



Guide to the Reading Workshop

GRADES 3-5



LUCY CALKINS

This book is dedicated to my mother, Virginia Calkins. She is—and has always been—my hero. She is the person I most admire and the audience I most value. I’ve grown in the sunlight of her appreciation. At the end of the day, my eight brothers and sisters and I still, after all these years, know that 3799 Windover Drive is where we are most at home. My dad joins me and all my siblings as Mum’s fan club; it’s amazing to me that although Dad will be 90 this summer, he doesn’t allow any of us to worry about him. Instead he works with zeal at his practice as a physician, at his writing, at his projects, and at his efforts to support us all. I salute him.



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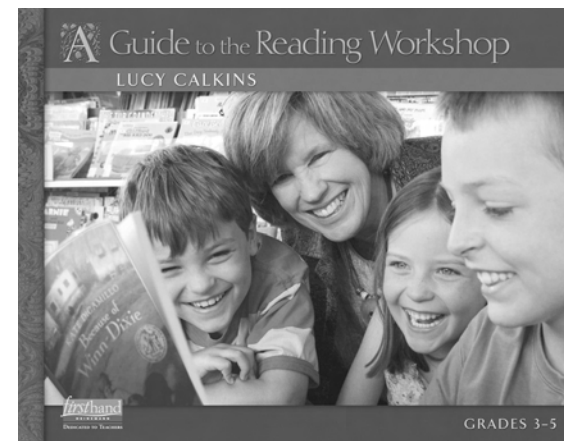
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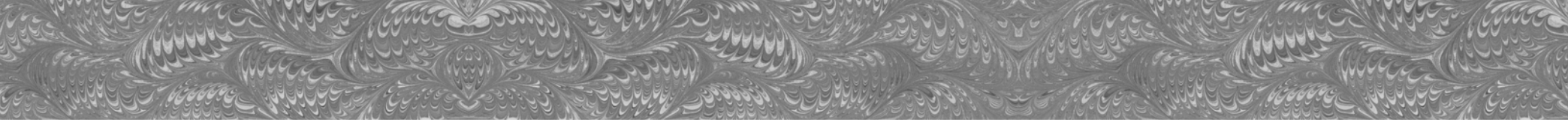


thank my editor, Kate Montgomery, who has been my closest writing partner, my coach and guide and critic and champion. Kate edited the writing units of study as well as these units. I rely on her judgment; she has made many of the decisions that define the Units of Study series. I am especially grateful to her for caring every bit as much as I do, for always taking the high road, and for never wavering in her commitment to making the series worthy of its mission. And I thank her for unerringly right-on critique. As a writer, there is no greater pleasure than to pass a draft to Kate and then to have it come back to me. “You ask if I like this—I don’t,” she’ll write, from time to time. Then, too, there will be notes like “You hit it out of the park.” “How are you getting all this done?” and “Finally we’ve got the book we need, one that....” If only every writer had an editor such as this.

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In the Acknowledgment sections in other volumes, I thank the giant network of people who worked to make this series what it is. For now, there are just a few people you need to know from the start. First on that list is Kathleen Tolan, who has been an enduring and constant partner from before the beginning until after the end of this effort. You will come to know Kathleen in the upcoming books she coauthored, and you will come to understand why she is regarded, at the Project, as the master teacher of us all. Mary Ehrenworth joined this effort toward the end of it, and she and I spent a flurry of three

A decorative marbled pattern in shades of gray, featuring intricate, swirling, and feather-like designs, covers the top portion of the page.

intense months, totally consumed with the final two books in the series. You'll learn more about Mary's enormous contributions in the Acknowledgments to those volumes, but know she's been a gift. Then, too, you need to know from the start of my gratitude to Julia Mooney, writer-in-residence and a coauthor of *Constructing Curriculum*. Julia understands this project in all its detail as no one else does and has lavished thoughtful, attentive care on it.

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The ideas in this series were first developed more than two decades ago when Randy Bomer, author of *Time for Meaning*, was Deputy Director of the TCRWP. All of the thinking in these books is grounded in that early work, so it carries his intellectual DNA—and I'm forever grateful for that. Scores of reading experts have also contributed to the think tank at the TCRWP, but none have contributed more than Marie Clay, founder of Reading Recovery, and Dick Allington, author of *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers*.

Finally, I am grateful to you, my readers. I know that you will bring your experiences, insights, wisdom, skepticism, ideals, and passions to these books, adding all that you know and feel and want between the lines of these books. And I know that you'll take these words with you into your classroom, where they'll reach children, who are the reason why all of this matters.

A Letter to School Leaders



Dear Colleague,

If you have just brought Units of Study into your school, you'll have some predictable questions. I want to take a minute to answer those questions.

“How can I get a quick sense of this curriculum?”

You'll need get a quick sense of this whole curriculum. You can't, after all, read all of these books, in all their detail—at least not just yet! My suggestion is this:

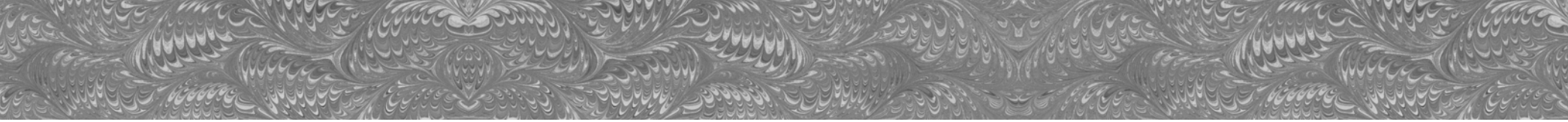
- Read this *Guide to the Reading Workshop*, ideally in its entirety, but certainly chapters 1-4, and the beginnings of chapters 6, 7, and 10.
- Then I suggest you read the front matter to each of the Units of Study books. It will give you a fairly detailed sense of the trail each unit takes.
- If you can, watch a few of the scenes on the DVD—each is about five minutes long. In the table of contents for the DVD, I've marked which segments I recommend you turn to if you only have 30–45 minutes.

“How does it work if I give the same set of units to teachers at different grade levels?”

You will consider how to disperse these units so that they can actually support a 3–5 curriculum in reading. You'll see four units, with two volumes for three of them, and wonder how to divide these up among your teachers. “After all,” you may think, “the kids can't cycle through the same units year after year, can they?”

I need to reassure you about that. These units are new—and not new. They're being written at this level of (I hope) excellence and of detail for the first time, yes. But the units themselves have been the mainstay in thousands of classrooms for many, many years. Briefer versions of these were written and distributed by the thousands a decade ago. These units have also been an important part of the summer institutes that we teach every year at Teachers College. And yes, teachers have taught these units repeatedly to third graders, fourth graders, fifth graders, and even to kids throughout the middle grades.

This doesn't mean the units have been taught in exactly the same way each year. Every year, always, every teacher needs to be encouraged to deviate from “the script,” if you want to call it that, from the teaching story we tell in the units. You will need to encourage teachers, from the start, to bring in their own anecdotes in place of mine, the stories of their own kids in place of mine. And you will want to encourage teachers to weed these minilessons. When I give two anecdotes and a quote to make a point, teachers will choose one of those anecdotes, and perhaps only have the quote, to make the point. They'll see that one of my mid-workshop teaching points addresses a really big topic for their kids and they'll pump that bit of teaching up and turn it into a minilesson. They'll see that their kids need a whole bunch of teaching that



isn't here, and they'll write in those entirely new minilessons. They'll see that something I teach is reminiscent of some teaching teachers have been doing with the help of Steph Harvey or Ellin Keene or Harvey Daniels or Linda Dorn or Gay Su Pinnell or a host of others, and they'll loop in that teaching.

But more than this, the content of reading minilessons, like the content of writing minilessons, is rarely something that any of us ever outgrows. For example, you could be reading *Freckle Juice* or you could be reading *Three Cups of Tea*, and the question—"What really, really motivates this character?" continues to be endlessly interesting and important to consider. What motivates a boy to use black marker to make freckles all over his body? What motivates a man to leave his wife and kids behind, to head to the most desolate sections of Pakistan and Afghanistan, to work for ten years to help a remote village build a one-room schoolhouse? What lessons do these characters learn, and what can we learn alongside them? Those questions are enduring ones, and if a teacher reminds readers who are eight of these questions, and then reminds readers who are ten (or twenty, or fifty) it is still excellent teaching. The real learning comes as the readers mull over these questions, using them to read more powerfully. This work will always, by its nature, be done at the reader's own developmental level.

I suggest that when you have first brought the series into your school, you ask everyone to teach the first three units. These are foundational units, units that provide kids with the essentials. More than this, the units are written as a form of professional development. Every minilesson is situated within a little keynote address—in the preludes, I look teachers in the eyes and try to talk about the big goals of that day's teaching, trying to fill them with a belief that this teaching matters tremendously. Within each day's conferring and small-group section, I anticipate the support that kids will need, and show teachers how they can marshal their time to get around, to use a combination of small-group work and conferring to reach their kids. In the early units, I teach the broad overviews of conferring; in later units, I teach this in much more detail.

So yes, I would ask all teachers to start by teaching those units. Frankly, I'd even suggest that the teachers read aloud the books we've read aloud—just for this first year. That's because it is a lot of work to find the places in a book to teach whatever it is that a teacher hopes to teach. Of course, if you have a grade-level of teachers that are tremendously knowledgeable about teaching reading and ready to work to put their own stamp on this by altering the read-aloud from the start—fine. Even better! But, in general, in the first year, it will be challenging enough for teachers to work with these units of study as they are written.

"Do you expect I should ask teachers to follow these units exactly?"

Under no circumstances will you want to require that teachers teach "by the book." From the start, you'll want to encourage teachers to tailor this curriculum to suit their own personalities, their beliefs, their kids.

I do encourage you, however, to ask teachers to stay largely in sync with their grade level colleagues (unless there is tremendous strife at a grade, in which case I'd still want to be sure that teachers were not working as Lone Rangers).

I'd want to encourage teachers to add a minilesson or two, but to do this in such a way that the unit still lasts approximately the same length of time as other units.

I'd hold teachers accountable to collaborating with other colleagues, to being transparent and planful in their teaching—if they want to write minilessons, that is terrific, but hopefully those are gathered and combined into a notebook that becomes a resource for others to adopt and adapt.

Then, after the first year, teachers will have a stronger foundation from which to make decisions, authoring and altering curriculum. Probably the fifth-grade teachers, that second year with the curriculum, will either decide to lean on Mary Ehrenworth's unit for launching the reading workshop in *Constructing Curriculum* (if the readers they teach are advanced), or they'll bring in a new read-aloud book and to make some larger-scale adaptations of *Building a Reading Life*. Those teachers can pilfer ideas from *Constructing Curriculum* and from the minilesson extensions on the *Resources for Teaching Reading* CD-ROM, but mostly they'll probably be eager to develop some new minilessons in response to what they are seeing that kids need.

In a second year with this curriculum, the third-grade teachers may feel ready to lean on Hareem Khan's unit in *Constructing Curriculum* that offers a simpler launch to the reading workshop than does *Building a Reading Life*. The fourth-grade teachers may become the grade that uses *Building a Reading Life*, as it is written, with *Stone Fox* as the read aloud—but for the second year they'll need to bring in a new read aloud to it since the third graders will, just for now, know that book.

In such a fashion, your teachers will, during year two, make adaptations on the three foundational units.

After your teachers have taught the three foundational units, the pathway that different grade levels take will probably separate. The final two volumes, encompassing Unit 4, *Tackling Complex Texts*, aims above the heads of many third graders in January. Most third-grade classrooms could profit from this unit at the end of third grade—and it has been a terrific hit with them. But if the entire school is adopting these Units of Study, you might suggest that *Tackling Complex Texts* and the unit in *Constructing Curriculum* on fantasy reading, "Learning from Elves," are reserved for the older grades. In that case, you'd want to channel third-grade teachers towards units on mystery, humor, series books, biography, on using story structure to help us read fiction, or even a whole unit on envisionment and prediction or on reading with fluency. Teachers can all consult *Constructing Curriculum*, which contains many of those units and also lots of units for the rest of the year in upper grade classrooms, including the full fantasy unit.

