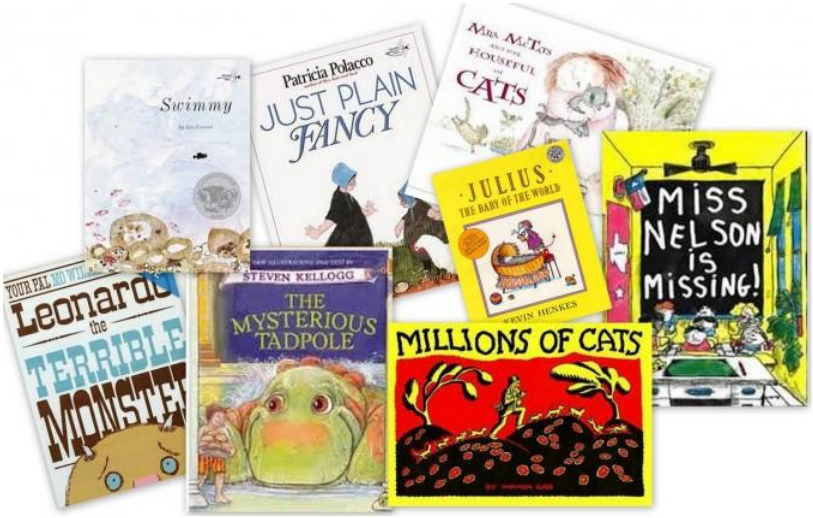
Writing Workshop

Day Four:

Story Openings



Discussion with the Kids:

What makes you decide whether to read a book or not?

My kids came up with...

the cover, the beginning of the story, the pictures, if it's interesting

Once you have a book in your hand, the author has a challenging job. She needs to set the scene, the mood and the characters. Most importantly, she has to draw you in right away so you'll want to read more. Let's look at the openings of a few stories... your job is to tell me whether you want to hear more or not.

"Leonardo was a terrible monster..." [*Leonardo, the Terrible Monster* by Mo Willems]

"Greetings, nephew!" cried Louis's Uncle McAllister, "I've brought a wee bit of Scotland for your birthday." [*The Mysterious Tadpole* by Steven Kellogg]

"In a small, cosy cottage lived Mrs. McTats. She lived all alone, except for one cat." [*Mrs. McTats and Her Houseful of Cats* by Alyssa Satin Capucilli]

"Once upon a time there was a very old man and a very old woman." [*Millions of Cats* by Wanda Gag]

"The kids in Room 207 were misbehaving again." [*Miss Nelson is Missing* by Harry Allard]

"Kaleb and his two daughters hurried along Lancaster County Road in their buggy." [*Just Plain Fancy* by Patricia Polacco]

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"Before Julius was born, Lilly was the best big sister in the whole world." [*Julius, Baby of the World* by Kevin Henkes]

Today The kids begged me to read more from a couple of the books. I asked them what made them desperate to hear more? The author did his job, I told them He made you WANT to read that book and grabbed your attention, right? (The kids laughed.)

Now let's see what else happens in these opening sentences...

They introduce the characters, right? The kids chimed in...

- Julius, the baby and Lilly his sister
- Mrs. McTats and her one cat
- Leonardo
- Kaleb and his two daughters

These sentences set the mood or feeling of the book. I re-read the first sentence of the Mysterious Tadpole. I asked, is it a sad story? scary? spooky? No, no the kids replied. It starts off happy. But Leonardo was a terrible monster starts off sad, DD chimed in.

Finally, we described the setting. Did you find out right from the beginning where the story takes place?

- Just Plain- starts in the country
- Mrs. McTats starts in a cottage
- Swimmy starts in the corner of the sea
- Mrs. Nelson starts in room 207 at school

The author sure has a lot to do in the beginning of a story or book, doesn't she? Now let's grab our writing journals and see what we come up with.

We set the timer for 10 minutes and went off to write.

When we finished talking about all these, LD rushed off to find a quiet spot to write. DD grabbed Leonard and read that before sprawling on the floor to write. ED took her notebook and wrote at her desk. I wrote a story about sitting at my desk in school in sixth grade and watching a 3-legged dog as he ran across the grassy field. Slowly, but surely the kids are taking ownership of their writing.

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