

A Snowman Named Just Bob By Mark Kimball

Writing Strategies ~ 6+1 Traits of Writing by Ruth Culham

A Snowman Named Just Bob is a whimsical story about a snowman who teaches his family about the value of friendship. Beautiful illustrations create the backdrop for this wonderful example of **Sentence Fluency** and **Voice**.

Before you get started, make a point to preview these words and phrases so that you can really savor the story without concern about the meanings of this new vocabulary:

- "feasted...on fine-cooked fare"
- obscuring
- "dance a jig"
- exquisite
- "peace fell lightly like a robe"
- inclined
- countenance

* Teaching Sentence Fluency: Varying Sentence Length and Structure*

"How the sentences sound to the ear depends greatly on their construction," Ruth Culham explains. The lines of *A Snowman Named Just Bob* are written in rhyme, which is one way that the author leads you through the story of Bob and the night he came to be. When you read the book, the flow and movement of the lengthy sentences carry you through the story, as if you are a snowflake floating on the winter wind yourself!

Pay close attention to the length and structure of Bob's sentences. It is as if the author composed a beautiful poem, and then turned each stanza into a long, lyrical sentence. Interesting writing will include sentences of varied length that begin and end in different ways, and you'll find these characteristics in Bob.

To help your students focus on the construction of their own sentences, Ruth Culham suggests several lesson ideas:

1. **Slinky City** (adapted from page 200-201)

- Select a couple of writing samples to share with your students, with one full of simple, short sentences, and another containing a variety of sentence lengths.
- If you have them available, give students each a Slinky. (Or use one yourself and model the activity for your class.)
- Select a text and display it on the overhead. As you read the story aloud, have your students practice stretching or shrinking their Slinky to match the length of the sentence. (Students can also do this with their hands, moving them apart and together to represent the length of the sentences.)

- After reading quite a few sentences, stop and ask students to discuss the length of the sentences they've heard. Were they all the same length, or were some longer and some shorter? Did this variety (or lack thereof) make the story more or less interesting?
- Select another text and display it on the overhead. Repeat the previous steps, pausing to reflect on the differences between the two stories and the impact that sentence variety has on the way the story sounds to the audience.

2. **Sentence Stretching** (aka Sitton Spelling "Stretch It" Activities)

- Start by providing students with a short sentence or group of words.
- Have each student add a word or short phrase to enhance his/her sentence, and then pass it to a neighbor who will add another word or phrase.

After several rounds, stop and have students share the sentences that they have created. Compare the original sentence to the final product, and discuss why the addition of adjectives and adverbs can make the sentences more specific and interesting!

(See 6+1 Traits, pages 195-209, for more ideas for teaching Sentence Fluency.)

* Teaching Voice: "...the heart and soul of the writing.."

"Voice is the writer's music coming out through the words, the sense that a real person ...cares about the message," as Ruth Culham explains it. The enthusiasm that the author has for the subject becomes evident in everything - the word choice, the sentence structure, the punctuation marks! In *A Snowman Named Just Bob*, it is plain to see that the author wants to impart a feeling of wonder and whimsy.

If you begin by reading the back cover of the book, you receive your first clue: "Sometimes life presents us with unexpected and magical moments." And thus the magic begins. Mark Kimball Moulton has crafted a story filled with beautiful language and fluid motion that invites the reader to read slowly and carefully. He's chosen enchanting words such as "exquisite" and "countenance", and presents a winter snowstorm that brings his wonderful character to life. The novel vocabulary and the rhyming sentences, bursting with action and description, work together to elicit a feeling of wonder and excitement from the reader.

Here's an idea for connecting **Voice** and **Word Choice** with your students...

1. **Getting a Reaction!**

- As you are beginning the brainstorming phase of a new writing project, have your students pause and reflect on the feelings they'd like to evoke from their audience. Are they hoping to share the feeling of excitement, and engage the reader with enthusiasm? Are they embarking on a debate, and hoping to persuade their audience to agree with their stance on a particular topic? Are they relaying a sad story, and hoping their readers will be sympathetic?

- Once they determine what their desired reaction will be, have students brainstorm a list of words that they could use to evoke those particular feelings. If they're describing their favorite family vacation, they might use words like "hilarious," "wonderful," and "amazing" - words that are exciting, not bland! Ask them to consult a thesaurus if they need more powerful words!
- Finally, have the students use those particular words to enhance their stories, and watch how their classmates react when they share the stories aloud.

(See 6+1 Traits, pages 125-138, for more ideas for teaching Voice.)