

Read Like a Writer
from Katie Wood Ray's *Wondrous Words*, 1999.

Notice something about the craft of the text.

Noticing *writerly* things means noticing things that are close to the words, close to the text. Examples: repetition, word choice, structure of the text. This is different than responding to *readerly* things such as "It flows" or "It has great description."

Talk about it and *make a theory* about why a writer might use this craft.

Discussing WHY a writer might choose to write something in a certain way helps students to understand the writing technique. This will, in turn, help them to "untie" the technique from the text studied and try it in their own writing. It's fine if the theory doesn't match the particular author's intentions. The point is to examine the possibilities as to why a writer *might* craft a piece in a particular way. This gives a strong sense of "I might write my piece like this, or I could write it like this, or I could try this other thing in my writing."

Give the craft a *name*.

The purpose of naming a technique is to give students a common language with which they can discuss the craft of writing. If we have a name for something, we're more likely to remember it and to use it with our own work. If students notice a craft that has a name - such as alliteration, metaphor, etc. - use that. If not, then the class can invent a name. The class will know what it means and can add it to the class pot of "things we can try."

Think of *other texts* you know. Have you seen this craft before?

The same wonderful ways to craft writing can be found in many books. As students are on the "lookout" for crafting techniques, they will notice this. Such ways of writing are not owned by particular authors, but are the domain of all writers. This helps students to understand that it's not "copying" to use writing strategies, that writers learn from each other. To seek out books that are crafted like books they already know helps students to make connections between authors and to read for voice and style as well as story.

Envision this crafting in your own writing.

The most important step. Students with their own drafts, about their own topics, think about, imagine, how this particular crafting strategy might work in their own draft. They "try them on" for size, talking out how a crafting technique might work with their draft. We can help them by making statements such as, "So if I'm writing and I want to _____, then I can use this technique." This helps students to make sense of WHY writers might choose certain techniques, why certain techniques make sense for certain types of writing. With envisioning, it makes sense to help students by "writing in the air" / "writing out loud" for them, so that they can hear the sound of the crafting technique in their own draft. This step will ideally give students the feeling of so many possibilities for their draft.

claim in title

Some Harsh Sentences Prove Unjust

By Leonard Pitts Jr. lpitts@miamiherald.com

This opening makes me feel like I'm entering a conversation which is what this genre is ~ adding your voice to a debate

So the people got sick of it, all those criminals being coddled by all those (bleeding heart liberal judges) with all their soft-headed concern for rights and rehabilitation.

Contrast between "people" & these "others" is emphasized by name-calling - but I'm

And a wave swept this country in the Reagan years, a wave ridden by pundits and politicians seeking power, a wave that said, no mercy, no more.

From now on, judges would be severely limited in the sentences they could hand down for certain crimes, required to impose certain punishments whether or not they thought those punishments fit the circumstances at hand. From now on, there was a new mantra in American justice. From now on, we would be "tough on crime."

a summary of what happened - succinct

alliteration feels crafted - I like it
wondering if I am one of the "people" or not
makes me see this clearly - attend to it

1. (We got tough on) Jerry DeWayne Williams, a small-time criminal who stole a slice of pizza from a group of children. He got 25 years. (O)

details matter - one slice!

2. (We got tough on) Duane Silva, a guy with an IQ of 71 who stole a VCR and a coin collection. He got 30 to life. ← a tragedy

bigger crime

3. (We got tough on) Dixie Shanahan, who shot and killed the husband who had beaten her for three days straight, punching her in the face, pounding her in the stomach, dragging her by the hair because she refused to have an abortion. She got 50 years.

details make the case

3 verbs that create images

4. (We got tough on) Jeff Berryhill, who got drunk one night, kicked in an apartment door and punched a guy who was inside with Berryhill's girlfriend. He got 25 years.

is this possible? one punch = 25 years? This is so outrageous his argument is won for me, and I'm

5. Now, we have gotten tough on Marissa Alexander. She is the Jacksonville woman who said her husband flew into a violent rage and tried to strangle her when he found text messages to her first husband on her phone. She said she fled to her car, but in her haste, forgot her keys. She took a pistol from the garage and returned to the house for them. When her husband came after her again, she fired — into the ceiling. The warning shot made him back off. No one was hurt.

ready to read his next bit of evidence.

