



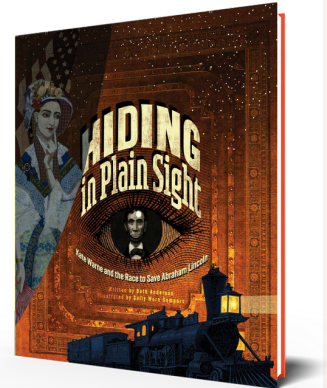
BREAK THE RULES TO “CREATE THE READ”

STUDENT ACTIVITY

(grades 3 and up)

Beth Anderson, Children’s Author

Explore how breaking some of the rules and conventions of writing English can change how the text is read, increasing engagement, connection, and meaning for the reader. Then, empower young writers to discover their own voices as they “create the read” in their own narratives.



Mentor Text: HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT: KATE WARNE AND THE RACE TO SAVE ABRAHAM LINCOLN by Beth Anderson, illustrated by Sally Wern Comport

Whole group:

Start by reflecting on techniques used in movies to draw the viewer into the experience, create excitement, drama, fear, surprise, and more. Generate a list. [examples: slow motion, zoom in, zoom out, sound effects, etc.]

Writers, too, can control the “camera” and add drama to a story. Taking on the role of “director” and “creating the read” can bring the reader into the experience, building connection and meaning. This activity explores ways students can intensify their writing, free up creativity, and find their voice by “breaking the rules.”

Use the SAMPLE provided for the scene on page 8 of HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT showing a traditional style narrative paragraph side-by-side with a not-so-traditional narrative text.

Cover the version on the right as you read the traditional version on the left. Then reveal and read the “not-so-traditional” narrative version on the right.

Do they look different? What’s the effect?

Do they feel different? In what ways?

Compare and contrast the versions sentence by sentence or line by line.

What “rules” did the author break? What’s the effect?

What changes do you see? What’s the effect?

Did you feel “closer” to the action playing out?

Did tension increase?

SMALL GROUP OPTION FOR EXTRA PRACTICE:

Practice with another paragraph. Students might manipulate text using a word processing program or with paper and scissors. Discuss emotion and effect. Experiment. Then share “director” decisions and their reasons.

INDIVIDUAL:

Using student narratives and the “Director’s Tools” page, invite students to explore how they can “create the read” with their own work.

Choose a section of their narrative featuring conflict. What emotions or effects do they want? Dramatizing (physically or mentally) can help discover how they want their words to be read. FEEL it. BE there. Then use the “Director’s Tools” to make that happen the page.

As they work, encourage students to read their words out loud (quietly) to test choices.

Finally, share and discuss the effects of creative rule-breaking in writing. How do the changes add drama? How did they add to author voice, characterization, conflict, and more?



NOTE: Playing with the conventions of writing raises awareness of how and why they’re used. Students should understand conventions of English are necessary for clarity and comprehension. We can’t throw them out altogether. But...if there’s a good reason for breaking a “rule” to enhance the narrative, try it!

If you’re interested in a formal presentation or a free 30-minute virtual Q&A with students, just drop me a note.

Website:

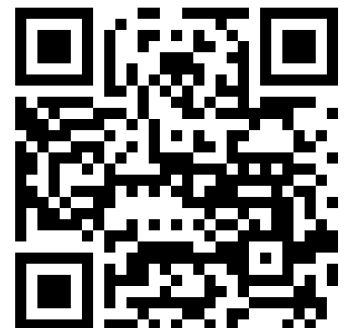
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Books and Links to Educator Resources



Traditional style narrative scene

The detectives had to do something to foil the plot. They couldn't change Lincoln's route because the only way to Washington was through Baltimore. They could change the time and the train, but first they had to convince Mr. Lincoln his life was in danger. With spies lurking about, Pinkerton didn't trust the telegraph, but he trusted Kate. She must deliver a message tomorrow to Mr. Judd, Lincoln's assistant. Kate rushed to catch the train for New York City. They had five days to save Lincoln.

***Hiding in Plain Sight*, p. 8**

The detectives had to act—find a way to foil the plot!
They couldn't change Lincoln's route. The only way to Washington was through Baltimore.
They *could* change the time . . . and the train . . .
But first they had to convince Mr. Lincoln his life was in danger.
With spies lurking about, Pinkerton didn't trust the telegraph. But he trusted Kate.
She must deliver a message.
To Mr. Judd, Lincoln's assistant.
Tomorrow.
Kate rushed to catch the train for New York City.
They had five days to save Lincoln.

Director's Tools



BREAK THE RULES TO “CREATE THE READ”

Punctuation: think of punctuation like road signs.	
Period .	Stop sign. Short sentences slow the read. Long ones flow.
Comma ,	Slight pause
Ellipsis ...	Lets text hang a bit, prompts thinking, imagining
m-dash —	Separates yet holds words, ideas tightly together
Parentheses	quiet comment, explaining, various uses
Sentences—Not: can show mood, emotion, tension, and more	
Incomplete or fragment	
phrases	
single words	
Layout and grouping	
Line breaks	break adds pause and attention
Paragraphs	sentences flow
Indents	Another way to make words or phrases stand out
BONUS TOOLS	
Sound effects	Onomatopoeia, alliteration
Word choice	Especially verbs that SHOW [Example: went/walk vs. trudge, tiptoe, limp, etc.]
Font	Italics and bold for emphasis