Reading Recovery teachers often establish one focus that echoes across the lesson (Clay, 1993). In this way, the same strategy or concept is reinforced in the reading, writing, and letter work parts of the lesson. Classroom teachers can link the isolated components of balanced literacy by helping students make focused connections in reading and writing throughout the day. Focusing on one strategy across literacy components helps students to:

- set a purpose for listening and reading;
- use exemplar texts to affect specific parts of their own writing;
- begin to read like writers; and
- realize that certain concepts are in the repertoire of all good writers.

In this article, we share how two teachers ensured that their lessons made explicit connections between reading and writing by focusing on components of author’s craft.

In Ms. Tran’s (all names are pseudonyms) first-grade classroom, the students learned about strong verbs. In the piece she composed in writing workshop, Maria experimented with replacing *said* with *shouted* to help her readers understand how she wants the characters to sound as they speak. Later, during shared reading, Ms. Tran invited Akeem and Michael to locate strong verbs while the class chorally read the big book *Silly Sally* (Wood, 1994). During shared writing, the class began a list of strong verbs for display in the classroom. Students acted out each action word as it was added to the chart. At story time, Eboney held up two fingers in a V shape to signify that she had identified a strong verb as Ms. Tran read *Cook-a-Doodle-Doo* (Stevens & Crummel, 1999) out loud. Ms. Tran led the class in a discussion of how a strong verb helps the reader to better visualize a particular character’s action. During guided reading, Kelsey noticed that there were no strong verbs in her leveled book. Her reading group brainstormed more vivid action words, and Ms. Tran helped the students use stick-on tape to add several strong verbs to their texts. During independent reading of self-selected texts, Ms. Tran asked students to use highlighter tape to mark effective use of a strong verb. Following independent reading, students shared their observations, and Ms. Tran prompted them to consider how they might use these effective words in their own writing.

Mr. Baker, a fifth-grade teacher, focused on helping his students understand how a main character changes throughout a text and how they can use the work of published authors to consider ways to depict character change in their own texts. As he read *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1977) aloud, Mr. Baker led the students in discussions of how the author uses description and dialogue to show the evolution of a main character, Jess Aarons. When working together on a shared writing piece, they used the knowledge they gained from these discussions to describe how their main character is changing. In a study group that read *The Ugly Princess and the Wise Fool* (Gray, 2002), Ali and Josh debated about text evidence that supported their opinion concerning how the wise fool changes throughout the text. David, in his writing workshop piece, conferred with a classmate on the effective-
| Topic development | • Where do you think the author got the idea for the text—imagination or memory? What evidence do you have to reach that conclusion?  
• Authors often write about ordinary things. What ordinary things does the author write about in the text?  
• How does the author develop the topic and expand one idea? |
| Components of texts | • What do you learn from the illustration?  
• How do the illustrations enhance your understanding of the text?  
• Why is this title a good title for this text? How does the title help you as a reader?  
• What do you observe when you look at the dedication, copyright date, and publishing location?  
• How does the cover differ from the title page? What information is given on each page? |
| Word choice | • What words or phrases grab your attention?  
• What words or phrases tug at your heart?  
• What beautiful language does the author use?  
• What words (color, number, size, shape, material, proper names) help the author be specific?  
• What strong verbs do you notice? How do they help you visualize the author’s meaning?  
• What onomatopoeia, interjections, and alliteration does the author use? How does it help you as a reader?  
• What comparisons (simile, metaphor, personification) do you notice in the text? How do they help you understand the text?  
• How do the author’s words help you develop sensory images?  
• How does the author use transition words (such as first, next, later) to help you transition from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, and section to section? |
| Fiction elements and structures | • How does the author help you learn about the main character? What do you learn from the text? From the illustrations?  
• How does the main character treat other characters? What evidence does the author include?  
• How does the main character change throughout the story? What evidence does the author include?  
• How does the author show each character’s feelings?  
• How does the author help you learn about the setting (time, place, season)? What do you learn from the text? From the illustrations?  
• How does the character react to the setting? How do you know?  
• How does the setting change through the story? How do you know?  
• An author usually does some research to help him or her write the text. What evidence of research do you find in this text?  
• What is the fictional genre of this text (realistic fiction, fantasy, fairy tale, science fiction)? How do you know?  
• What occurs in the beginning of the story? The middle? The end?  
• What is the problem in the story? How is it solved?  
• Can you tell if the story describes a particular culture? What’s your evidence?  
• What is the author’s lead? What kind of lead is it? How does it help you become interested in the text?  
• How does the author end the story? What kind of ending is it? How does it help you know that the text is finished?  
• Does the author describe any cause-effect relationships? What are they?  
• How does the author show a character’s emotion?  
• How does the author’s writing help you, as the reader, feel emotions?  
• What is the author’s purpose? How do you know?  
• What is the author’s point of view? How do you know?  
• How does the use of dialogue help the author develop the characters?  
• How does the dialogue help you understand the interaction between characters?  
• How does the author show which character is talking (dialogue attribution)? |
ness of his description and dialogue showing how a character’s attitude is transformed in his text.