I'm relieved.

No one hurt. Must mean a light sentence - but I wonder because of the earlier evidence, so I keep reading.

With the background of 1-4, we look more closely at 5.

The "she said" statements planted doubt.

parallel openings to these sentences create a rhythm and an ease in reading.

without details I'm not sure if this is a good choice, but assume she made the right one.

Like Shanahan before her, Alexander was offered a plea bargain. Like Shanahan, she declined, reasoning that no one would convict her under the circumstances. Like Shanahan, she was wrong.

great short last sentence to focus us

Earlier this month, Alexander got 20 years for aggravated assault. And like Shanahan, like Berryhill, Williams, Silva and Lord only knows how many others, she received that outlandish sentence not because the judge had a heart like Simon LeGree's, but because he was constrained by so-called "mandatory-minimum" sentencing guidelines that tie judges' hands, allow them no leeway for compassion, context or common sense. In other words, they prohibit judges from judging.

Yikes!
+ now a list of what we know & then a phrase that expands the problem from what he has identified here to the world at large

who is this?

save the best - most important of the list for last where it has a greater impact.

now the judge is not a label like in the opening, but a compassionate human being

Charles Smith, the judge who sent Shanahan away, put it best. He said the sentence he was required to impose "may be legal, but it is wrong" Amen.

connotes God - so really wrong

The Eighth Amendment prohibits "cruel and unusual punishment." In a

nation where we execute people based on no evidence save eyewitness testimony, it is hard to imagine what meaning that prohibition still holds. But assuming it means anything, surely it means you can't draw a 20-year sentence for shooting a ceiling.

Except that Alexander just did. In restricting judges from judging, we have instituted a one-size-fits-all version of justice that bears little resemblance to the real thing. It proceeds from the same misguided thinking that produced the absurd "zero tolerance" school drug policies that get children suspended for bringing aspirin and Midol to class. In both cases, there is this silly idea that by requiring robotic adherence to inflexible rules we will produce desirable results.

great way to remind us this is what we expect them to do

By now, it should be obvious how wrongheaded and costly that reasoning was — and how urgently we need to roll back the wave that swept over us in the Reagan years. It is understandable that the nation wanted to get tough on crime.

But we have been rather hard on justice, too.

things - I can't help liking them in my head - so it makes this writing bigger than the original claim.

The last line has punch - pulls the piece to a central idea.

I have never heard this - like how the cliché is challenged with this plain common sense talk.

This essay makes me want to do something in response, even though he doesn't ask me to.

what we notice on a rereading, once we understand the whole of the essay and can begin to exam the parts. First the meaning - a synthesis of the parts presented - comprehension - but if we want students to evaluate the argument presented, they'll have to reread and begin to question, notice writerly techniques, reconsider evidence and evaluate the overall impact of the whole.

Cruel as It Is, We Somehow Go On

Sometimes the earth is cruel. *general to specific*

That is ultimately the fundamental lesson here, as children wail, families sleep out of doors, and the dead lie unclaimed in the rubble that once was Port-au-Prince. *defines "here"* *gives a definition of cruelty - or evidence to support the position* *more cruel still*

Sometimes the rains fall and will not stop. Sometimes the skies turn barren and will not rain. Sometimes the seas rise and smack the shoreline like a fist. Sometimes the wind bullies the land. And sometimes, the land rattles and heaves and splits itself in two. *over evidence* *opposite* *although individually bad, also combine to make a hurricane.* *moves in increasing intensity & violence* *violent*

Sometimes, the earth is cruel. *repeats, but now we hold evidence in our heads to give power to the phrase* *includes himself* *This could be a metaphor or literal - works both ways.* *And always, when it is we do the same thing. We dig ourselves out. We weep and mourn, we recover and memorialize the dead, we rebuild our homes. And we go on. This is the price of being human. And also, arguably, the noblest expression* *we hear an echo of the title* *now it moves back to general - including all kinds of cruelties, not just natural disasters.*

Sometimes, the earth is cruel, and you have no choice but to accept that as part of the bargain called life. And when it is your turn to deal with it, you do. *honoring the prior experiences of readers - that ethic of standing up to adversity -*

But what if it's always your turn?

