

TRAIT FOCUS: SENTENCE FLUENCY

Lesson Objective

Students rewrite simple sentences into a poem or paragraph using various fluency techniques.

Strategies for Improving Sentence Fluency

Sentence fluency is the rhythm, flow, and cadence of language. It's a bit like housework...no one notices it until it's not done. Writing that lacks smooth fluency is often noticeably jarring, rough, and off-putting. Effectively fluent writing, however, subtly captures the flow of language, much like a calm river.

Fluent sentences can be crafted using a variety of techniques: varying sentence length, using rhetorical questions and their answers, skillfully repeating words or phrases for emphasis, using ellipses to create natural pauses, and employing a conversational style that sounds like natural speech. With a little coaching, student writers can develop an ear for using these techniques and greatly improve the fluency of their own writing.

The poem "Paul Revere's Ride" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow is an excellent mentor text with a lyrical cadence. Integrate the following Literature/Writing Connection lesson into your discussion of the novel as a way of instructing your students on listening for effective sentence fluency.

Story Overview

The poem recounts Paul Revere's midnight run from Boston to Lexington to warning the citizens of the marching British troops. A warning lantern was hung in the North Church tower—"One, if by land, and two, if by sea"—and off Revere rode to warn every Middlesex village and farm of the danger.

Published in the 1860s, Longfellow's poem is a crucial piece to the legend of Paul Revere's midnight run. The poet took some liberties with the actual history surrounding the event, but it has nonetheless become a classic text of the American Revolution.

The Music of Poetic Language

1. As part of your instruction on the writing trait of sentence fluency, discuss how fluent sentences are graceful, rhythmic, and lyrical. There are different techniques a writer can use to craft fluent sentences: length, questions and answers, repetition, pauses, and style.
2. Share with your class that poetry often provides an exemplary example of the music of language. Not all writing needs to be poetic, of course, but poetry by definition is language that has been fine-tuned.
3. Read the Longfellow poem as a class. It should be easy to hear the natural meter and pattern of the stanzas. Tell your students to pay special attention to how one sentence flows into the next. How does the poet incorporate the different fluency strategies discussed above to achieve his effect?
4. Next, list the following simple sentences on the board or overhead: *The sun rose in the morning. It shown on a field of flowers. There were birds singing. A brook ran nearby. Horses came out to graze.*
5. Give your students 10 to 15 minutes to turn these sentences into a poem or paragraph using the fluency strategies discussed. They may combine, remove, expand, or rewrite the lines however they wish. The goal is to produce text that captures effective fluency.
6. Once complete, pair your students up and have them read their work aloud to their partner. They should share feedback with each other on ways they might improve the fluency. Are there any strategies they might utilize again or in a different way?
7. Allow time for your students to revise their work and to incorporate the feedback they receive.