In these vignettes, it is evident that Ms. Tran and Mr. Baker clearly understood the importance of making instructional links throughout all components of balanced literacy instruction. It is also apparent that students in these classrooms were thinking like writers as they completed a multitude of reading and writing activities. Both teachers accomplished all these literacy connections by beginning with explicit minilessons related to author’s craft. They used literature as a tool for directing their students’ attention to the craft of writing. Dorn and Soffos (2001) wrote, “Teachers design minilessons that guide children to notice how writers write, including language, text conventions, and special techniques for communicating meanings to particular audiences” (p. 56).

Ms. Tran and Mr. Baker used a list to select appropriate topics for literacy minilessons (see Table 1). The minilessons occurred during reading and writing instruction. For example, when Ms. Tran wanted her students to focus on the transition words that Eric Carle uses, she read The Very Hungry Caterpillar (1969) aloud and reread parts to highlight and discuss effective transitions. During guided writing, students brainstormed a list of transition words denoting passage of time. Using interactive writing, students composed a sentence that used a transition phrase. The students received positive affirmations when they highlighted transition words in leveled texts or attempted to use transition words in their independent writing.

Mr. Baker wanted to have his students consider how similes help readers gain a better awareness of a story’s setting. He modeled adding a simile to a paragraph describing the setting in a fictional piece he had written. He prompted and reinforced students as they revised their own pieces to add a simile. Both teachers planned additional instruction to thread a particular minilesson topic throughout all literacy components (modeled, shared, guided, and independent reading and writing) to ensure that students were thinking about the skill or strategy as they participated in many literacy activities.

Our constant professional pursuit is to improve our understanding of the link between reading comprehension and writing production. We strive to use this knowledge to help students to connect their comprehension understanding with their deliberate strategy choices in writing by focusing on author’s craft. The topics for minilessons presented in this article are useful because they not only improve students’ understanding of texts they read, they also develop their skills as authors of their own texts. As teachers introduce each question as a topic for discussion, they should integrate the question with many of their literacy lessons and tasks. In addition, they should encourage students to consider how that particular question relates to a published author’s work as well as how it will affect their own piece in writing workshop. This link between reading and writing makes for powerful connections between reading comprehension and writing processes and products.

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<th>TABLE 1</th>
<th>Author’s craft minilessons (continued)</th>
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| **Nonfiction elements and structures** | - What is the author’s purpose? How do you know?  
- What is the author’s point of view? How do you know?  
- How does the author make nonfiction entertaining?  
- How does the author use ___ (captions, table of contents, index, glossary, labeled diagrams, headings) to help you gain information?  
- What text structure(s) does the author use (question-answer, problem-solution, descriptive, cause-effect, sequential, and compare-contrast)? |
| **Signals to the reader (conventions)** | - How does that author’s use of ___ (exclamation marks, dashes, italics, boldface) help the reader?  
- What do you notice about ___ (ellipses, quotation marks, commas, colons)? |

*Note. Adapted from Rickards and Hawes (2004).*
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References