Surely some homeless, dust-streaked Haitian can be forgiven for thinking it is always Haiti's turn this morning, two days after the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere saw its capital city smashed by the strongest earthquake it has ever known, a 7.0-magnitude monster. Surely, the rest of us watching from afar, experiencing tragedy and devastation from the comfort of desk chairs and living room couches, are tempted to believe the same thing. *as if it isn't right to think this? Like... try to understand his position before you reject it...*

Bad enough, Haiti is wretchedly poor. Bad enough it has a history of political instability and colonialism, of being ignored by the major powers when it is not being exploited by them. Bad enough, all that, yet at the end of the day, those are disasters authored by human hands, by human greed, human corruption, human economic predation. *syllables - 1 - 1 -* *so intensity increases & length of the words lengthen as well*

Sometimes, though, you have to wonder if the planet itself is not conspiring against this humble little nation. *this word is coniving, learned, savvy.* *vs. this is the homeless, uneducated, dust-streaked victim* *the earth again - what we cannot control or completely understand*

We value freedom to choose, but recognize its limitations. *The essay turns from we all agree here to the specifics of one case and his argument that Haitians have had more than the rest of us... and it's a hard argument to make because people like to outdo each other with stories of how hard life has been. He piles on the evidence to make his case.* *the power of words to communicate much more than information*

recent past - which makes this relevant & quite a list forward.

After 1994, when Tropical Storm Gordon killed several hundred people,

why did he start here?

after 1998, when Hurricane Georges swept away over 500 lives, after 2004, when the rains of Tropical Storm Jeanne claimed over 2,000 souls, after 2005, when Hurricane Dennis took 25 lives in July and Tropical Storm Alpha snatched 17 in October, followed by Hurricane Wilma which stole 11 more, after the double whammy of Hurricanes Fay and Gustav in 2008 killed over 130 people and destroyed over 3,100 homes, after all that, comes this latest insult - and a death toll officials cannot begin to even imagine. Perhaps as many as 100,000, they were saying on Wednesday.

think of all the choices he made re: what to include/exclude

Keeping it chronologic allows us to organize as we read. The details teach - we wonder why we didn't know any of it. People want the news to inform

Sometimes, the earth is cruel. To crawl the planet's skin, scanning for

a statement to summarize the above & transition forward

tornadoes in Oklahoma, charting storm tracks in Florida, running from wildfires in California, is to understand this in a primal, personal way. It is to breathe a prayer that begins, "There, but for the grace of God . . ." It is to write relief checks, donate blood, volunteer material and time and to fear, even in the doing, that these gestures are small against the need inconsequential against the ache of a people whose turn seems never to end.

physical, but detached feels human & individual we all know aches.

But what else are you going to do? As the playwright put it, your arms too short to box with God. Even less have we the ability to answer the question that burns the moment: Why are the most vulnerable repeatedly assessed the highest price? This is a general question again - it leads us to consider who we

know who is vulnerable - and the prices they have paid.

We are hamstrung by our own limitations, so we can only do what we always do, only send prayers and help. And watch, staggered by the courage it takes, as Haitians do what human beings always do, the thing at which they have become so terribly practiced. reminds us of his evidence

repeats but shortened [Dig out. Weep and mourn. Memorialize the dead. Rebuild. Go on.] And show the world once again a stubborn insistence on living, despite all the cruelties of the earth.

including the title, the 6th time cruel is used - and cruelty has intent - it didn't just happen, it wasn't just a flood or an earthquake, it was more.