"How long does each unit take to teach?"

I've written these units with the idea that the first one is a month long, and the others are each a week or two longer. I imagine the three foundational units will last until the December holiday. (Providing a teacher has enough relevant books, reading units can go longer than units in the *Units of Study for Teaching Writing* 3–5 series. The writing units should only be one month in length, since 9-year-old children shouldn't be expected to work productively over one single piece of writing for more than a month.)



“Do I need to buy particular children’s literature for the classroom libraries?”

You are probably also wondering about the books that you will need to provide classroom. You are right to think about this, and it may be that you’ll need to unroll this curriculum over time, with only some grade levels getting started for now so that you can be sure those classes have the libraries they need. In New York City, schools did not have that luxury. Every school was asked to adopt the reading workshop, and asked to do that right away. Many schools initially thought there would be no way that they could provision the classrooms, but when people actually turned schools upside down in search of books, it was astonishing how many books were behind lock and key, or hidden in recesses of closets and basements.

You will need to decide whether class-sets of books can be broken apart and distributed across the school, and whether kits containing expository texts need to be kept intact or can be separated into parts—with their expository texts moving into classroom libraries. You’ll also want to think about levels of books that are in your classrooms. Often libraries look, from a distance, as if they contain plenty of books, but careful scrutiny reveals that half the books are probably out of range for the actual readers in that classroom. Your leadership will be required to wrest books that don’t belong at one grade level from that classroom, moving them to the grade levels that contain students who can read those books. Meanwhile, our experience suggests that most of you will probably need to order more lower-level books. Remember, a fourth grader who is reading Level M texts needs to read ten of these a week, while a fourth grade who is reading level U texts will be apt to read one of those in that same amount of time. That means that the quantities of books at each difficulty should not be the same!

“How will I provide teachers with professional development?”

Finally, you are probably wondering how you will provide your teachers with professional development. Research is clear that nothing matters more than your teachers’ skills, so you are wise to think about this. The series itself is designed as a form of professional development, so you will want to think about how to provide your teachers with release time so they can read and talk about the content of the books, and with opportunities to visit the classrooms of peers who might have gotten off to a strong start with this work. Schools themselves need to be sites for professional development. You may also be interested in bringing one of my colleagues to your school or in sending key teachers to participate in the institutes and conference days we lead. Check the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (<http://rwproject.tc.columbia.edu>) or the Heinemann Units of Study (<http://unitsofstudy.com>) websites for more information.

I know you’ll find the series has the capacity to bring you and your staff together as a community of practice. Seize the moment!

Best wishes,
Lucy Calkins



Essentials of Reading Instruction



hen children come to us at the start of the school year, they don't necessarily come cherishing written language. We see this in the books strewn under the coat rack, grimy with footprints, and in those snarled in the darkest recesses of children's backpacks. We see this in the child who tells us, "I read sixty-two pages last night." Impressed, we ask, "What happened in the story?" and he scrunches up his face and looks up at the ceiling, saying "Uhhhh..." as he wracks his mind for some recollection of what he has read. Nothing surfaces, but he hastens to reassure us: "I read the whole thing—honest. I just can't remember any of it, that's all." He's not our only Teflon reader. We watch one child reach the final page of *Number the Stars*, and we're ready for her to look up, eyes brimming; we know the passage by heart and know how impossibly hard it is to take in. We watch her eyes move down the page to the last paragraph, then the last line. Our eyes well with tears, just thinking about what she will find there. She reads. For a second, she pauses. Then she snaps the book shut, slings it toward us, and says, "I'm done. What should I do now?"

How do we say to her, "You should live differently for the rest of your life because you've read that book?"

How do we teach reading—the heartbreaking, soul-searching kind of reading, the reading that makes you feel as if you are breathing some new kind of air? How do we teach the kind of reading that makes you walk through the world differently because a light bulb is no longer just a light bulb; it's filaments and electricity and the industrial revolution and all that tumbled forth from that? How do we teach the power of reading—the way it allows us to see under the words, between the words, beyond words? How do we teach the intimacy of reading—of belonging to a community that has a shared vocabulary, shared stories, and shared petitions and projects?

The irony is that often when it comes to teaching reading, we convince ourselves that the subject is *So Important* that we outsource it to large for-profit companies that don't know us, don't know our kids, and don't necessarily even know how to teach well. Because we're sure that teaching children to read

is the single most important thing we do, we want someone else to make the decisions about how our teaching will go. “Tell me what to do, and I’ll do it,” we say. And then, when the core reading program channels 19,000 little things toward us, we don’t stop long enough to think, “Does this match what I know from my own experiences learning to read?” “Does this reflect what the research shows kids need?” “Does this draw upon what I’ve learned from all my years of teaching?” We’re too intent on racing through those 19,000 steps, on doling out, checking off, drilling, monitoring, and on and on.

We need to catch our breath and to pause long enough to think, to remember, to research, and to make informed choices. Racing faster and covering more is not the answer. Years ago, when I wrote the first chapter of *The Art of Teaching Writing*, I wrote some words that then became foundational not only to that book but also to *The Art of Teaching Reading*. The words are still true today. “If our teaching is going to be an art, we need to remember that artistry does not come from the sheer quantity of red and yellow paint or from the amount of clay or marble, but from the organizing vision that shapes the use of those materials. It’s not the number of good ideas that will turn our teaching into something significant and beautiful, but the selection, balance, coherence, and design of those ideas” (Calkins 1994, 2001).

Perhaps the place to start is by thinking about our own lives as readers. (Don’t worry—it will take just a minute.) Think for just a minute about the times in your life when reading was the pits, and then think about times when reading was the best thing in the world. What were the conditions that made reading so bad; what made it so good?

I’m pretty sure that you are saying that reading worked for you when you could choose books that mattered to you, when you had lots of time to actually eyes-on-print read, and when you could finish one chapter, and instead of answering twenty questions, read the next chapter. If you’ve had the exquisite pleasure of sharing reading—in a book club, a Bible study group, a woman’s group, a writing group, or in a friendship that includes books—then the social fabric of reading will be part of what made reading work for you. And I’m pretty sure that when reading was the pits for you, someone else told you what to read,

what to think about, and what to do when you finished reading. You probably felt as if your every move was monitored and judged, making reading a performance for someone else.

How can it be that thousands and thousands of teachers and principals are clear about the conditions that have made reading be the pits, the worst thing in the world, for us—and yet we allow a Big Publishing Company to establish a gigantic system around the teaching of reading that results in us teaching in ways that exactly replicate the worst of what has been done to us? How can it be that half the teachers in America have been convinced to teach in ways that directly counter what we know kids need? Above all, how can this system perpetuate itself when it clearly hasn’t worked? The average college graduate in this country reads one book a year. The longer kids stay in school, the less they like to read.

These are important times in the teaching of reading, though. There’s been a gigantic crack in the system. Judgment is no longer pending. The verdict is in. Not one of those core reading programs, mandated under No Child Left Behind, has been shown to reliably work.

Meanwhile, there is an increasing sense of urgency in the air. Today’s information age requires that young people develop literacy skills that are significantly higher than those that have ever been required of them—and this education needs to be for all students, not just for the elite. Study after study is showing that globalization and new information technologies have made it especially urgent for schools to chart a new mission. In their important book, *Breakthrough*, Michael Fullan, Peter Hill, and Carmel Crévola point out that the old mission for schools used to be to provide universal access to basic education and then to provide a small elite with access to university education. The world has changed, however; whereas twenty years ago 95% of jobs were low-skilled, today those jobs constitute only 10% of our entire economy (Darling-Hammond et al., 2008). Children who leave the school system without strong literacy skills will no longer find a job waiting for them. “The new mission is to get all students to meet high standards of education and to provide them with a lifelong education that does not have built-in obsolescence of so much old-style curriculum but

that equips them to be lifelong learners.” Those words form the prelude of the book *Breakthrough*, and they could be the prelude to this series as well.

As this nation wakes up to the fact that the education that millions of Americans received in the past simply isn’t adequate for today, more and more school systems are taking a good look at the expensive core reading programs of the past and they’re thinking, “Could it be that the emperor has no clothes on?” If your superintendent looks to the right and to the left, he or she will see districts where kids soar on every imaginable test—and where funds have been invested not in programs but in teachers, in professional education, in time for collaborative study, and in books. Those places deserve our attention. There’s been a crack in the system, and light is shining through.

Clearly, over the next few years, the status quo in reading education won’t be enough. This is time for ambitious reform. Consider this statistic—and it is but one of many that can take a person’s breath away. During the four years between 1997 and 2002, the amount of new information produced in the world was equal to the amount produced over the entire previous history of the world (Darling-Hammond et al., 2008). The amount of new technical information is being produced at such a rapidly increasing rate that it is predicted soon to double every seventy-two hours (Jukes and McCain, 2002).

The problem and the opportunity coalesce. Now is the time for a new vision for reading instruction. Although the increased urgency caused by globalization and the pressures of the Information Age have led us to spend billions of dollars over the past ten years on the teaching of reading, the emphasis has thus far been mostly on reading programs, and the results have not been compelling. After reviewing the lack of actual evidence that supports even programs that regularly proclaim themselves to be “research based” (including Success for All, Direct Instruction, Waterford Early Reading Program, and Accelerated Reader), Allington wrote, “There is a long-standing federal enthusiasm for packaged reading reform. Unfortunately, we have forty years of research showing that packaged reading reforms simply do not seem reliable to improve student achievement” (Allington, 2006, p. 14). He continues, saying, “None of the proven programs that generated so much excitement a decade ago has withstood the independent research review. None of the commercial reading series has either” (Allington, 2006, p. 14). Over the eight years between 2001 and 2009, despite extraordinary pressures to achieve, reading essentially flat-lined. America has yet to find a way to deliver on the promise of a high-quality universal education. With 32% of students dropping out or failing to complete high school on

time, education has become the great civil rights issue of our generation. Only one in ten low-income kindergartners becomes a college graduate in the United States today. With drop-outs costing the nation at least 200 billion a year in lost wages and taxes, costs for social services, and crime, education is also becoming the great economic issue of our time (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 25.)

Research is clear on the reason why commercial reading series and packaged reform programs haven’t yielded results. Any reform effort that seeks to improve education by bypassing teachers, by trusting programs rather than professionals, will always fail. The U.S. Department of Education recently released a study showing that the single most important thing that can be done to lift the level of student achievement in our classrooms is to support the development and retention of good teachers. In fact, access to good teachers is more important to the likelihood that students will do well than anything else. It is more important than a student’s background, than small class size, and than the fact that a school as a whole is a good one. A mountain of research confirms what all of us already know: the single most important resource a school can provide to its students is an effective teacher. In a recent address at Teachers College, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said, “Teaching has never been more difficult, it has never been more important, and the desperate need for student success has never been so urgent... It’s no surprise that studies repeatedly document that the single biggest influence on student academic growth is the quality of the teacher standing in front of the classroom—not socioeconomic status, not family background, but the quality of the teacher at the head of the class” (Duncan, 2009). And yet most of the money that has been spent over the past decade to improve the teaching of reading has been spent on large commercial reading programs that aim to teacher-proof reading instruction. What’s needed is exactly the opposite.

In his book, *Time for Meaning*, my colleague Randy Bomer, associate professor at the University of Texas in Austin, writes about what it was like for him to go from another career to becoming a teacher. On his first day of orientation, the district lined the new teachers up like children, and Randy and the others marched single file onto a yellow school bus to be taken on a tour of the district. Randy and the other teachers didn’t know each other, so each sat, as children are apt to do, one per seat, each in a separate box, with the seat ahead and behind walling each off in a fashion that Randy would later see as emblematic of his experience in that district. The new teachers were brought to the high school and led into the music room—an amphitheater of chairs on risers—where

they sat as if in a chorus, although no one opened his or her mouth. The superintendent took his place on a swivel chair at the front of the room, sitting as if he was a conductor, and offered the new teachers some advice. “When anyone talks back to you, when a kid steps out of line, just write the person’s name like so.” To illustrate he called on Randy, elicited his name, and then wrote R-A-N-D-Y in large letters across the board. “Each time the kid talks back, just erase one letter,” he said, and he proceeded to turn R-A-N-D-Y into R-A-N-D, R-A-N, R-A, R, and eventually, into nothing. “They identify with their names. They don’t like to see themselves disappearing” (Bomer, 1995).

