

# *Engaging and Teaching Middle School Writers*

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## Mr Nestle: Building Relationships Before Teaching Writing

By Amanda Conway

Mr. Nestle who has taught for 14 years, is a 8th grade Language Arts teacher at Shepherd Middle School. He has won the Michigan Association of Middle School Educators teacher of the year award in 2011, and works wonders in his classroom. The first thing Mr. Nestle does before trying to teach his Middle School Writers is meeting them at their level. His main focus is to ensure that he has established trust with his students, he knows all of his students, and ensures that his students knows that he cares about each and every one of them. One of his philosophies are that "A student in your classroom will care and try to learn what you are trying to teach if they know you care about them." Mr. Nestle says "this takes lots of time, and sometimes you have to personally dig a little deeper to reach certain students, but once you have established this bond, a teacher will gain their student respect, and that is when the teacher gets to begin to teach."

## Taking the Floor as the Teacher

By Amanda Conway

How much should a teacher really speak during class time? This is a focus Mr. Nestle has everyday. He monitors how long he takes the floor for and thinks and takes notes on key points to refer back to during instruction. Mr. Nestle chooses to monitor how much he actual talks during class time because as he has seen himself and from studies, is that a teacher can only hold a students attention for so long before the mind will drift. Instead of lecturing the class, Mr. Nestle

**“Avoiding the drifting minds will be an important aspect of teaching.”**

**- Heath Nestle**

takes a different approach. He will talk the bare minimum to get the point across. This time frame can range 3-5 minutes, and after that its the students job to do the communicating.

An example of this occurring is when he is doing a lesson on Author's craft. He goes over examples of the specific things he is teaching, and reads a sample piece from a novel. Once that is done, he opens the floor to the students to tell and show him examples from the text of the different Author's Craft they are working on for the day. He will prompt different students with various questions as well to help prevent the minds from drifting.

How much the teacher takes the floor during class time should be taken with a great amount of cautiousness. It is important for the teacher to instruct the students, but they must keep in mind to only take it a few minutes of the time then give it back to the students. Otherwise, students minds could very easily drift.

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## Quick Tips

**“Provide writing rubrics to students, and have students help to create them.”**

**- Heath Nestle**

**“Give a 5-8 minute leeway for lessons”**

**- Heath Nestle**

**“Remember why you started.”**



# Reaching out to Engage the Struggling Writers

By Amanda Conway

It is fairly easy to engage students in writing who are already talented at it and enjoy it, but what about the ones who struggle with it? Those are the ones that will be tougher to engage in writing during class time. Mr. Nestle has some valuable thoughts on this topic, and has implemented these thoughts in his own classroom.

First and foremost he gives these students additional one on one guidance. This one on one guidance is to help address areas that need more help, and to also help give them confidence. Having confidence will help the student to enjoy writing more, which in turn will help to keep them engaged.

Another thing Mr. Nestle does is providing extra time on an assignment. Since his struggling writers often take longer to finish a polished piece, he decides to not give the same target date to them. Allowing them more time, gives the student the opportunity to write a great piece.

Mr. Nestle will often give a accommodated rubric for these students as well. Struggling writers need reachable goals. Having reachable goals will help the student feel they can accomplish the assignment and be engaged to do so.

Mr. Nestle believes every student can be engaged in writing and enjoy it, including the ones who struggle. As long as they are guided and taught well, he knows all of his students can succeed.

## Implementing the Author's Craft

By Amanda Conway

Mr. Nestle believes that good grammar will come through being exposed to many examples of writing. Instead of focussing on the grammar he turns his focus to Author's Craft. His main focus when working with his students on craft is being able to use all of the different stylistic pieces such as personification, similes, metaphors, vivid verbs, and much more in their writings.

There are several ways he goes about teaching this stuff. Sometimes it's during daily reading. When he comes across something that is a perfect example of one of the stylistic pieces during class readings, he will stop and ask what that sentence is an example of. Students then will tell him and explain why and then continue reading.

Other times it is a formal way of teaching it. He will do a mini lesson on one or two stylistic pieces and having the students pick out the stylistic pieces in a reading sample he pulled from a book. Afterwards he has the students write by choosing from various topics and incorporating what they learned into their writing.

<p>Mr. Nestle works very hard at teaching how to write, instead of the tedious things such as grammar. He has observed during his 14 years of teaching that students pick up on how to write grammatically correct by being exposed to it, so instead he focuses on more important things that make a students writing more interesting.</p>

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