By LEONARD PITTS JR. lpitts@MiamiHerald.com

The value of a second reading is in increased comprehension, which allows for deeper thinking, but also in the implications for student writing. Study the best writing you can find so students internalize the power of repetition, word choice, the presentation of evidence in an argument, and the way a writer can include you in the thinking - make you a part of the argument. A great argument moves beyond the specifics of one case to the myriad ways it plays out in our individual lives.

one long sentence piles on - makes you catch your breath & ends with a number that dwarfs all the others.

human words - human actions to describe the weather, the earth, which fits with its cruelty - a word that speaks of intention

we can't fight God, so we try to help others

Gamers To the End

Rick Reilly

You up for a challenge?

he'll have to back this up with evidence

I'm going to tell you about five young Americans at the peak of their athletic lives.

Your job is to guess how all five lives came together in the past month. very specific task

One. As usual, Elizabeth Loncki is acting very unladylike, just the way she likes it. It's 2001, she's 18 and she's challenging her dad to do a push-up contest. He just did 50, but now Elizabeth's hitting 51. adj. - then evidence

He could've done 100, and she would've done 101. That's how she is. A 5'5" Energizer Bunny, she's the furnace that heats the volleyball team at Padua Academy in Wilmington, Del. She's the darling of the weight room wherever she works out, spotting guys twice her size. the athlete

She also reads to shut-ins and runs errands for seniors. And seems like twice a week, she'll get up early so she can get balloons for somebody at school. Just don't try calling her "sweet." the rest of her

(Two) Brian (Cap'n) Freeman is about to become one of the best in the world at something he never thought he'd even try--bobsledding. the "peak" ?

A burly brakeman from the virtually snowless town of Temecula, Calif., Freeman digs in, grunts and pushes the U.S. to a bronze medal at the 2002 America's Cup in Lake Placid, N.Y. But Freeman isn't just the piston for his sled team, he's also the soul of it--willing to push for drivers other than his own, just to give them a chance to develop with a few more runs. "A total team guy," says Steven Holcomb, the current World Cup bobsled points leader. "I wouldn't be where I am today without Brian." evidence ↑ with credibility but that's past more than athletics

Three. If you'd been there when Shawn Falter was a toddler, with those massive braces on both legs, you wouldn't believe what you're seeing now, as the senior leads his 1998-99 Homer (N.Y.) High basketball team. No longer pigeon-toed, he's blocking shots, rebounding like a man on a caffeine drip, scoring when it's needed and setting up teammates the rest of the time. keeps the tone light, playful - makes us smile

establishes voice in the opening line - casual, playful

readers aren't often given 'jobs' when they read

He's keeping count, keeping us in the challenge - while also providing transitions that keep the piece moving fast

"peak" from braces to leader

That's nothing. You should see him on the football field, scoring TDs at tight end and trying to decapitate receivers at safety. And all the while being skinnier than a one-iron.

the drive followed by a playful reference so we don't see him as menacing, just driven.
more than athletics
"All heart," marvels Jeff Tabel, who was his hoops coach. "Born to lead."

Four. Luis Castillo isn't just a good wrestler, he's the captain of the 2003-04 team at Mattawan (Mich.) High. Wait! He's not just the captain, he's the winner of the team's leadership award.

not football, hoops, volleyball, or bobbleheading
And wrestling is only where it starts. He's a break-dancing, bungee-jumping, joke-telling machine in a crew cut. "The all-American kid," the grown-ups call him. And it makes you wonder: How many people know he was born in Mexico?

again - bigger than 'gamers' - fun-loving, adventure seeker
who are these people?
Five. It's 2000, and 17-year-old Jason Corbett takes his mark at the ancient Panathenaic Stadium in Athens. The timer is ready and--bang!--Corbett's off. Of course, there is no official time for his run because there's nobody in the stands and it's his buddy holding the watch.

yet another sport to match diversity in home towns + other (beyond athletics) interests
He's not in a track meet, he's on a trip with some Casper, Wyo., high school classmates. But, hey, that's not going to stop Corbett from running or having a good time. Nothing stops Corbett. He swallows life whole--track, snowboarding, fly-fishing and hunting. The kids has all the warning signs of a thrillaholic and loves anything to do with the outdoors. Maybe that's why he ended up in the only place big enough for him: Alaska.

more diversity in games
So what if you gave students only the first half of the essay?