Within a few years, it became clear to Randy that this was the district’s way of working *with teachers* as well as with students. When he protested what he regarded as excessive test prep or tracking, he sensed that he was being erased. He was dropped from committees and no longer referred to in decisions. “The longer I stayed in the classroom, the more my voice, my judgment, my creativity were erased” (Bomer, 1995). What happened to Randy is what has happened to too many teachers. Too many teachers have felt their creativity, their talent, their beliefs, and their dedication have all been erased—often by decisions that others have made to outsource reading, the heart of our teaching, to corporations. It hasn’t worked.

The reading workshop offers an alternative, one where the emphasis is on providing students with the conditions that are supported by *reading* research (not by *market* research). The irony is that there are mountains of scientific studies that confirm what most of us knew just by thinking about the times in our own life when reading has worked and the times when reading has been the pits. The research confirms what most of us knew all along. Kids get better as readers when they have time—lots of time—to read (to actually read, not to answer questions, fill in crossword puzzles, and circle the right answers). It is critical that kids read with engagement, and nothing supports engagement more than kids reading books they can actually read, and that are high interest, and the best are books they choose to read. Learning to read isn’t magic. For most kids, good instruction makes the difference. Good instruction involves demonstration and supported practice, and it is tailored to the learner based on the teacher’s ongoing assessment.



What Are the Essentials of Reading Instruction?

Over the past ten years, I've twice been part of a group of literacy leaders from across the nation that each time met repeatedly for the purpose of constructing proposed K–5 or 4–5 literacy standards that would be applicable not just to a state but to the nation. The members of these think tanks are always a disparate group of literacy leaders, each representing and leading a different thought collaborative, a different perspective, and yet each time I've participated in this work I am reminded again of the consensus that has emerged around the bottom-line essentials that all children need to thrive as readers. Increasingly, people are coming together around the recognition that youngsters need the following to thrive as readers.

Learners need teachers who demonstrate what it means to live richly literate lives, wearing a love of reading on our sleeves.

In the end, it's teachers that make the difference in kids' lives. Again and again, the research shows what most of us already knew to be true: good teaching makes a world of difference (Rebell and Wolff, 2008, p. 90; Hanushek et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond and Sykes, 2003; Pressley et al., 2003; Guthrie et al., 2004.) Good teachers provide children with the other opportunities to learn that I'll describe in this chapter, but good teachers of reading also wear a love of reading on our sleeves.

Shirley Brice Heath has gone so far as to suggest that the single most important condition for literacy learning is that a person needs mentors who are joyfully literate people, who demonstrate what it means to live joyfully literate lives. Some lucky children grow up in households where families demonstrate the richness of a life of books, but many of our children rely on school to provide them with that image of possibility. And so it is not just nice—it is essential that teachers talk about the books we read, share excitement over hearing an author speak, revel over finding a new book in a favorite series, share the thrill of discovering a website built around a favorite genre. We rejoice in the prospect of a rainy


Saturday, telling our students that there is nothing better than curling up with a book while the rain patters against the windows.

When my colleagues and I began the research that has culminated in the publication of this series, we decided that just as teachers across the world had benefited from working on our own writing process so we could then teach writing as insiders in that process, so too we needed opportunities to invest in our own reading so we could bring that insider's perspective into our reading classrooms. In schools across New York City and the surrounding suburbs, we soon formed almost a hundred adult reading clubs. Our schools were filled with conversations about Eudora Welty, Toni Morrison, and Wallace Stegner. For several years, the teacher-leaders of those groups met to study the conditions that we, as adults, need to grow as readers and the qualities of good reading that especially transformed our own reading. Those groups are not all still in place, but the commitment to our own adult reading remains as an enduring feature of all the work we have done over the past three decades, and every page of this series is steeped in a first-hand immersion in literacy.

As the leader of your classroom organization, you are called upon to be the kind of leader who rallies kids on an important mission, who raises the flag—the standard—and calls, “Right this way.” If you are going to rally your children to

love reading and to compose richly literate lives for themselves, then it is terribly important that you are invested in reading right alongside your kids. The important part is not that you come with degrees in English literature. The important part is that you are public about your own efforts to outgrow yourself as a reader. If working on your reading is somehow “kid's stuff” and beneath you, if every time you say to the children, “One thing I try to do as a reader is.... Watch me as I.... Now you try the same thing...” you're thinking it is really a sham because frankly you learned everything you need to know about reading decades ago, the kids will learn that getting better at reading is kids' stuff, that in real life, readers don't think about how we read or work on outgrowing ourselves as readers. How important it is

that instead, we teach our children that learning to read is a lifelong process and something that all of us can be engaged in alongside each other.



If you are going to rally your children to love reading and to compose richly literate lives for themselves, then it is terribly important that you are invested in reading right alongside your kids.

Learners need long stretches of time to read.

When we teach reading, we are teaching a skill—like playing the oboe or swimming. And when we teach skills, the learner needs to be doing the thing. That is, there is very little I can do from the front of the room that will make you good at playing the oboe or swimming. The learner needs to be playing the oboe or swimming. And in the same way, our students need to be reading.

Although it is common sense that students need to read a lot to learn to read well, this is also the one single conclusion that is most supported by research. Krashen, for example, shows that 93% of the tests on reading comprehension that collect data on volume of reading show that kids who are given more time to read do better (2004). Guthrie and his colleagues found that reading volume predicted reading comprehension and that dramatic increases in reading volume are important for thoughtful literacy proficiencies (2004). The NAEP Reading Report Card for the Nation (U.S. Department of Education 1999) shows that at every level, reading more pages at home and at school was associated with higher reading scores. Foertsch (1992) examined the factors most closely related to performance on the NAEP and found that the amount of reading that students do in and out of school was positively related to their reading achievement and that despite extensive research suggesting that effective instruction requires moving from an emphasis on workbook pages to an emphasis on extensive reading and writing, children still spend an inordinate amount of time on workbook activities. Allington's entire Chapter 2 of *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers* is a synthesis of the extensive research that spotlights the importance of students reading for long chunks of time. In a study he and others conducted of effective classrooms, the sheer volume of reading time was a distinguishing feature of more effective classrooms. Students in the classrooms of more effective teachers read ten times as much as students in classrooms of less effective teachers (Allington and Johnston, 2002).

After reviewing the overwhelming research on this important topic, Allington concludes, "So how much daily in-school reading might we plan for? I would suggest one and one half hours of daily in-school reading would seem to be a minimum goal given the data provided by these studies.... However my ninety-minute recommendation is for time actually reading" (Allington, 2006, p. 47), and he has gone on to show what that estimated amount of time means in terms of progress through books. A child reading *Stone Fox*, a book containing approx-

imately 12,000 words, will finish that book in two or, at the very most, four hours, or two days of reading (perhaps three days if one imagines a lot of concurrent reading in the content areas). A child reading a book in *The Magic Tree House* series will finish it the day it is started, reading seven of those books in a week. These books contains approximately 6,000 words, and for this to be a just-right book for the reader, he or she would need to be reading the book at 100–200 words per minute—hence the calculation that these books should take no more than thirty to sixty minutes. A level W novel such as **Missing May*, by Cynthia Rylant, contains 24,500 words. Most readers for whom this is a just-right book will be reading at least at 150 words per minute, but even if a reader was only reading 100 words per minute, that book would require at most four hours, suggesting readers would read several such books in a week.

The single most important thing we can do to turn schools around, making them into places where youngsters thrive as readers, is to clear out the time and space so that children can learn to read by reading. There is no question but that making more time for reading is a challenge. One of the biggest problems in schools is inflation of curriculum, with people adding and multiplying the things we are to cover. The one thing that most of us long for is more time. But in the end, more time is the one thing that none of us will ever get. The real challenge, then, is to use the time we have in ways that match our priorities.

How important it is for those of us who aspire to teach reading well to be willing to step back for a moment. Howard Gardner says we need to "go to the mountains" from time to time to remind ourselves of what we are really after when we teach. Too often, though, teachers feel pulled to cover this, to get through that. Published programs are filled with reams of busy work. As a result, too often in lieu of real reading, kids spend their time doing what Allington recently summarized as crap. Speaking at Teachers College, he said, with a twinkle in his eye, "Crap is the technical term reserved for all the non-reading and non-writing activities that fill kids' days—the dittos, dioramas, papier-mâché maps... all that chases real reading and real writing out of the school day." Of course, sometimes kids spend their evenings doing more of the same. Just as it is crucial for kids to read for long chunks of time during the school day, it is equally crucial for kids to read for similar chunks of time in the evening. Remember—exemplary teachers' students read and write as much as ten times as much as kids in other classes. I can't stress enough the importance of kids "just reading."



Learners need opportunities to read high-interest, accessible books of their own choosing.

Readers need time to actually read, and that means eyes-on-print, mental-movie-making reading. Yes, this means they are not filling in dittos or making dioramas, but it also means they are working with texts they can read with that orchestration of cueing systems that allows the magic to happen and meaning to be made. If a child holds a giant tome and stumbles along through it, making swipes at some of the words, that's not reading. Novelist John Gardner describes reading this way:

It creates for us a kind of dream, a rich and vivid play in the mind. We read a few words at the beginning of the book or the particular story and suddenly we find ourselves seeing not words on a page but a train moving through Russia, an old Italian crying, or a farmhouse battered by rain. We read on—dream on—not passively but actively, worrying about the choices the characters have to make, listening in panic for some sound behind the fictional door, exalting in characters' successes, bemoaning their failures. In great fiction, the dream engages us heart and soul; we not only respond to imaginary things—sights, sounds, smells—as though they were real, we respond to fictional problems as though they were real: we sympathize, think, and judge.

It's not surprising really that children need opportunities to engage in high-success reading. I do not know anyone who brings giant pharmaceutical books on a long airplane flight, or to the beach on a summer day. You and I, as adults, rarely read a text that we can't read with 99.5% accuracy. We wouldn't read if we were constantly derailed by complexities that we couldn't assimilate, and kids aren't any different. They, too, want to read books that make sense. The good news is that the sort of reading people want to do is also the reading that helps us achieve.

Over sixty years ago, Betts (1946) studied fourth graders and found that low error rates led to improved learning. For him, independent reading levels were texts that readers could read with 98% accuracy or better, and instructional level texts were those readers could read with 95%–97% accuracy. Swanson et al.'s (1999) meta-analysis of 180 intervention studies showed that for learning-disabled students, one of the three conditions that allow for achievement is that the difficulty level of the task must be controlled enough that the learner can be successful. For readers to flourish, they need to be reading texts with which they

can be successful, which means texts they can read with something like 96% or more accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.

This is nowhere more important than for children who struggle. One of the things we know about schools is that they are marked by what educators have come to call the “Matthew effect,” for the Biblical reference to the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. Too often, kids who can read well are given lots of opportunities in school for just-right reading, and as a result they flourish. Kids who can’t read well come to school, ready for the promise of an education, and they’re given impenetrable texts. They might as well be given sawdust, really. And the longer they stay in school, the farther behind they fall. When successful readers are given texts that they can read and strugglers are given texts that are impenetrable to them, presumably the logic is that these strugglers will need to read this level of text on the high-stakes standardized test. But just because the reader will starve 120 days from now does not mean that the best way to prepare him or her for that time is to starve him for the duration! In too many classes, even when students are in pull-out situations geared to support their reading, they still are not given materials with which they can have successful reading experiences, and they still are not given the long blocks of time for reading that are so critical.

The other important thing to understand is that children need to read books they can read not only during the reading workshop but across the day. This means rethinking the reading children are doing in social studies and science. Chall and Conrad (1991) found that only one of eighteen social studies and science textbooks they examined had a readability level that matched the intended grade in which the textbook would be used. Four of the textbooks were written for students who could read at a level three or four grades higher than the grade for which the book was written, and almost all were written for students two grades beyond the intended level, and this doesn’t address the fact that even if the text was geared for that grade level—say, the fifth-grade level—the term refers to what the *average* child at that grade level can do. An average class will typically contain a spread of children, including many who are not able to read at the level that is determined to be average.

