

Mr. George Baker
written by Amy Hest
illustrated by Jon J. Muth

I was introduced to this beautiful picture book when I spoke at the Georgia Regional IRA Conference in November and immediately fell in love with it. The story is a simple one for use at all grades: a young boy tells about his neighbor who is a hundred years old but who is just learning to read at the same time this little boy is learning—and “it’s hard,” he says. The language and rhythm of this prose is striking.

SSR Block - It’ll be a wonderful read-aloud. The dialogue and voice are rich, and you’ll want to practice this one before reading it to your students. It’s a simple text, but just begs to be read with an expressive voice.

Guided Reading Block - Here are some different skills this book lends itself well to:

Compare and contrast the two main characters in this story—Mr. George Baker and the young speaker.

Explore how the reader determines just who the speaker of a story is. Make inferences about the attributes of the two characters: the speaker’s age, the relationship between the two, and the personal traits of each character.

Beginning, middle, and end are simple in this story and easy to identify even though there’s very little action to the plot.

Theme - Explore the themes presented in this simple story.

Writing Block - I’ve already used this book to model some writing lessons. I like to think that students will grow beyond what I’m able to achieve as a writer. So, published authors’ works are used for many mini-lessons. Here’s what I found to use for lessons:

Explore how a good writer makes wise choices of words to convey the desired mood, tone and voice of a story. Find examples of this.

Notice how the dialogue and the first person speaker's voice impact the mood and tone of the story.

Explore how the author is able to show and not tell with descriptive language the following: Mr. Baker is talented; he's kind and gentle; the young boy greatly admires Mr. Baker; Mrs. Baker loves her husband.

How would the story change if Mr. Baker were to tell it? What if Mrs. Baker told the story? Do you think the author chose the best point of view?