So what do these five athletes have in common? They were all killed in Iraq during a two-week period in January.

Air Force Senior Airman Loncki, 23, was killed by a car bomb near Al-Mahmudiya.

Army Captain Freeman, 31, was killed by insurgents disguised as American soldiers in Karbala.

Army Private First Class Falter, 25, died as a result of that same ambush.

Marine Lance Corporal Castillo, 20, died from wounds suffered while on patrol in Al Anbar province.

the parallel structure in the reporting takes all playfulness and emotion away.
just the facts - but we hold the person behind each one in our heads - we remember images from the first half of the essay.

stopping here? After digging in to details & making theories... keep reading?

Army Specialist Corbett, 23, died on injuries from small-arms fire suffered while on patrol in Karmah.

more than athletics

Five athletes. Five futures. All gone.

Five of 84 Americans killed from New Year's Day through Sunday. Five of 3,084

Americans killed since the war began.

Two sentences that pull this essay from a narrow focus to a much larger issue

Athletes love teams, and when they run out of sports teams they sometimes join bigger teams, ones with Humvees for huddles and tombstones for trophies and coaches they've never met sending them into a hell they never imagined.

This works well on a structural level with two parallel phrases

And they throw their whole selves into it anyway, because they are brave and disciplined and will chew through concrete to win the game.

followed by the longer one -

But what if the game can't be won?

from narrow to broad focus - from story to commentary -

innocent kids in this war

but as far as order? Tombstones has the biggest impact and it is in the middle.

February 12, 2007

Transition - the past - the future, the present reality.

we have evidence from the five descriptions

1, called this short TP by Joe 'darn-near perfect,' so you might be wondering why does this snapshot work so well?

Violet
By Joe D'Angelo

-the title makes me wonder

readers like to be in a scene-a place-
right away, and they want to
know where the narrator is

The sky was clouded and the air slightly cool. I approached the batter's box,
bat on my shoulder. My heart was pounding against my chest, seemingly trying to
break through. Drops of sweat streamed down my face, tickling my cheeks, and my
arms were shaking uncontrollably, as if being shocked. I took a glance down at my
coach, who did a series of motions with his arms and gave me a, "Let's go, Joe."
Coach's signs didn't really translate to anything, but I knew what I had to do at this
point—I didn't need him to tell me how to get the job done. I briefly closed my eyes
in an attempt to clear my mind. I desperately wanted this moment; no, I needed it. I
dug in with my foot, and met eyes with the pitcher. It was a staring contest—my eyes
never left his. I had the intention of reaching into his brain and shaking it like there
was no tomorrow—to make him think of anything other than pitching. He reared
back and fired it towards the plate; without thinking my arms straightened and
Crack. The ball rocketed through the air and dropped in right field, just far enough
from both outfielders so I could make it to second base. Tears started to form behind
my eyes as a wave of emotion swept over me. No, this hit didn't win the game, and
no, I had not set some sort of record or anything like that. In fact, as far as the game
itself, the hit was meaningless. But to me, it was perhaps the most important
achievement in my life. This hit was for my grandmother.

smart to include
sound

I could
see him do
this.

Don't
you love
how Joe
makes his
connection
to the topic
clear here?
Now I know
it isn't
just any
at-bat for
Joe...
and I'm

wondering
why. My
wondering
motivates
me to keep
reading.

I like how Joe
anticipates my
thinking.

I love how this
last line introduces
something entirely
new in the piece and
makes me rethink the
whole scene ~ now I have a
different way to look at his nervousness
and his determination.

Also... one of the tricky things about
composing in snapshots is connecting them
together. This grandmother line serves as a
perfect bridge to the next scene, which, you guessed it,
is about grandma. Now don't you want to read the rest?

way to go, Joe!

look at
all of
these
clear
details!

Cool...
the
enemies
in this
situation
look
eyes
which
creates
tension.

I can
hear
this!
Joe
mixes
sound
&
sight
which
is
smart
writing.



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THE LIFE OF REILLY

go I'm so excited to find his writing again - free - online - and his opening piece is like a sucker punch to my gut. And somehow, just what I needed.