What does all this mean? It means that classrooms need to have libraries that match the real children that we actually have in the school, not just the children we wish we had. Publishers may market and sell books for a specific grade, as in advertising a set of books as appropriate for average fifth-grade readers, but many classrooms only have three or four kids who read like average fifth-

grade readers! Chances are that many of our kids will need easier books, and many will need more challenging books. Schools need a close alignment between reading assessment and the effort to provision classrooms with books. And of course it is a wonderful thing when schools have book rooms so that teachers can return books to the book room that have become a bit easy for their kids and check out new books in their stead.

This also means that schools need a system for estimating text complexity in books, for assessing the level of text difficulty that a particular reader can handle, and for matching each reader to books that are just right for that reader. I discuss this in more detail in the assessment chapter of this book.

It takes just a moment of reflection on our own reading lives to be reminded that it’s important not only that young people have access to books they can read, but that they also have access to books they want to read. Choice matters, not a little but a lot. The goal, after all, is not only to teach kids to read, but to help youngsters grow up to be people who value reading. Luring kids to be invested in reading is not a small goal. After all, a 2007 National Endowment for the Arts study, *To Read or Not to Read*, found that Americans are reading less, with children aged fifteen to twenty-four spending two hours a day watching television and less than seven minutes a day reading. If we hope to bring up a nation of readers, it is crucial to allow them to choose among high-interest books that they can read. In fact, Guthrie and Humenick (2004) did a meta-analysis of twenty-two experimental or quasi-experimental studies of reading motivation and achievement and found four factors that were strongly related to student success. Ensuring students had easy access to interesting texts was the single most influential factor, and providing children choice over what they read and whom they read with was the second most influential factor.

Learners need explicit instruction in the process and skills of proficient reading.

When I was in elementary school, reading comprehension was “taught” through an SRA kit full of cards, each containing a passage followed by a dozen little questions. There were main idea questions, vocabulary in context questions, and inference questions. I’d read the passage, bubble in the answers to the questions, count up my score, and sometimes I would climb from orange to blue or blue to green.

Now, decades later, there is an emerging consensus that my comprehension was being tested rather than taught and that children deserve more than this.

Just as it is not enough to turn down the lights, turn on the music, and say, “Reeeaad, children, reeeaaaaad,” so too, it is not enough to barrage young people with paragraphs followed by questions, questions, questions.

Good teaching matters. It is, in fact, the one thing that matters most. Kids absolutely profit from explicit strategy instruction. Bembry (Bembry et al., 1998) has found that students who were, for three years, in classrooms that provide high-quality instruction achieved scores on standardized reading tests that were 40% higher than the scores earned by students receiving lower-quality instruction. That is a staggering statistic, and it is important because many people believe that reading comprehension boils down to intelligence and that some kids will be predisposed to understand complex texts and others won’t. Some people think that really, reading is in the DNA. What’s a teacher to do?

The answer is that a teacher’s job is to teach. More specifically, a teacher needs to explicitly teach the strategies that proficient readers use, that students can do—on paper, in their minds, with partners—to comprehend better. Lots of researchers have detailed what strategy instruction entails; among them are Duke and Pearson (2002), who point out that strategy instruction involves:

- Naming and describing the strategy: why, when, and how it could be used
- Modeling the strategy in action
- Using the strategy collaboratively
- Guiding practice of the strategy, gradually releasing responsibility to the student
- Providing opportunity for using the strategy independently

Researchers also agree, within a certain domain, about the skills and strategies reading entails. Allington suggests that six comprehension studies have been shown, through multiple research studies, to be especially effective on traditional school comprehension tasks. These include activating prior knowledge, summarizing, story grammar lessons, imagery (also referred to as envisionment), question generating, and thinking aloud.

I write more about the topic of the skills and strategies of the reading process in a later chapter. The larger point, however, is that in the end, reading well involves using skills and strategies with increasing finesse on texts of increasing complexity and that readers need explicit instruction in these skills and strategies.

Learners need opportunities to talk in response to texts.


Talking and writing both provide concrete visible ways for learners to do the thinking work that later becomes internalized and invisible. Think about it. If you want to gain insights on your teaching, your family, your life—what do you do? You meet with someone to “talk things over.” If you want become better at doing something, you bring in a coach, a tutor, or an advisor. Whomever the person is, what you will do is talk. In think tanks, study groups, inquiry projects, graduate courses, seminars—what do you do? You talk. Talk is the medium in which we all outgrow ourselves, over and over. It was Vygotsky, more than anyone, who staked out the theory that accounts for the crucial role of social interactions in supporting learning. The key element in his theory of learning is that “all the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals” (1978, p. 957). The words that we say in conversation, the kinds of thinking we do in collaboration, become internalized. If you and I had a conversation about the ending of a book, mulling over why the author may have chosen to end it that way and weighing how the book might have been different had it ended differently, then another time, reading alone, I can reach the ending of a book and think to myself, “Hmmm. I wonder why the author decided to end this book this way?” The thinking that I’d be doing would be an internalized conversation.

Because teaching reading is teaching thinking, it is not surprising that social relationships are critical to a reading workshop. Conversations are especially crucial because data suggests that few American students are growing up to be thoughtfully literate. The related finding is this. If one looks at what students spend their time doing in school, it is very easy to project the skills that they will master. If students spend their time answering low-level literal questions, filling in blanks, and recalling facts, then that will be the kind of thinking they can do well. And all too often, that is exactly what is being asked for and what is being learning in American classrooms. In study after study, researchers report that in the typical classroom the assigned tasks overwhelmingly emphasize copying, remembering, and reciting with few tasks assigned that engage students in discussions about what they’ve read. Is it any wonder that many students do not seem adept at comparing and contrasting, analyzing, making connections, and thinking interpretively and critically? And yet this is exactly the sort of literacy that is required in the world of today—and of tomorrow. The New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce describes the candidates that the best

employers in the world will be looking for this way: “Candidates will have to be comfortable with ideas and abstractions, good at both analysis and synthesis, creative and innovative, self-disciplined and well-organized, able to learn quickly and work well as a member of a team and have the flexibility to adapt quickly to frequent changes” (2007).

One of the most powerful ways to teach children to think is to teach them to engage in thoughtful discussions, and especially discussions that incorporate thinking under, between, and around texts. Talking well, like writing well, does not emerge *ex nihilo*, and it is helpful to explicitly teach students to make claims that are grounded in the text, to supply evidence for those claims, to talk between the example and the claim, to uncover assumptions, and to explore ramifications. It is also helpful to teach students to develop a line of thinking through sustained talk about one subtopic, and as part of this to elaborate using transitional phrases such as, “The important thing about this is...” or “What is worth noticing about this example is....” Then, too, it is important to teach readers to be able to entertain ideas different than their own, to hold more than one idea in mind at a time, and to build upon the ideas of others, following an idea to its conclusion. Teaching youngsters to talk has a great deal to do with teaching them the skills of writing to think—and both are essential.

For this reason, reading workshops not only support talk, but also teach talk. Readers are generally matched to a long-term partner—someone who is able to read and interested in reading similar books. Partners tend to read independently for most of the reading workshop, but in the last few minutes of time, they compare notes, raise and pursue questions, and learn to see the text through each other’s perspectives. For something like half the year, readers work in small groups—inquiry groups or book clubs—so their talk can encompass not only a partner, but also other voices and other perspectives. The classroom community as a whole engages in extended conversations around texts that are read aloud.



We must invent ways to study kids’ work, to research and reflect and discuss and imagine what good work entails; we must wrestle with what the pathways toward good work can look like, and we must help kids progress along those pathways.

Learners need assessment-based instruction, including feedback that is tailored specifically to them. Strugglers especially need instruction that is tailored to their specific strengths and needs, as well as extra time and extra help.

Learners are not all the same, and learners do not all need the same things to progress. Teaching, then, must always be responsive, and our ideas about what works, and what doesn’t work must always be under construction.

Certainly when a teacher decides to angle her teaching in such a way as to support a cluster of reading skills (in expository reading, say, the ability to ascertain the main idea, to think between generalizations and particulars, and to synthesize within and across texts), then teaching begins with observing, listening, and small, informal assessments. Those assessments help us analyze what it is that our learners can do, can almost do, and can’t yet do.

By taking the time to look at students’ work and to theorize about their place along a pathway of development in a cluster of skills, we provide ourselves with the knowledge that enables us to provide explicit, optimistic, concrete, doable guidance so that each learner is able to progress toward goals that are clear. This requires a stance toward teaching that means that always, teachers behave in classrooms as researchers. We must invent ways to study kids’ work, to research and reflect and discuss and imagine what good work entails; we must wrestle with what the pathways toward good work can look like, and we must help kids progress along those pathways. Assessment, then, like teaching, can’t be outsourced. And assessment can’t be something that occurs once or twice or three times a year. Instead, assessment is sewn into the fabric of our teaching. In this series, you’ll see that units of study are book-ended with discussions of some of the formative assessments that inform these units.

Of course, assessment is nowhere more critical than when it allows us to take our cues from strugglers. If a child enters our classroom already encumbered with labels, then we need to be clear from the start: it is our job to turn that child around so that he or she begins immediately to see that, in fact, learning and progress are within reach. Strugglers cannot wait a week, even, before we

begin to show them that indeed, reading can make sense for them, and yes, they can in fact get better as readers in a palpable, observable fashion, making multiple years of growth in just a single year. The first step is for the most knowledgeable person around to assess these readers to find what the reading work is that this child can do with success. If this is a fifth-grade child and he needs to be reading books at the level of *Frog and Toad*, then absolutely nothing is gained by taking him instead to *Captain Underpants*. Halfway measures are good for naught, because with texts he can't read well, the child still won't feel everything clicking together into reading and still won't have the chance to read in ways that allow him to learn from reading. If the various stakeholders who are invested in this child, the people who care about him, disagree, then these adults need to come together and talk longer and think harder so that a single, coherent plan is made that will allow this child to be a successful reader (with the texts that are within reach) and then to move forward in giant steps.

There are a few obvious things to be said.

Strugglers cannot be taken from the language arts classroom—from reading, writing, word study, or reading aloud—for extra help in language arts.

It is especially devastating if a struggler who is already apt to feel disoriented, confused, and behind his or her peers is *sometimes* taken from the regular classroom and other times left to flounder in it, all the more confused and disoriented because it's in fact the truth that the struggler missed half the instruction! Then, too, strugglers can't be outsourced to various and sundry peripheral people in such a way that the child's primary teacher ends up feeling that he or she isn't or even can't be accountable to this child. The classroom teacher must be absolutely clear that this child is hers or his. It can't be that the strugglers who most need people to stand by them end up belonging to everyone and yet, in a real way, to no one.

Strugglers need to spend 100% of their time reading books they can read with ease.

For strugglers, 90% of their reading time should be spent on books that are easy for them, books they can read with 99% accuracy, and, perhaps as much as 10% of the time, they can be reading books that they read with 96% accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. This means that guided reading can't be about propping a child up to struggle valiantly along through a text that is too hard. Anyone who uses guided reading in such a fashion should reread Gay Su Pinnell

and Irene Fountas's important books on the topic! It is critical that strugglers are reading books within their zone of proximal development not just during reading time, but across the day.

If strugglers are pulled out of the classroom for extra help on reading, this must be provided by an extra-knowledgeable person.

These are children for whom teaching has for too long been confusing, inappropriate, and disheartening. To turn the tide, to get these learners on a trajectory that is positive and self-sustaining, it is important that they work with the most knowledgeable professionals around, not with para-professionals.

During extra-help time, strugglers need help that is assessment-based and tailored to that particular child and in sync with what is happening in the classroom.

It cannot be that all strugglers receive the same help during this intervention, because what we know about strugglers is that they are more different, one from another, than most readers are. Strugglers need something, but every struggler does not need the same thing! For starters, some children in grades 3–5 who struggle need help in comprehension and fluency; others need help in phonics and word work. The instruction these readers need will be utterly different.

