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Mechanically Inclined: Building Grammar, Usage, And Style Into Writer's Workshop



Synopsis

Some teachers love grammar and some hate it, but nearly all struggle to find ways of making the mechanics of English meaningful to kids. As a middle school teacher, Jeff Anderson also discovered that his students were not grasping the basics, and that it was preventing them from reaching their potential as writers. Jeff readily admits, "I am not a grammarian, nor am I punctilious about anything, so he began researching and testing the ideas of scores of grammar experts in his classroom, gradually finding successful ways of integrating grammar instruction into writer's workshop. *Mechanically Inclined* is the culmination of years of experimentation that merges the best of writer's workshop elements with relevant theory about how and why skills should be taught. It connects theory about using grammar in context with practical instructional strategies, explains why kids often don't understand or apply grammar and mechanics correctly, focuses on attending to the "high payoff, or most common errors in student writing, and shows how to carefully construct a workshop environment that can best support grammar and mechanics concepts. Jeff emphasizes four key elements in his teaching: short daily instruction in grammar and mechanics within writer's workshop; using high-quality mentor texts to teach grammar and mechanics in context; visual scaffolds, including wall charts, and visual cues that can be pasted into writer's notebooks; regular, short routines, like "express-lane edits, that help students spot and correct errors automatically. Comprising an overview of the research-based context for grammar instruction, a series of over thirty detailed lessons, and an appendix of helpful forms and instructional tools, *Mechanically Inclined* is a boon to teachers regardless of their level of grammar-phobia. It shifts the negative, rule-plagued emphasis of much grammar instruction into one which celebrates the power and beauty these tools have in shaping all forms of writing.

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Customer Reviews

In *MECHANICALLY INCLINED*, Jeff Anderson tackles the issue of grammarphobia and edit-phobia head on. You know the diseases. They are endemic in English classrooms everywhere. Anderson advocates using "mentor" sentences and paragraphs taken from books that interest students. He also details how to set up a writer's notebook where kids can write freely without fear of the Red Pen (which, to them, is like an invader from the Red Planet, as narrated by Orson Welles). The notebook includes sections for creativity, exploration, modeling, and copying well-written sentences and paragraphs. I especially like Anderson's idea for the Editing Checkout, where students "scan" work looking for specific skills, then create a "receipt" of their findings. *NATIONAL ENQUIRERS* are not necessary for this activity. The kids will get a kick out of it and (not too loud, now) will learn something about editing (with one pen, two pens, red pens, or blue pens) while they're at it. What more could a teacher ask for? (OK, don't answer that...)

I absolutely adore this book! It's incredibly user friendly, and I didn't feel stupid about grammar while reading it. The first half of the book sets up the lessons. The second half is the lessons. It's obvious Jeff uses a writer's notebook and writer's workshop. He truly makes 'grammar in context' a meaningful and attainable way to teach. I have used several of the lessons with my fourth graders and they love it. I think only a book like this, and Jeff himself, could get someone like me to yell AUWWBIS like a farmer's pig call. It's fun and effective - get this book!

Anderson explains how to show students the practicality of grammar and how to teach it in context rather than isolation in a way that middle school students will not only understand but also enjoy. He provides lists, lessons, examples, and everything needed to take this approach and immediately implement it in the classroom. This is one of the best-written and most helpful books I have read in years.

This book provides strategies to help teachers "merge grammar and mechanics with craft in the context of meaningful writing", and it does exactly that! It outlines how to use mentor texts to teach students how to write well-written sentences, paragraphs and essays.

This is a must read for any pre-service English teacher or, for that matter, any English teacher. No more correct-alls and sentence diagramming. Anderson's unique and energetic approach to teaching grammar and mechanics will inspire you and get your students to engage in text as if it were play!

I'm a glutton for books on education, and I can comfortably say that this is hands-down the most practical, entertaining, and useful book I read in 2008. While I was still reading the book I was able to implement some of Anderson's ideas in my own classroom. He's a middle school teacher but I adapt many of his lesson ideas for my third grade class. He answered every question and eased my discomfort about teaching structure in a fluidly structured environment like writer's workshop. Well done in striking the balance between squelching student ideas and squeaking by with any old slop.

As the forward of this text suggested, this book IS engaging enough to read far into the night, despite it being about grammar and usage! It is packed with usable information, visuals, examples and stimulating ideas for writing teachers. I highly recommend it, for teachers and writers of all ages (middle school to college).

I first came across this book at the library and found that I was constantly writing down ideas from the book. I returned the book and decided to buy my own copy! Great resource book for Language Arts teachers! I highly recommend it.

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