By Rick Reilly

Since this is my first column for *The Magazine*, I figure I should introduce myself.

And maybe the best way to tell you who I am is to tell you about my dad, Jack. He

was an Irish tenor, a yarn spinner, a songwriter, a father of four, a crack golfer and a first-class drunk.

As kids, we blamed golf. We thought the game made him meaner

than a dyspeptic rattler. We were sure it was more important than we were, or why was he never around? More than once he asked me, "What grade are you in again?"

He'd always come home drunk from golf, except for the times he'd come home dripping drunk. Then he'd be looking to bust something, maybe a lamp, maybe somebody's nose, my mom's, once. To this day, the sound of spikes on cement sends a shot of ice through me. That was him coming up the sidewalk.

In alcoholic families, the youngest kid becomes the mascot. That was me. I became the funny one, comic relief, third-grade vaudeville—anything to keep the furniture where it was. When he'd eventually stagger into bed, the rat in my stomach would finally stop gnawing.

When I was about 10 or 11, I started working through the thing backward. If I could play golf with him, maybe I could keep him from drinking. I'd be the hero! So I started asking him to take me. He did once, but my fear of him was so paralyzing that any instruction he gave sounded like a shotgun in my ear. After about three holes, I stormed off the course in tears and waited in the car.

I remember all of my own theories.

I remember this as well.

I was so afraid of rage.



The photo & then his name draw me closer to the subject.

List with details order here makers first class drunk not pretty not easy.

not sure what this means - but rather - strike w/o warning - deadly evidence
much better than I'm afraid
scary again
really scary
don't know what this means but he explains with examples
This claim - ? - I measure it against myself - test it.
what a phrase
always fear

gr. 4-5 hopes & dreams - greatness - solve adult problems - save the day

I didn't play again until high school. I did it partly to understand what was so wonderful about a game that would keep a man from coming to his kids' games and piano recitals and birthday parties. *1 wondered too.*

And I was happy to find out it wasn't the Titleist clubs that made him so mean, it was the Canadian Clubs. It was the whiskey. Golf was this green-and-blue launching pad for little white rockets. Golf taught me the lessons my dad never did, including the best one: You play life where it lies. You hit it there. You play it from there. Nobody threw you a nasty curve or forgot to block the defensive end. I learned that my mistakes were mine alone, not my boss', not the cop's and, as much as I hated to admit it, not my dad's. *

And then one day, out of the blue, maybe 25 years ago, my dad went to one AA meeting and quit. Never had a drop after that.

It was five more years before I finally believed it. Then I invited him to the Masters. He was 70, I was 30.

And it was on that two-and-a-half-hour ride from Atlanta to Augusta that we finally met.

now I believe he knows this territory.

He told me his life story, how he drank and fought to get the attention of his distant father, how he'd kept from us that he'd been married before, and how sorry he was to have let his family grow up while he was holding down the 19th hole with his elbows.

He apologized and cried. I forgave him and cried. I never dreamed I-20 could be that emotional.

Suddenly he understood. He went home to Boulder, Colo., and apologized to my mom and my brother and two sisters. They finally got to tell him how much he hurt them. He wrote us a poem about his love for us and his shame and why nobody would cry the day he died.

It took a lot of guts and a lot of courage, and the only lousy part was that it came so late. By the time I saw him for who he was—a strong man who took most of a lifetime to understand his crushing weakness—I was ears deep into my own family and career. So we didn't play much golf together before the warranty on his heart started to expire. I never got to really see the swing that won all those trophies. By then, the only time he used his putter was as a cane.

Two months ago, on the final night of his life, I sat alone in a chair next to his hospice bed, holding his hand and a box of Kleenex and proving how wrong poems can be sometimes.

As I looked at him, I realized that for better and worse he'd shaped me. I think I'm a good father borne of his rotten example. I'm a storyteller out of surviving him. I'm a man with more flaws than a 1986 Yugo, but I try to own up to them, because a very good Irish tenor showed me how.