Above all, children who struggle need access to good teachers, and that means that teachers need high-quality professional development. This subject is such an important one that I devote an entire chapter to it.

Learners need teachers to read aloud.

Reading aloud is so essential to reading that I have often suggested Teachers College not place a single student teacher in the classroom of a teacher who does not read aloud several times a day. We read aloud to open the day, using stories and poems to convene the community and to celebrate what it means to be awake and alive and together. We read aloud to embark on shared adventures, to explore new worlds, and to place provocative topics at the center of the community.

For children, an adult's proficient read-aloud is a sneak preview of what reading can be. The fact is, as we read, we transmit more than just the story. We model a mood, a stance, an engagement and a fluency that bring out not just the meaning, but the feeling of many texts and how they go—features that, once children *internalize* them, make their independent engagement with their own texts far more effective.

Of course, it benefits children to hear a variety of texts. Expository nonfiction texts, when read aloud, sound different from stories, just as a poem, when read aloud, sounds different from a letter or a newspaper editorial. Apart from choosing a variety of genres to read aloud, teachers will want to match texts to the interests and proficiency levels of their children and also to plan their read-aloud in ways that optimize its rich instructional potential. I detail ways to do this in the chapter on reading aloud.

Learners need a balanced approach to language arts, one that includes a responsible approach to the teaching of writing as well as to reading.

Reading is critical, but it is not everything. In a democracy and a world that requires people to speak up, writing needs to take its place alongside reading as one of the basics. I often ask leaders of a school system to tell me what the promise is that they make to youngsters who enroll in their school. Presumably, the school says to all children, “In this school, you will all learn math. Whether the teacher loves math or not, you’ll be taught math every day, and in a way that is planned and sequential, where one year builds on another.” How is it, then, that so often the school system says to youngsters, “Writing? Maybe you’ll luck out and get a teacher who likes to write and teaches writing. Otherwise, you’ll do Halloween writing, Mother’s Day writing, and spring haikus. But don’t worry—you’ll be tested in writing. In fact, you won’t be able to do well in half the subjects you encounter later on if you don’t write well.” How is it that some teachers are allowed to describe their curriculum for writing, saying, “I don’t really teach writing as a self-contained subject, per se. I do writing across the curriculum. You know, when we finish the movie, I tell the kids to write about it.” I tell administrators that when teachers say, “I don’t really teach writing as a self-contained subject, instead I integrate writing into other subjects,” that is code for, “I don’t teach writing.” What if a teacher said, “I don’t really teach math per se, but we do math throughout the whole day. You know—we add how many pages we read yesterday and today. That’s math! We count how many minutes until the end of the day. That’s math.”

Writing, like reading and like math, is a skill that is developed through time, through practice, and there is no way that a child can be test-prepped into being a skilled writer. Writers grow like oak trees, in the fullness of time. If our schools are going to assume responsibility for the basics, then we need to make sure that reading instruction is one portion of a balanced literacy curriculum, but that alongside reading instruction, there is instruction also in writing.

These tenets, then, have led to the reading workshop structure for teaching reading:

- Learners need teachers who demonstrate what it means to live richly literate lives, wearing a love of reading on our sleeves.
- Learners need long stretches of time to read.
- Learners need opportunities to read high-interest, accessible books of their own choosing.
- Learners need explicit instruction in the skills of proficient reading.
- Learners need opportunities to talk and sometimes to write in response to texts.
- Learners need assessment-based instruction, including feedback that is tailored specifically to them. Strugglers especially need instruction that is tailored to their specific strengths and needs, as well as extra time and extra help.
- Learners need teachers to read aloud.
- Learners need a balanced approach to language arts, one that includes a responsible approach to the teaching of writing as well as of reading.

You will read more about the reading workshop in the next chapter.



The Big Picture of a Reading Workshop



he reading workshop provides a structure to the teaching of reading, one that has been especially designed to make sure that children are given the essentials they need to flourish as readers. This *Guide to the Reading Workshop* and the series as a whole will show you how all the pieces of a reading workshop combine to provide children with the opportunities they need to learn in leaps and bounds.

In this chapter, let's walk through the basic structure of the reading workshop, and then let's consider the values of a reading workshop and the environment and materials of a reading workshop. Finally, it will be important to think about a reading workshop as a schoolwide structure.

What Are the Structures of a Reading Workshop?

The reading workshop, like the writing workshop, has a characteristic structure. Workshops are deliberately kept simple and predictable, like an art studio or a researcher's laboratory or a scholar's library, because it is the work itself that is ever-changing and complex. Students can approach any day's reading workshop as artists approach a studio or researchers approach a laboratory, planning to continue with their important ongoing work. Each day's teaching in a workshop does not set up a new hoop for the students to all jump through, in sync on that day. Instead, for the bulk of time during each day, students carry on with their work. As they do so, they draw upon a growing repertoire of skills, tools, strategies, and habits. But the bulk of students' time during the reading workshop is spent reading, in the fullest sense of the word: reading, imagining, thinking, recalling, questioning, talking, writing, reviewing, comparing, researching, and reading some more. If you have taught within a writing workshop structure, the reading workshop structure will be very familiar to you.

As I describe it, you'll see how the structure upholds the tenets we all know are necessary to teach children to read. You'll find separate chapters in this book on each of the major components of a reading workshop.

Minilesson

The workshop tends to go like this: people assemble and expect to work for about an hour, every day. To open the hour-long session, the teacher teaches everyone a short lesson, called a minilesson. This minilesson is usually a quick demonstration of a powerful reading skill or strategy—a way for readers to handle a challenge or, in general, to lift the level of their reading work. The lesson is meant to be helpful to people in their ongoing work, today and in the future, not just an activity to do for the day.

Then, after the ten-minute minilesson, students turn to their ongoing reading work. In the reading workshop, that means readers get their self-chosen, just-right books out of their backpacks, and they settle down to read. Imagine this is a unit of study on characters, and the children are reading fiction. Some have been working on fluency since the start of the year and are continuing to maintain that work, while also thinking about allowing characters in their books to emerge as distinct personalities. Others have been challenged to consider secondary as well as primary characters as they read, letting this work enlarge their understandings also of the protagonist. Some readers have been coached to pause often to retell the current chapter in such a way that when retelling what the main character does now, they also reach back for explanatory information and in that way synthesize what the character already did with what is happening now. Some children might be conscious that as they read, they need to grow ideas, jotting those ideas down in preparation for a conversation about their book. That is, every reader has work to do, and that work grows in part out of assessments and out of one-to-one and small-group teaching and in part out of the cumulative impact of minilessons.

Children Engage in Ongoing Reading Work; Teacher Engages in Conferring and Small-Group Work

The minilesson ends with a teacher saying, “Off you go,” and then children bring bins or baggies containing their books to their reading spots, and they begin reading. They often jot on Post-its or in a reading notebook as they read, but the written responses are usually kept brief because the real goal is for children to have forty minutes in this period for actual reading (and more time during the rest of the day and in the evening). Children are reading books they’ve selected from their classroom library. Often some of those texts are leveled, to help readers find

accessible books. Later in the year, children will often read books in synchrony with members of a book club, drawing from text sets of multiple copies. These might fall under categories such as historical fiction or social issues or fantasies, and these sets of multiple copies are apt to rotate among classrooms so that perhaps the fifth grades have the historical fiction books in January and early February, and then these text sets of books are brought into the fourth-grade classrooms.

The simplicity and predictability of the workshop is important precisely so that teachers are freed from constant choreographing and are able to observe, to listen, to assess, and to teach into each students’ zone of proximal development. Like an artist in a pottery studio or a physicist in a physics lab, the teacher circulates. She pulls close to observe, mulls over what is and is not working, and intervenes to coach, demonstrate, encourage, and celebrate with individuals and small groups. This teaching may reinforce the minilesson, or it might address a child or a group of children’s unique needs and goals. The teaching in a conference or a small group, like the teaching that occurs within minilessons, aims to support not just today’s work, but also that child’s reading from that point on.

Conferences and small groups are essential in a workshop, and the small groups often feel like one-to-one conferences, but involving a cluster of children instead of just one child. These forums allow the teacher to tailor her instruction to match the needs and goals of individual learners. Reading conferences are very similar to writing conferences, and both are essential not only for the student but also for us as teachers. It is by conferring that we develop the knowledge, the insight, and the methods to be able to reach learners. A teacher-student reading conference often provides the material for the small-group strategy lessons and the minilessons we later teach. Both conferences and small-group instruction are important enough that I devote an entire chapter to each later in this guide.

In a day, a teacher will move among many readers, helping many to settle and channeling many toward work the teacher believes will be helpful. Then the teacher is apt to lead a four- or five-minute conference with two or three individual readers or partnerships of readers and to coach a small group or two. By this time, the teacher generally needs to address the whole class, usually through a mid-workshop teaching point that sometimes channels kids to work with a partner for a few minutes before they resume reading—and the teacher resumes teaching.

Mid-Workshop Teaching Point

In different classrooms, kids' endurance for reading will differ. If, after twenty minutes of reading time, children begin to wiggle and squirm, then a mid-workshop teaching point is one way for us to reach all our learners and to try to hold them on course for another twenty minutes of reading.

Otherwise, the mid-workshop teaching point can sometimes be a way to peel kids' attention from their books for just a minute while we harvest a bit of teaching from our one-to-one or small-group work that we think has wide implications. There is nothing essential about a mid-workshop teaching point. Sometimes we forego these, and sometimes we'll stop the class and address all of them more than once. This, of course, is exactly the same situation in a writing workshop.

Then teachers resume teaching, again engaging in some walk-by teaching, more one-to-one (or one-to-two) conferring, and some small-group work.

Children Resume Ongoing Reading Work; Teachers Resume Conferring and Small-Group Work

One of the powerful ways in which we teach is through leading guided reading groups. The term *guided reading* means remarkably different things to different people, and teachers who teach reading workshops draw on the ideas of whichever expert has been most helpful to them to know how to lead guided reading groups. I generally follow the suggestions of Gay Su Pinnell, who once spent twenty days coaching staff members of my organization and me in her understanding of guided reading, and I also draw on some of the work of Australian educators such as Di Snowball and Brenda Parkes.

Generally, when I lead guided reading groups, I gather four to six children (usually two or three partnerships) and take three minutes to do a book introduction that includes a summary of the book and supports readers in what I anticipate will be tricky aspects of the book. The readers are usually holding the text while I do this, and I might have them point to or find a tricky part, just because their activity serves to highlight that item. Then children read, not in sync with each other, usually silently, and I swing like the big hand on the clock

from one reader to the next, tapping each on the arm to signal, "Please read aloud, starting where you are in the text." If a child is in dire need, I say, "Can I take a turn?" and I read to the child, figuring I didn't provide a supportive enough introduction or I put the reader into a too-hard text. After a child or two finishes reading the selection, I signal for that child to reread or to find a favorite

page or a tricky part (something like that). When everyone has finished, after no more than ten minutes, I engage the children in the briefest of conversations and then select one skill or strategy to teach, drawing on what I saw as a shared hard part. We practice whatever I teach, sometimes on the white board and sometimes by returning to the passage that contextualized that part in the text. I might give a tiny text introduction for the upcoming section if I want children to continue reading on after the guided reading session is over.


Guided reading is an especially powerful method to use in certain situations. For example, when working with English language learners, this is a way for me to

scaffold their comprehension and vocabulary. When bringing readers to a new level of text difficulty, and especially when launching them into a new series at the new level, this is a great way to provide extra training wheels for those readers. When I see children who seem to respond to trouble in knee-jerk, reductive ways, forgetting about meaning and relying only on letters and sounds in isolation, I find that a strong book introduction makes it much more likely that they'll draw on meaning as well as phonics when they encounter difficulty.

Although guided reading is one important way to lead small groups, it is not the only way to lead small groups, and in a strong reading workshop, teachers as well as kids are always developing their repertoire. For teachers, the ideal situation is to have a host of ways in which one can lead small groups, and then to be able to select the method for small-group work that best suits the learners and the moment. I describe this in more detail in the chapter on small-group work.

