

Carl Anderson
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“Bring Magic into Your Writing Curriculum by Teaching Fantasy Writing, Grades K-3

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.

Contact Carl at carlanderson1@mac.com.

Follow Carl on these social media channels:

Twitter/X: [@conferringcarl](https://twitter.com/conferringcarl)

Instagram: [carlandersonconferring](https://www.instagram.com/carlandersonconferring)

Bluesky: [@candersonwriting.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/candersonwriting.bsky.social)

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:

For Grades K-1:

<p>Magical Adventure Stories</p> <p>In these stories, a human character or magical creature goes on a journey or quest, sometimes with a companion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>The Wildwood Elves</i> by Anne-Marie Chapouton.• <i>Oona</i> by Kelly DiPucchio. (There are two sequels, <i>Oona and the Shark</i> and <i>Oona in the Arctic</i>).• <i>Sulwe</i> by Lupita Nyong'o.• <i>Where the Wild Things Are</i> by Maurice Sendak.
<p>Fairy Tale Stories</p> <p>These stories are typically set in a medieval-like time and include royal families and their attendants who live in a castle, as well as magical beings and creatures such as wizards and dragons.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>The Knight and the Dragon</i> by Tomi dePaola.• <i>Attack of the Underwear Dragon</i> by Scott Rothman. (This book has a sequel, <i>Return of the Underwear Dragon</i>.)
<p>Magic Doorway Stories</p> <p>The main character in these stories goes through a magical portal that takes them to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Journey</i> by Aaron Becker. (There are two sequels to this book, <i>Quest</i> and <i>Return</i>.)• <i>Lift</i> by Minh Le

<p>an imaginary land, or to a different place on Earth.</p>	
<p>Science Fiction Stories</p> <p>These stories usually involve planets, outer space, aliens, and spaceships. Characters may have an adventure in space, or an alien may come to Earth for a visit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Astro and the One-Eyed Bully</i> by Claude Jones. • <i>The Three Little Aliens and the Big Bad Robot</i> by Margaret McNamara. • <i>Your Alien</i> by Tammi Sauer. (This book has a sequel, <i>Your Alien Returns</i>.)
<p>Superhero Stories</p> <p>The main character in these stories is a human who has superpowers. These stories are often about characters learning to use their powers, or confronting villains.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Astonishing Secret of Awesome Man</i> by Michael Chabon (This book has a sequel, <i>Astonishing Man: The Mystery Intruder</i>.) • <i>Max</i> by Bob Graham.
<p>Magical Family Stories</p> <p>These stories are about families in which one or several members have magical powers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Littlest Witch</i> by Brandi Dougherty. • <i>Spellbound</i> by Jess Townes.

For Grades 2-3:

<p>Magical Relationship Stories</p> <p>In these stories, the main character (human or magical) has a need they meet through a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Oona and the Shark</i> by Kelly DiPucchio (The first book in this series is <i>Oona</i>, and the third is <i>Oona in the Arctic</i>) • <i>Boy + Bot</i> by Ame Dyckman
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<p>relationship with a nonhuman or magical character.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Night Dragon</i> by Naomi Howarth • <i>Raising Dragons</i> by Jerdine Nolen • <i>Abiyoyo (Based on a South African Lullaby and Folk Story)</i> by Pete Seeger • <i>Margaret's Unicorn</i> by Briony May Smith • <i>The Mermaid Moon</i> by Briony May Smith
<p>Magical Adventure Stories</p> <p>A human character goes on a journey or quest in these stories, sometimes with a companion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dragon Night</i> by J.R. Krause • <i>Sulwe</i> by Lupita Nyong'o. • <i>Where the Wild Things Are</i> by Maurice Sendak.
<p>Fairy Tale Stories</p> <p>These stories are typically set in a medieval-like time and include royal families and their attendants who live in a castle, as well as magical beings and creatures such as wizards and dragons.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Knight Owl</i> by Christopher Denise • <i>Return of the Underwear Dragon</i> by Scott Rothman (The first book in this series is <i>Attack of the Underwear Dragon</i>.)
<p>Wizarding World Stories</p> <p>In this kind of story, a magical being or creature goes to school to learn how to use their powers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Long Goes to Dragon School</i> by Helen H. Wu
<p>Superhero Stories</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Amazing Adventures of Awesome Man</i> by Michael Chabon

<p>The main character in these stories is a human who has superpowers. These stories are often about characters learning to use their powers and/or confronting villains.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Awesome Man: The Mystery Intruder</i> by Michael Chabon • <i>The Adventures of Sparrowboy</i> by Brian Pinkney
<p>Science Fiction Stories</p> <p>These stories usually involve outer space, spaceships, planets, and/or aliens.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sadie Sprocket Builds a Rocket</i> by Sue Filess • <i>Your Alien Returns</i> by Tammi Sauer
<p>Magical Family Stories</p> <p>These stories are about families in which one or several members have magical powers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Witch Who Was Afraid of Witches</i> by Alice Low

Note: As I searched 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 in grades K-1 decide who they're characters will be before they start drafting, but generally do their worldbuilding as they compose their stories in the process of illustrating each page of their books.
 - b. Students in grades 2-3 draw their primary and secondary characters before they start drafting, and key settings.
- Students plan their stories:
 - a. Students in grades K-1 can plan by touching each page of their book and saying what could happen on each page of their story.
 - b. Students in grades 2-3 can plan by describing each scene of their story on a sticky note—which characters will be in the scene, and what happens in the scene.

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:

a. For grades K-1:

- How do you come up with an idea for a fantasy story?
- How do you draw a magical creature?
- How do you come up with the plot of a fantasy story?
- What do you do when you finish a draft?
- How do you get started with a new fantasy story?

b. For grades 2-3:

- Create the main character for your story
- Create a secondary character for your story
- Create the settings for your story
- Plan the scenes of your story on sticky notes
- What do you do when you finish a draft?
- Start another 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
- Describe what main characters look like in illustrations and/or in the text

- Describe settings in illustrations and/or in the text
- Show magic at work in illustrations and/or in the text
- Give your story a great title
- Make a cover for your fantasy story

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 K-1 students to revise by adding details to their illustrations and texts
- Teach grades 2-3 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) as well as about how to use writing conventions more accurately (capitalizing the first letter of a sentence, ending a sentence with appropriate punctuation, internal 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.