’s best to let Steinbeck, Shakespeare, and Hillenbrand take the lead in this unit, but since we cannot easily bring authors to the classroom, we will instead have to rely on their stories to teach us how to write. The pieces of literature that illuminate the lessons of authorship are referred to as mentor texts.

Mentor texts are student or teacher selected excerpts of that are used to demonstrate a particular stylistic element that student writers want to embody through the act of mimicry. These model texts provide students with the opportunity to analyze an author’s writing toolbox. After a close-reading of one of these texts, students become consciously aware of a variety of these skills; how authors construct appealing sentence structure, implement vivid detail, or develop complex characters. This unit describes how students can select and mimic mentor texts in their pursuit of writing fictional narratives.