Writing About Reading

During any one day's reading workshop, readers typically jot half a dozen Post-its or a few brief entries in a reader's notebook, with most teachers leaving the



The simplicity and predictability of the workshop is important precisely so that teachers are freed from constant choreographing and are able to observe, to listen, to assess, and to teach into each students' zone of proximal development.

decision of whether to write in one format or the other up to the reader. Especially when readers are in book clubs, in which they read texts in synchrony with each other, many teachers ask readers to write a page-and-a-half response to their reading something like once a week.

Either way, the writing that readers do as they read is meant to capture thinking, and that thinking (that Post-it) is typically then put at the center of a partnership or book club conversation that follows independent reading time, during what is often referred to as teaching share time. It is important for children to sometimes devote longer stretches of time learning to draft and revise literary essays. This writing generally occurs during the writing workshop, although the reading and thinking and talking that supports the writing may occur during reading time.

Teaching Share

The most important word in the phrase “a teaching share” is the word *share*. The workshop ends with a small amount of time for readers to work collaboratively with partners or with a bit longer time for readers to work with clubs. This time is framed by a teeny bit of teacher-talk, and this sometimes takes the form of celebrating what a few readers have done in ways that apply to other readers in other instances, providing the teacher with a chance to balance instruction. If the emphasis had been on writing more thoughtful responses, the teacher can hedge a bit by reminding children that the writing needs to be brief and to not squeeze out time for reading. If the emphasis has been on reading more quickly, pushing oneself to move quickly down the page, the teaching share might qualify that with talk about comprehension. This is a forum for micro-lessons.

Teachers often angle the sharing that children do during this time. They may do this in ways that provide follow-up to the topic addressed in the day’s minilesson. For example, if the minilesson demonstrated a few ways in which readers could make their predictions more powerful, during the teaching share the teacher might suggest that readers share their best predictions and then think between those predictions to determine one which represents their best work, using that mentor prediction to help them revise their not-quite-best work.

Then again, often the teaching share time is left more in the hands of children, who choose ways to share work. Partners might decide to read aloud and enact powerful parts of a text or to work on word-solving together. They may decide to discuss the ideas that a reader generated while reading that day. The idea is put

at the center of the conversation and talked about for as long as possible. Research has shown that even just five minutes of talk in the midst of reading stirs up provocative thinking, making readers more responsive and critical.

Read-Aloud Time

Teachers often read aloud a little bit during the minilesson, using the read-aloud text to demonstrate a skill or strategy, but most people think of “the read-aloud” as something that happens outside the reading workshop itself. Often those read-alouds ignite whole-class conversations.

Qualities of a Reading Workshop

The structures of a reading workshop are important, but it’s the tone, the tenor of reading and writing workshops, that particularly characterizes them. Visit a school in which reading and writing workshops are underway, and you’ll detect a level of engagement on the part of both teachers and kids that are hallmarks of the workshop approach. You’ll have a chance to visit classrooms of teachers who are engaged in teaching reading workshops, because the DVD that accompanies this series captures more than four hours of snippets of classroom life in those classrooms. We didn’t carefully control for perfection in those videos. There’s a place for that sort of video, where one spends weeks perfecting every detail so that viewers are able to see heaven on earth. That wasn’t our goal. Instead, we simply turned the cameras on during three or four different units of study, at three or four intervals during the first half of the school year. The filming occurred in five New York City classrooms, one of which is an inclusion third-grade classroom; in schools in Harlem, the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn; and in two suburban classrooms, one in Scarsdale, New York, and one in Tenafly, New Jersey. You’ll see minilessons, strategy lessons, partnerships, guided reading, conferring, book clubs, inquiry groups, and read-aloud sessions. But more than this, I hope you see a tenor that is characteristic of a good reading workshop, and before I talk about room arrangements and the materials that reading workshop teachers value, before I talk about anything else, really, pertaining to the way the reading workshop takes root in classrooms, I want to try to address three factors that contribute to the tenor of classrooms.

The Workshop Is Collaborative

Independent Reading

It may seem ironic to develop the idea that the reading workshop is collaborative by turning first to a discussion of *independent* reading. But the truth is that there is nothing all that independent about independent reading! Think of this even for yourself. It is probably the case that the book you have recently read “independently” has actually been situated in a rich social context. That’s certainly the case for me. I’m reading *Stones into Schools*, Greg Mortenson’s sequel to *Three Cups of Tea*, the story of how he has established schools across Afghanistan and Pakistan. The book was given to me by a colleague, Amanda Hartman, and she shares my dedication to this cause. I read, thinking of her and of Hareem Khan, one of the coauthors of this series, who lives and teaches on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Most of our students pick up a book because a friend has read it. They may even find some of their friends’ Post-its left in strategic places throughout the book. They read, talking back to whatever the friend had to say about the book. “What did Andy mean when he said this is sort of *depressing*?” one child says. “I think it is *deep*—not depressing.” And readers read, anticipating the conversations they’re about to have, marking pages that deserve to be discussed and starting those discussions in their mind’s eye. Then, too, readers who have been sharing their reading with others read differently because we read with others perched on our shoulders, anticipating the responses others will make to the text. If one of our friends is always appreciating the thrilling parts of a story, we come to one of those sections and smile, just knowing that our friend will be glad. If another friend always battles stereotypes, we start to see them as well.

The reading workshop also brims with social connections because most children talk often about friends whom they are emulating and strategies they borrowed from each other. If the classroom teacher is always finding what particular individuals do well and showing the rest of the class the power of that one reader’s work, suggesting others might try the same strategy or aspire to the same quality, then one will often hear a child say, “I’m trying Randalio’s idea of noticing startling passages, and then talking about them,” or “I’m pushing myself to read faster, using a bookmark as a goal post, like Grace did ‘cause it worked for her.” So in all these ways, and other ways as well, even independent reading is imbued with social significance.

Partnerships

At the end of reading time (if not also during the mid-workshop teaching point), children need a few minutes to talk with another child. Usually readers are in swap-book partnerships (that is, they may both be reading Gary Paulsen books, and one is reading *Hatchet*, the other *The River*, and then they swap). The advantage of swap-book partnerships is that half the time, children are able to talk about books that their partner has recently read and knows well. Meanwhile, swap book partnerships do not require that classroom libraries be in duplicate. There is no question that reading shared books in synchrony with another person is preferable, however, whenever a teacher can swing this, and most of us make a point to often channel our strugglers into same-book partnerships.

Children do a variety of sorts of sharing within these partnerships. On the DVD, you can watch a partnership between two fourth-graders who have just read *Old Yeller* (a same-book partnership). You’ll see that the readers decide to go to a startling passage in the book, to read it aloud taking parts (roles), and then they talk about the emotions in the passage before rereading it with more feeling. Finally, the readers close the book and ad lib the passage. In other partnerships, readers might regularly share words that they found challenging and work together to pronounce and understand the words. The mainstay of partnerships, though, is that a partner rereads his or her Post-its, chooses either one that seems especially important or two that go together, puts that Post-it (or those Post-its) on the table between the partners, and then the two children try to talk for as long as they can about the ideas sparked by that one reader’s thought. To do this, readers use “thought prompts” such as “I agree because...,” “I disagree because...,” “That connects with another part of the book because...,” “I think that is important because...,” “I used to think..., but now I realize...,” and so forth. Of course, once these scaffolds are no longer necessary, they fall away, and children simply talk with depth, referencing the text and traveling along a journey of thought.

Reading Clubs

The partnership conversations that are a mainstay in the fall of the year give way to reading clubs—also called book clubs or literature circles—in the spring of the year. Now the reading workshop still involves a minilesson, time to read, and time to talk, but approximately three times a week the conversations will not be among partners but among club members, and these are readers who are

reading multiple copies of the same book in sync with each other. Usually the clubs across a classroom will all be engaged in a genre-based unit of study, as when all the clubs are reading historical fiction books. You will absolutely want to watch the club meetings that are captured in the historical fiction segment on the DVD, and don't wait until that unit to watch these, because your partnerships and read-aloud book conversations at the start of the year all need to work together in ways that enable children to participate in this sort of conversation by the end of the year.

The Workshop Is a Place that Values Words

It is important to approach a reading workshop keeping in mind that although explicit instruction is incredibly important, we also teach implicitly. Our job is to do nothing less than to induct children into a culture where words matter. Although when teaching reading, part of what we do is name and demonstrate and coach the skills of proficient reading, because we are wanting each of our children to author a life for himself or herself in which words make a difference, it is equally important for us to create a world in the classroom that is saturated with the most beautiful, intense, powerful sort of literacy possible.

As I recounted in another volume, I will not forget my visit to a school in the Bronx, where the fifth-grade class was engaged in an author share. The principal asked me to poke my head into that classroom, and just as I did, a little girl in her Holy Communion finery took her place at the front of the room to read her memoir aloud:

I'm the kind of girl who has never had a birthday party. I live with my aunt. She cooks macaroni for me and tells me to get going and where have I been? She doesn't think about my birthday. Last summer, I went back to the Dominican Republic and my baby sister—she's big now—and they gave her a party. No one could tell I never had one.

Soon I will be ten. I pretend there will be a party and the kids will come, and we'll play "duck, duck, goose" and we'll listen to the radio and they'll be a pink cake, 'To Marisol.' But then my dream ends. I'm the kind of kid who never had a birthday party.

A week later, Marisol turned ten. And all the children, their parents, and their teacher, gave her a big birthday party in the park. There were pink balloons hanging from the trees, and a pile of presents, and those great big fifth graders played "duck, duck, goose" and listened to the radio. And there was a pink

cake—and on it the words, "To Marisol, for all the birthdays that you never had." Later, in the classroom, the children talked about how Marisol is no longer the kind of kid who never had a birthday. They talked about how it had been the words of her memoir that gave them the idea for the birthday party, and about how words can do that. They can give us the ideas for something as big as a birthday or a nation. They talked about how, every July 4, what we celebrate with parades and fireworks is really a time when some people went in a very little room and put words onto the page—a new nation, out of words.

Since then, I've often told this story when I try to convey to teachers the quality of respect for language that infuses reading and writing workshop classrooms. These are listening rooms, where the assumption is that words matter. A poem like Christina Rossetti's "Hurt no living thing..." might be posted as the class constitution. Birthdays might be celebrated with the teacher reading aloud a passage from a book where another character is acting in ways that are characteristic of that child (at his or her best!). Perhaps when a new child enters the school, the entire class gathers in a circle, and the teacher reads aloud a bit of Byrd Baylor's *Everybody Needs a Rock*, and then the newcomer has a chance to choose his or her very own rock from the special plate of rocks collected on a class field trip. Afterwards, that newcomer's rock is passed from child to child, and each member of the class, in turn, says what he or she will do to make the newcomer feel at home. I learned that idea somewhere—perhaps from Ralph Peterson, author of *Life in a Crowded Place*—but I'm sure the ritual has been revised a hundred times over as it becomes part of new classrooms, each with their own culture. The important thing is that inventive teachers dream of ways to make books and poems come to life in the classroom and value not only explicit instruction but implicit teaching as well.

The Environment and Materials in a Reading Workshop

Let's tour these rooms for just a minute and see what classrooms that support reading workshops have in common. You'll see that usually (not always, of course) the desks have been pushed into clusters so that most children are sitting at tables. Children have long-term reading partners who read the same books as they do. In some classrooms, reading partners sit together during reading time. (Usually reading partners are not also writing partners, and children may not



live at the same desk all day long.) In other classrooms, each reading partnership has a set place in which it meets, but this might be a masking-taped circle on the floor (or even a spot where the masking tape has long since been worn away).

The Library

In every classroom that supports a reading workshop, there is a classroom library, even if it is not as large as we wish it was! The books are cherished and celebrated. Teachers often talk about visiting bookstores to learn ways that bookstores have invented for promoting books. Special shelves help, titled in enticing ways, and of course those enticing ways will be different, one classroom from another. The best is when the classroom library bears the imprint of the kids in that classroom. Perhaps one shelf will be titled “Max’s Favorites” and another, “Sad Depressing Books that Make You Cry and Cry,” and others will bear titles like these: “Cousins of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*,” “Walter Dean Myers Books,” “Lite Sports Books,” or “Funny Books.” That is, although early in the year, when trying to help children find books they can read with ease, some teachers will slot books into leveled bins (level P books, level U books), as the year unfolds, most teachers try to organize the library into shelves and baskets such as those I just described because this helps readers progress from one book to a collection of others like it, and also these collections invite inter-textual connections.

The good news is that no school needs to do the hard work behind this alone; schools can, instead, stand on the shoulders of the countless other schools that have gone through a similar transition. On the *Resources for Teaching Reading* CD-ROM accompanying this series, my colleagues and I include very extensive bibliographies, and we have worked with Booksource, a provider of trade books, to make sure the libraries we recommend are available at the most inexpensive price we could find.

In the bibliographies you will not see libraries organized by grade level. That is, there is no attempt to say that a third-grade class needs books at levels K–Q. I assume that if you are going to invest money, which is scarce and precious, you’ll take the time to first assess at least a sampling of your kids to learn the approximate range of book levels that will match the kids you actually have at a specific grade level, and you’ll notice the books you already have and those you don’t. What we have included in the libraries is a list of our first-choice books (and another of our “we also love these” books) at each level. (Our lists are longer for lower levels because you’ll need more books when the books are

easier. These should generally take readers a day or two to read, while the books at harder levels generally take closer to a week.) These are recommended books for high-interest independent reading, with the assumption that once readers get linked to a series, an author, or a genre, you'll channel those readers to the school library for more books like the ones they love. Plus, we include very carefully developed text sets for multiple copies of books to support book club work in social issue books clubs, historical fiction book clubs, mystery book clubs, fantasy book clubs, and the like. These collections of books match the units of study that draw on specialized collections. For example, for historical fiction, we include titles we especially recommend related to various eras—books in levels R–U related to the Depression, books in levels Q/R/S related to Westward Expansion, book at levels M–O related to Colonial America, and the list goes on (and on). When possible, we include a few picture books or short stories that also relate to the text set. In a similar way, our bibliography includes recommended books for nonfiction reading, with a list of well-scaffolded expository nonfiction on high-interest topics as well as less-scaffolded expository texts, plus a list of narrative nonfiction. Always, the books are leveled, and there are many at every level.

We have taken seriously the responsibility of developing those book lists and called on scores of our most knowledgeable teachers to help us in their areas of expertise. But there is nothing magical about the lists we compile, and we are eager to learn from your suggestions as well as to provide these to you, as time goes on, on the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project website. We are always especially on the search for high-interest low-level books.

The Meeting Area

Alongside the bookshelves there will probably be an easel, or something that stands in for the easel that you are still angling to get! The important part is not the actual easel but the pad of chart paper. Most teachers have a couple of charts going at all times, and the teaching point from each day's reading workshop is generally added to one of the charts. So if this is a unit of study on nonfiction reading, there may be a chart about ways readers read expository nonfiction (Readers look over the text and think, "How do I think this whole text will unfold?" Readers read until our minds are full, and then we pause, usually at the end of a chunk, and think, "What's the big thing I've learned so far?" and retell what we just learned). The one main chart that threads through a unit of study might be referred to in half the unit's minilessons, and certainly teachers

will refer to this chart in some of their small-group work and their conferences. Meanwhile, however, there will probably be two or three subordinate charts that also thread through the unit. One, for example, might be a chart listing ways partners can share their reading, and another might be a chart about strategies for tackling tricky words. The latter two charts probably were begun in an earlier unit of study and are carried along within and beyond this unit.

If a teacher has access to an overhead projector, a document camera, or a smart board, this can be a helpful resource during minilessons, but they can also alter the tone and intimacy of a minilesson, making the minilesson feel not like a huddle or story time but more like a PowerPoint presentation. I like these tools best if they are kept low down, close to the floor, so the teacher needn't stand and deliver. I do not advise wheeling these machines into the minilesson, and then standing alongside them, teaching with eyes glued to the projected text rather than on the students. I also think that we need to teach listening as well as reading, and that most of the time we should read aloud without displaying the text. Still, these tools can be helpful, depending how and how often they are used.

Whenever possible, teachers put a carpet on the floor of the meeting area. It sets this part of the room apart, making it special, and it makes sitting on the floor more appealing to kids. But whether or not there is a carpet in the meeting area, you'll want your kids to become accustomed to sitting on the floor. Many times a day, you'll want to convene kids to explicitly teach to them in an all-eyes-up-here fashion, and classrooms in which reading is taught through a workshop approach induct kids into the ritual of assembling quickly and dispersing quickly. Certainly it would be cumbersome to imagine chairs dragged hither and yon during the reading workshop.

Materials

Book Bins/Baggies

In reading workshops, you'll see that readers carry some sort of a container in which they keep their books and other stuff. Sometimes this is a cardboard magazine box that doubles as almost the wall of a carrel, separating the child's reading space from that of the child beside him, and sometimes it is a freezer baggy (cheaper, but risky for stepping on!). Of course, readers keep all their reading materials in their book bins.

Take-Home Baggies

There is always a take-home baggie in the book bin (or a take-home baggie within the larger baggie). This is the means to support a reader's texts going wherever the reader goes.

Reading Logs

Each reader in each and every reading workshop keeps a reading log, and I can't stress enough the importance of this tool. Many teachers find that students value their logs most if they are kept in a cumulative fashion, perhaps in a three-holed binder or a folder, with recent logs combined with those from other weeks of the year. This allows readers themselves and others who care about their reading to refer to the log for evidence of growth across time. The log is a record of the book title, the level, the date, the reading place (home or school), the page at which reading began and the page at which reading ended, and the minutes spent reading. At the start of each reading workshop, children pull out their reading logs and record the page number at which they'll start that day's reading, and they record the start time. Then, at the end of reading time, readers record the number of total minutes spent reading and the number of pages read. As a teacher moves about the room, this makes it is easy to notice that in, say, seventeen minutes of reading time, a particular reader may have read fifteen pages (which is what you'd expect) or four pages (which would lead you to want to do some further research). Children, as well as teachers, study data. Children review the data on their reading like runners might study their times or dieters their weight, and there is a lot of emphasis on these data being scientific. If a child records that she only read twelve minutes last night at home, a teacher is apt to congratulate the child on such precise and honest data. If the teacher wants to address the need to make more time for reading (which is likely), that conversation needs to occur far from any discussion of the written record. Because logs are kept out as children read, every day in every class and because books travel between school and home each day, this makes it more likely that they are accurate records of the reading that is done in home and at school. If children distort the amount of reading they did at home, then each day they'll be forced to read from pages that don't make sense to them.

Short Stacks of Just-Right Books

Teachers often talk to children about how readers have books at our bedside tables, or books in waiting. This rhetoric, then, paves the way for children to select

not a single book at a time from the library, but a "short stack of books." These short stacks function like books that are piled on the bedside table. The short stacks of books are more important than you might realize because they keep children from constantly finishing books and running to the classroom library, where they roam and drift sometimes for long stretches of time. It means that the interval between finishing one book and starting the next is a seamless one.

This also means that when we confer with a child, we can notice the trajectory of that child's reading. If this one book seems too hard, we can see whether that's been the case across many books or whether this is just an exception.

We can also help children to talk and think across books. "In this series, is the character growing any older? Is time seeming to pass? How can she tell?"

Then, too, we can also check on the reading work that kids have been doing even if they are not in class. During gym, for example, we can say to all the children, "Please leave your book bins out at your reading spot so I can look at your short stack of books," and we can quickly look across the books in readers' bins, checking to see whether the levels of text difficulty seem about right, looking at the nature of the readers' Post-its and/or reading notebook entries across time.

Post-Its

Your children will no doubt keep Post-its in their book bins. I once wrote to the Post-it company suggesting that it supply me with thousands and thousands of free packages of Post-its to share with New York City teachers who have very little because, after all, the reading workshop has no doubt sent sales of Post-its over the moon. The company would have nothing to do with me, alas, and for a week I boycotted them. But I couldn't maintain my freeze. Post-its are too important to me. They're important because kids don't own the books in our classrooms and therefore can't write in them as you and I do—with stars and marginalia and underlined passages. Post-its are the closest thing I know to that sort of ear-marking. These and other on-the-run responses to reading, coupled with partnership conversations, can efficiently angle a child's reading without supplanting it with a daily dirge of writing about reading. And so, for example, a reader can have a theory going about a character and can Post-it places where the character acts out of character in ways that are surprising, that suggest the character may be changing. The reader might jot her thought about this briefly on the Post-it and then read on, but later she could elect to come back to this point in the book with a partner.

Temporary Scaffolds

In the reading bin, readers will also keep temporary scaffolds of various sorts: a list of key questions they can ask themselves, a spectrum of precise words for describing a character, a reminder of the strategies readers use to do whatever that reader has been working toward. One reader might be asked to prop a card of reminders in front of him as he reads. Another might use a bookmark containing some specific reminders. The important thing about these scaffolds is that they are temporary and meant to be removed when readers no longer need the support. It's always helpful to keep in mind that a tool that could provide a scaffold one day can on another day become a box, limiting what a learner does.

What Does Reading Workshop Across a Whole School Look Like? Creating a Community of Practice

If you were to visit any one of the hundreds of thousands of schools where the reading workshop is the method of choice for teaching reading, you'd find that usually this is a whole-school, and often a whole-district, approach. Sometimes a school system is in transition, allowing the more skilled teachers or the more successful schools to use a reading workshop approach to teaching reading while keeping some of the less experienced teachers tied to a core reading program, a basal textbook. Usually, these districts in transition meanwhile provide teachers the professional development they need to take steps toward the reading workshop. Leaders of these schools will say, "I'm working to be sure all teachers are ready to teach using a reading workshop. For now I think only some faculty members at this school are ready for that." I'll discuss this in more detail later, but for now my point is that usually, although not always, the reading workshop is an approach that a city, a town, a district, or a school adopts.

Provisioning Classrooms with Books

When a school decides to use the reading workshop as its approach to teaching reading, this means that instead of every child reading selections from reading textbooks in synchrony with each other and then doing a series of activities around those selections, the emphasis in the teaching of reading is on reading real books—trade books. Funds are less apt to be channeled toward

mammoth reading programs that come with stopwatches, puzzles, puppets, CDs, books of ditto masters, plaques for the wall, games, and the like, and instead every possible dollar is spent on bringing the best of children's literature into the classroom and on providing teachers with literacy coaches or lead teachers, staff development, and time to study together.

Of course, provisioning classrooms with the best of children's literature is not a small detail. Some people suggest that the minimum number of books that a classroom needs is twenty per child; most schools agree that over time, it will be important to provision children with more books than that. Schools that take the time to develop book rooms are making good use of their energy and resources because this means that text sets containing multiple copies of certain books can be accessed and returned, and this is an important way to support guided reading groups and book clubs. Then, too, in general as a class of children grows across the year, the books they're able to read will change, and book rooms allow teachers to keep our fast-growing kids "in books." I provide more resources, including bibliographies, on the topic of classroom libraries and book rooms on the accompanying CD-ROM.

In a reading workshop, children not only read actual books; they also usually choose the books that they'll read. Those choices, of course, are guided. For example, children are channeled to read books that are at their "just-right" reading levels. They may also be channeled to read a particular genre of books or sent to choose books from a limited collection (perhaps, for a time, books the teacher believes are especially well written).

If a school adopts a reading workshop approach, generally this means that the school will also adopt an assessment system that enables teachers to ascertain the level of text difficulty that each reader can handle, and then classroom libraries will be organized so at least 50% of the books (usually more) are labeled by level of text difficulty. Every school I know relies on a leveling system originally developed by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell to scaffold their levels, although leveling books by lexile is another possibility. Once books have been leveled, a teacher can suggest that a child will feel strongest reading, say, level T books, and then the child can choose the books he or she will read, choosing from texts that are labeled with level T or are similar in difficulty to those texts, or the child can read texts that are a bit easier than those. Teachers sometimes question whether their school could adopt a reading workshop approach to teaching reading if their school does not have leveled classroom libraries. This is a wise question, because the truth is that whereas teaching a writing workshop requires

only that students have pens, paper, and a willing teacher, teaching a reading workshop does require more support. Readers need access to books that they can read—and lots of them.