And that's what I call a very good save.

so simple-sparse-

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* not my dad's. interesting how he's set this up until now with the horrors and fear and we're waiting to see that connect to missed opportunities or broken relationships ("I couldn't trust anyone because...") but instead he teaches his greatest lesson in this phrase. we own our mistakes no matter what.

FENCES

Fences never stopped me.

great couples: parallels

Wood slat, chain link, barbed wire -- it made no difference: fences were my trusted companions. They were my step ladders, my playground equipment, my launching pads. As a fearless six year old, I knew nothing of barriers and boundaries and borders. I knew trampolines and trapezes and tree forts. Fences existed for my entertainment and recreation, enhancing rather than enclosing my expanding existence. I had never met a fence I had not crawled or climbed or conquered.

again the parallel forms

That is, until fences became deadly.

this one sentence TP here - just right. And it echoes the first sentence - an idea - then

My world without limits started to collapse the day my mother warned me about a new kind of fence, one with electric current surging through its wires. "These electric fences are very dangerous, David," she said, looking me dead in the eyes. "If you ever touch one, it can kill you."

exposition in a TP - then another idea.

It could not be true. Beyond the occasional splinter or scratch, I believed fences to be utterly harmless. They were nothing like scary monsters or speeding cars or that blue stuff in the bottle under the sink -- those were the dangerous things. Fences were entirely different. Fences were my friends.

childlike voice here - pleading against her certainty

For weeks my mother's words haunted me, hovering around me as I played near my house, making me suddenly cautious and hesitant in the world I had previously roamed imperiously. She had said that if you listened carefully, you could tell an electric fence because it made a humming sound. Instead of leaping ferociously onto fences as I once had, I would stand paralyzed near any suspicious barrier, holding my breath and listening for the quiet hum of death. I never thought I heard the hum, but I usually backed away from the fences carefully rather than taking a chance; after all, dying seemed to be about the worst thing that could happen to you.

These are all big words... weighty with image.

childlike voice

As the days passed and I failed to discover even one certified death fence, I regained some of my old adventurousness. Some days I would forget my mother's warning

- seems to playfully challenge Mom

so much intentional craft - but simple, concrete language so the craft does not interfere with my enjoyment.

good place for dialogue - another voice to change the narrator's dominance of the piece up until now.

resonates with May - the quiet hum of the hospital room taking the life of my father

entirely, pouncing eagerly on anything that stood in my path. But as any parent will attest, you should never forget your mother's advice.

Almost like that hum returns here... that ominous tone of foreshadowing.

One sweaty summer day I left my mother's words behind as my best friend Paul and I walked out of my backyard and across the corn field that stretched toward the mountains. Paul was always an eager accomplice, and we had watched as the field became more and more alluring as the corn grew higher and higher. That day it was nearly up to our shoulders as we darted in and out of the rows, hiding from and catching each other, moving farther and farther from my house. As our spontaneous game of tag became more competitive, I discovered a successful strategy to avoid being caught. I would duck my head and cross over several rows of corn before dashing full speed down a corn corridor, never lifting my head above shoulder level as I ran. Certain I had left Paul far behind, I felt the giddy thrill of victory as I flew through the stalks and ears.

great alternative to forgot

There're children, but the admir writing this knows what allure is - means - does.

I never saw it coming. what a line. One sentence - all preparation.

It was only two wires, one at my ankles, one at my chest. By the time I saw the top wire - too late! - grabbing onto it seemed my only option, a reflex more than a decision. But before I could vault over the almost invisible line, I felt a shocking surge, a surging shock. My entire body froze, my hands gripping the wire in an involuntary contraction. And then my body recoiled, falling back into the field of corn and dirt. A low hum hung in the air. Shock waves raced through my veins, and my brain registered the most terrible truth: I had touched an electric fence. I was going to die.

