

Verbs Matter

Writing gurus such as Katie Wood Ray and Lucy Calkins emphasize the power of the verbs authors select, they matter. Verbs draw precise clear descriptions, yes, we celebrate the use of adverbs and adjectives, but just ponder the difference between *dart* and *meander*... verbs create images.

Revising *Dog Park Days* over and over, I intentionally used power verbs, unexpected verbs and very specific verbs to create images, with help from my treasured collection of children's literature.

Below is the mini-lesson on verbs in a Writer's Workshop classroom.

Mentor Sentence:

'Fists of rain pummeled the cockpit windshield'.-
Robert Burleigh, Night Flight: Amelia Earhart Crosses the Atlantic

Noticings from Burleigh's text:

- Verb- pummeled is all of the above; powerful, unexpected and specific

As I visualized Jack, in *Dog Park Days*, entering the park (page 6), I searched for a verb, such as *pummeled*, to help readers learn about Jack. It is not necessary to tell readers-Jack is not shy, Jack views himself as strong, Jack is not old, slow or lazy. The verb creates that image, similar to '*pummeled*,' allowing readers to visualize the vicious rain.

Compare these sentences:

A lot of rain fell on the cockpit windshield.
Fists of rain pummeled the cockpit windshield.

Although this essentially gives the same information, the words are not powerful, the verb '*fell*' is very ordinary and it is harder to visualize.

Now compare these sentences:

Jack came in on his drumstick sized legs with his tail held high.
Jack barrels in on his drumstick sized legs with his stubby tail held high.

Although the 'tail held high' supports the concept of Jack's confident personality, it is the verb that creates the image.

After this comparison, students work with their teacher to create sentences with verbs that create strong images for readers. Teachers nudge students to focus on verbs in their own pieces as the "writing" portion of Writer's Workshop begins.

Additional mini-lessons from Burleigh's one sentence

- Word Choice- "fists", save this phrase for a mini-lesson on noun collections!
- Less is more- notice how Burleigh doesn't bog down the power of his sentence by using unnecessary words such as: **The rain was pummeling in fists on the cockpit windshield.** Many young authors add "the" or helping verbs... with a little rearranging 'those' words could easily be omitted, creating a more powerful sentence. Save this example for a mini-lesson on not starting sentences with the same old words!

Jack:

