

Carl Anderson  
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“Bring Magic into Your Writing Curriculum by Teaching Fantasy Writing, Grades 4-8

### About the Presenter:

Carl Anderson is an internationally recognized expert in writing instruction for grades K-8. A regular presenter at national and international conferences, he works as a consultant in schools and districts around the world. Carl is the best-selling author of *Teaching Fantasy Writing: Lessons that Inspire Student Engagement and Creativity*, *How to Become a Better Writing Teacher* (with Matt Glover), *A Teacher’s Guide to Mentor Texts K-5*, *A Teacher’s Guide to Writing Conferences K-8*, *How’s It Going: A Practical Guide to Conferring with Student Writers*, and other titles. Carl began his career in education as an elementary and middle school teacher.

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This workshop is based on Carl’s new book, *Teaching Fantasy Writing: Lessons that Inspire Student Engagement and Creativity Grades K-6* (Corwin, 2024).

### Reasons to Add Fantasy Writing to Your Curriculum:

- Fantasy helps students meet writing standards.
- Fantasy helps students develop their creativity and imagination.
- Fantasy is a highly engaging genre for children to write.
- Fantasy gives children expressive tools for exploring important themes.
- Fantasy helps students with SEL.

## What Happens in a Fantasy Unit?

1. *Immerse* students in great fantasy mentor texts by spending the first few days of the unit reading and discussing the texts:

- You will find great fantasy short stories you can use as mentor texts in *Highlights*, *Cricket*, and *Spider* magazine. (In my book, *Teaching Fantasy Writing*, there are downloadable mentor texts from the above magazines in numerous fantasy subgenres, such as secondary world fantasy, fairy tales, wizarding world, magic doorway and science fiction.)
- You can also find mentor texts in anthologies of short fantasy fiction written for children, such as Jon Scieszka's *Guys Read: Other Worlds*.

Note: As I search for mentor texts, I used these criteria to evaluate their worthiness and appropriateness for students:

- Is this text an excellent example of a fantasy subgenre that children will enjoy reading?
- Is there a relationship between a main and secondary character at the center of the story?
- Is the main character someone who is relatable to children in this age group? That is, is the main character a child, or if the main character is a magical creature, child-like?
- Does the main character have a problem or challenge that is relatable to a child in this age group? Does the main character resolve this problem or challenge through a relationship with the secondary character?
- Does my stack of mentor texts include stories with characters of different genders, races and ethnicities?

2. *Rehearsal*, or the work students do to get ready to write a story:

- Students decide what kind of fantasy story they’re going to write (magical relationship, fairy tale, superhero, sci-fi, etc.)
- They do some *worldbuilding*, that is, they imagine the world their story will be set in and the characters who live in it:
  - a. Students draw a fantasy world (secondary world, fairy tale world, sci-fi world, etc.) and populate it with a variety of beings and creatures, many magical.
  - b. Students create a *magic system* for their world.
  - c. Students decide who gets along – and who doesn’t – in their worlds.
  - d. Students create main and secondary characters to tell stories about.
- Students plan their stories:
  - a. Students write an “elevator pitch,” which helps them write a tightly-focused story.
  - b. Students make a formal plan for their story by “breaking” their story idea into scenes.

3. Students *draft* their stories:

As students write stories (most students will write several in the unit), teach *process* and *craft* lessons in your whole-class and small-group lessons, as well as in 1:1 writing conferences:

- Some lessons will be *process* lessons, in which you’ll teach students strategies for navigating the parts of the writing process lessons. The best way to teach process lessons is by going through the writing process yourself to write a fantasy story, and then showing your students the work you did at various stages. Some process lessons include:

- How to learn from a mentor text
- What do I do when I'm done with my story?

How do I start a new story?

- Some lessons will be *craft* lessons. The best way to teach these lessons is to show students excerpts of mentor texts where the craft technique is used by authors. Some craft lessons include:

- Introducing the main character's problem or conflict right away in the story
- Building scenes with character actions, thoughts and feelings, and dialogue
- Describing the main character's emotional journey in the story
- Using description lists when you introduce characters and settings
- Describe settings in illustrations and/or in the text
- Show how magic works
- Transitioning readers from scene to scene
- Ending a story with a resolution to the main character's problem or issue.

4. Students select one of their stories to share at the end-of-the-unit writing celebration make final *revisions* and *edits* to their draft, and make final preparations for the celebration:

- Teach students to revise by reworking parts (e.g. writing a new introduction) and/or by developing scenes further by adding different kinds of narrative details (character actions, thoughts and feelings, and dialogue).

- Teach students editing strategies (reading their writing aloud, peer editing) as well as about how to use writing conventions more accurately (paragraphing, internal and end-of-sentence punctuation, etc.)
- Finally, students can make a cover for their stories.

## 5. The Writing Celebration

- Students can celebrate their writing by reading their story to a partner or small group.
- Students can place their stories on their desks and circulate around the classroom to read their classmates' stories and leave comments.