2 wonder if this was a surprise to him -

2 love that this is real - not just a story his mom told him - & 2 love how he repeats it here.

the 't' sound repeated is like a series of mini jolts

Paul found me lying on the ground, a mass of despair. I could not hold back the sobs, but I could not find the words to tell my friend that I was going to die. I ran wildly toward my house, husks slapping my skin and tears blurring my vision. When I threw open the back patio door, I wanted my mother to rush to me and scoop me up in her arms, holding me as the world faded to black around me. I wanted to tell her that I hadn't meant to touch the electric fence, that I was afraid to die. But there was no one to witness my agony and distress; I stood alone in the silent house, listening to my breathing become slower and slower. Then I heard the low whisper of music coming from my mother's basement sewing room, but I no longer wanted her comfort or protection. A realization rose within me: I would need to face my death alone, with bravery and strength, like my heroes on movies and television.

different than the low hum above

> childish voice again

and farther and farther from her influence

so different than giddy racing above

Resolved to die like a man, I retreated miserably but noiselessly to my bedroom. I sat on the edge of my bed, trying to feel the beginning stages of death in my body. My foot felt numb -- is that how it starts? Then a tingling in my arm -- is that what's next? I was sure my pulse was weakening. I knew I could not lie down, because if I fell asleep, I would never wake up. And who wants to die without even knowing it? I propped myself against the wall next to my bed and tried to feel the clock ticking inside me: would I make it to dinner, which was still several hours away?

The knock on my door jolted me back into awareness, and I looked frantically at the clock on my nightstand. It was 5:30. Had I fallen asleep? Or was I almost dead? My mother's voice asked me where I had been, told me that dinner was ready. I mumbled that I was coming, and she retreated to the kitchen. I felt my limbs, my lungs, my heart -- I knew I didn't have much longer to live. I thought about how awful it would be to die at dinner, food on my plate and my parents watching on in horror. Would I slump slowly to the floor, my parents sitting helplessly as I waved my napkin in a final surrender? Would my face suddenly pitch forward into my meatloaf and mashed potatoes as my parents gasped in disbelief? I decided I couldn't face such an undignified conclusion. So I stayed in my room, thinking I might die before they came to call me a second time, which would save all of us the pain and sadness of a death at dinner.

But when my mother knocked at my door again, I began to cry out loud, and she heard me. She rushed into my room, putting her hands on my shoulders and asking me what was wrong. I didn't want to tell her -- I didn't want her to be mad at me for touching the fence, I didn't want her to be sad that I was going to die -- but her voice was so warm and nice, and she was my mother, after all. So I told her everything -- that I touched an electric fence even though she told me it could kill me, that I could feel death coursing through my body, that I didn't want to die at dinner. She started making a sound that I thought was crying, and I saw tears in her eyes. But then I realized she wasn't crying at all -- she was laughing. And I didn't see why me dying was all so very funny, so I started crying even more.

And then I heard her saying the same words, over and over again. "David, you are not going to die." What she was saying sounded impossible, and I reminded her that she had said touching an electric fence would kill you.

"It would have killed you right away, honey," she assured me, holding my head against her shoulder and stroking my hair. "It can only kill you while you are touching the fence."

↳ like this mother-
when she was laughing I didn't, even though I understood her.

It took even more convincing before I mostly believed that I wasn't going to die that night. Hours later, stuffed with meatloaf and potatoes, I was still afraid to let myself fall asleep. I lay in bed, feeling for even the slightest spark inside me, convinced I could defeat sleep just that one time.

concrete
& details make
writing
more
vivid - the
reader
experiences it.

And then it was morning, the sun streaming through the crack in my curtains. I was awake and alive, but somehow my life would never be the same. More fences were waiting out there, some of them humming with danger, and I would never roam the world so freely again.

David Rowe

What
fences
are
waiting
out there
for us?
What do we
fear might
stop us just as
we're getting
close to
achieving
something
great?

What do I notice that I could try in
my own writing? or I want to pay more attention to?

- alliteration
- parallel structure
- a child's authentic voice
- writing about rules at our house that scared me or weren't very helpful
- boundaries as a child - write about them
- the whole piece blends show and tell with such skill - the way his mom holds him that show she understands his fear - then tell to zoom past the unimportant details of dinner
- zoom in / zoom past: how writers make time work for the story ~ has a good sense of what he wants to tell & what is important in that story...

Lifts
this
piece
beyond
the specific
to the
general.