However, bear in mind that eight years ago, the chancellor of New York City's schools went to one school—PS 172, a stronghold of the reading and the writing workshop—and said, “The approach to language arts in this school is going to be the approach to language arts across the city of New York.” Hundreds of New York City schools were caught off-guard by that announcement. They didn't even have classroom libraries (let alone leveled classroom libraries)! Across the New York City, people took sets of twenty-five copies of books and dispersed them into classrooms, providing single copies to many rooms and four to six copies for book club reading to other rooms. The layers of materials were excavated from the edges of classrooms, the book rooms, the basements, and in doing so, countless books were uncovered. Schools held leveling pizza parties on a Friday afternoon. Staff rooms became leveling rooms. Instead of knitting while chatting, people leveled a few books. The security guards, paraprofessionals, student teachers, and parent volunteers were trained in the rudiments of leveling books. After all, it isn't rocket science. You take a book. You look up the level on one of several websites. Perhaps you find the book with its level, in which case, you record the level. If you don't find the level, then once you develop a sense for text levels, you make the wisest decision you can, knowing that once the book is in use in the classroom, if it seems harder or easier than others that carry the same level label, then its level can be adjusted.

Most teachers know that any system of assessing the text level a child can read and of assigning books to levels is an approximate one, so when a child especially wants to read a book that is a bit harder, the teacher will work with the child to be sure he or she gets support doing that reading and to be sure a deadline is set for when the reader will finish that book. It's one thing for a child to take three days to read a book his friend loved, promising to have lots of conversations with the friend and getting summaries from the friend, and quite another for a child to lug a giant *Harry Potter* book to and from school for four months as she inches her way through it! I discuss the possible systems for leveling texts and for assessing readers and matching them to texts in the chapter “Assessing Readers: Schoolwide Systems for Tracking Progress.”

One way in which children's book choices are guided, then, is that children are channeled to read books that are at their just-right levels (and to progress up levels over time). In addition, the class will always be engaged in a unit of study

(more on this later), and the unit will often influence children's choices. That is, it may be that the third graders spend a month in a unit of study on mystery books. Most of the books that third graders read seem to be mysteries, so this doesn't curtail their reading lives to a very big extent, but yes, during a unit of study on mystery reading, what this means is that every child will continue to choose just-right books to read. For example, a child will be reading level T books, but the child will choose from a collection of mysteries that are written at levels he or she can read. During another unit, the emphasis may be on characters (allowing any fiction book to suffice) or on interpretation. Still other units of study might be on expository nonfiction or biography.

In schools that teach a reading workshop approach to reading, this means that instead of purchasing a program that controls the teaching of reading, teachers are decision makers. This means that creating a climate of professional study is crucial. There are a variety of ways in which a school does this.

Knowledge and the Connection Between Expertise and the Classroom

One challenge, then, is to provision classrooms across the school with books. An even more important challenge is to provision classrooms across the school with expertise. When possible, people with expertise on the teaching of reading will spend some of their time helping teachers as well as helping children. Sometimes the expert's title is literacy coach; sometimes it is reading specialist or director of language arts or lead teacher. The title is less important than the role. The important thing is that schools need to be places where everyone is engaged in professional study, and this is most apt to happen if professional development is built into the fabric of the school.

Usually a school will agree upon a set of methods that are used across the school, in every grade, and in every classroom. This means, then, that the faculty in the school becomes a gigantic community of practice, with people all talking and thinking about methods of teaching that underpin the reading workshop in first grade, third grade, fifth grade, and so on. A cluster of teachers can spend time developing expertise in a particular method. Imagine that three teachers from across widely different grade levels take on a study of the best possible ways to lead guided reading groups. After the small group develops some expertise at whatever they are studying, then other teachers can visit those classrooms to observe what the core group of teachers is doing. With little inexpensive hand-

held flip cameras, informal videos can be made of people using the method under study. In study groups, the school community can read what various experts have said about the method, watch the videos made by experts on the method, and then approximate and emulate, analyze, and question whatever is read and viewed. In this way, the school as a whole can agree upon a rough draft of tentative ideas about that particular method as that method lives in that particular school. In this fashion, the school will begin to develop a shared set of methods for teaching reading and shared understandings about those methods.

One of the wonderful things about a reading workshop is that the methods teachers will study and use to teach reading will mostly be methods that they can also use to teach writing. Minilessons, conferring, small-group strategy lessons, teaching shares, work with partnerships, and methods for constructing units of study will be mostly the same, whether one is teaching reading or teaching writing. Of course, some teachers will feel more at home with a method within one venue or the other, and this is one of the ways in which all of us outgrow ourselves all the time.

It's powerful and efficient, then, when a school adopts a shared set of methods for teaching reading and writing, because teachers from divergent grade levels can then work shoulder to shoulder, with one person's knowledge becoming everyone's knowledge. The first-grade teacher may be reading aloud *Mike Mulligan and his Steam Shovel*, and the fifth-grade teacher may be reading aloud *The Giver*, but both teachers will plan for their read-aloud work in ways that can be discussed, and both teachers will shift between demonstrating and scaffolding and removing scaffolds. Schools become beehives of inquiry and collaboration when the entire staff of a school sees itself as co-contributors to an ever-evolving schoolwide repertoire of teaching methods.

There is another reason why shared methods of teaching are incredibly important, and it is this: any method of teaching is also a method of learning. If teachers study conferring and know that it helps to approach a child and ask questions such as "What work are you doing as a reader?" then that method of teaching has powerful implications for kids. *They* need to learn *their* roles in these methods of teaching. They need to know that when the teacher asks, "What work are you doing as a reader?" the teacher is not wanting to know the title and


page number of the child's current book, and they need to know that if they aren't sure what work they have been doing, it can help to cast their eyes over the anchor chart from the unit of study and to think, "Have I been working on any of those bullet points that my teacher has taught in this unit of study?" Of

course, conferring is not the only method that kids need to learn. Every method of teaching is a method also of learning, and the more we can induct kids into the system, the more proactive and powerful they can be in their roles. In schools in which teachers share a set of methods of teaching, kids take over those methods. It is not uncommon for a child to offer to reteach the preceding day's minilesson for the children who were absent, or for children who have developed expertise on a subject to suggest they could lead strategy lessons for others. Older children who buddy with younger children can use those buddy relationships as time for

conferring, with the older child functioning very much as they've seen their teacher function. Buddy-reading (a term that I think of as referring to times when older students buddy-up with younger students) can become a forum for cross-grade-level book clubs. Student Council meetings can abide by principles of accountable talk that children experience first within the whole-class read-aloud.

Of course, the job of supervising and supporting teachers also becomes easier when a school becomes a community of practice with all the teachers working within shared methods of teaching. For example, a principal who may not feel confident that he or she necessarily knows how to teach really effective reading workshops can spend time in the classrooms where kids are growing in leaps and bounds. The principal can study what's happening in those rooms and then use the image of good teaching, gleaned from those classrooms, as a resource when supporting and supervising other teachers. Of course, sometimes the principal will want to get out of the role of middleman and spend time enabling the one teacher to support the other directly.

Teachers are especially able to learn from each other if the various classrooms are not only all using similar methods of teaching, but are also engaged in a curriculum that makes it likely that, for much of the time, the kids are working in shared units of study. I'll discuss the process of developing curriculum in more detail later, but for now the important thing is that generally, in a school that has adopted a reading workshop approach to teaching reading, the teachers at



The reason that people choose to teach in reading workshops is not that this form of teaching produces scores. Instead, the reasons to do this are the children, grasping books to their chest, whose lives are forever changed because they are readers.

a specific grade level will meet together toward the end of one school year to map out a (mostly) shared curricular calendar, as I call it, for the upcoming year. This means, for example, that at any one time of the year, the teachers across a grade level will probably all be teaching the same unit of study in reading (and in writing), so teachers can swap minilesson ideas, show each other their students' work, ponder the unit-specific problems that come up, and in general provide each other with professional company.

Why Reading Workshop?

As you'll see in Chapter 11, the scores that readers who are schooled in reading workshop earn on standardized tests are impressive, but really the reason that people choose to teach in reading workshops is not that this form of teaching produces scores. Instead, the reasons to do this are the children, grasping books to their chest, whose lives are forever changed because they are readers.

I think of Imani. She'd been in a series of foster homes and was, when she entered one of our reading workshop classrooms, living with her mom, who was a single parent and a crack addict. Within a month or two of entering this classroom, Imani became a ravenous reader. Her teacher put a steady stream of books in her hands, books that featured African American girls like herself, books that were not the victim narratives of slavery and prejudice but instead stories of strong sassy girls like Imani. She read *Dancing in the Wings* and *Junebug* and most of Jacqueline Woodson's books. Imani began carrying two or three of these books at a time, reading them constantly, and she became a feminist. She wrote this poem about herself:

I am
The chocolate in the twix bar
The cookie crunch in the oreo cookie
Not the creamy center
I am
B-ball and yoga and
Books hidden under my bed
I am
Not 'ho' or 'yo' or anything else
The boys in my neighborhood
Call the girls they think are easy girls
Who go with them to be somebody
I am *somebody* already.

When I think of the reasons to teach a reading workshop, I think also of my son Miles. When it came time for Miles to write the essay accompanying his college applications, I felt sure he'd write about one of the service activities that had been so important in his life, or about his relationship with his brother or with his grandfather. But to my surprise, Miles wrote instead about his relationship to characters in books. His essay began:

When I enter college, I will bring my experiences trekking through the mountains of Vietnam and my memories of a 227-day stint in a lifeboat, accompanied only by a Bengal tiger. When I attend classes as a freshman, my role will bear the imprint of the tortuous hours I spent standing along the town square, a scarlet letter emblazoned on my chest. Reading has given me the water I swim in, the heroes I emulate, and the imagination to believe that I can make the world a better place.

I have often said that one of my goals is to give the children of the world what I give to my own children. And so it matters to me that when it came time for Miles to introduce himself to prospective colleges, of all his formative experiences, the one he chose to write about was the moment he experienced vicariously, standing in shame as a woman overlooking the town square, a scarlet letter emblazoned on the chest. Like Miles, your children will let you know that their lives have been changed because of books, and that will be the evidence that kindles your passion for teaching well.



Planning a Year-Long Curriculum for Teaching Reading

In reading, as in writing, children benefit from being part of a buzzing community of practice, where learning occurs sideways, from each other, as well from the hands and mind of a teacher. Children benefit from being immersed, all together, in a whole-class study that leads to lessons being wrapped throughout the classroom in the form of anchor charts and exemplary work, celebrated often and posted everywhere. And children also need to feel, as the year unfolds, that their work in reading has seasons. Always they read, read, read. Always they integrate all the skills of proficient reading to make meaning. Always they think, write, and talk about texts. And, sometimes, the class is turned totally upside-down by a study of character; sometimes, everyone has become a detective, reminiscent of a giant Clue game, with readers piecing together clues from their books, not from a game board, to find “Who dun it, where, and with what?” The challenge to make sure that all kids are learning with us does not mean each child needs to work as an island, doing his or her own thing, untouched by anyone to the right or to the left! *It does* mean that we are always working to support children in the ongoing reading work they are able to do—and almost able to do. It does mean that we are always aiming to teaching children about goals and strategies and skills that they can apply to their reading lives, now and from now on, no matter what the topic and focus at hand.

Planning Curriculum

In the schools I know best, teachers have some release time toward the end of a school year to meet with colleagues across their grade level (sometimes across two grade levels that decide to work in sync) to plan what we refer to as “a curriculum calendar” of shared units of study. When teachers of grades 3 and up plan units in *writing*, it is essential that those units do not last longer than a month because usually the units scaffold the children’s work on a single piece of writing, and eight-, nine-, and ten-year-old children do not often have the rehearsal and revision skills to work productively for more than a

month on a single piece of writing. But in units of study in reading, children are always reading a great many books pertaining to that unit—those working at lower text levels may read three books a week, while more proficient readers read closer to one longer book per week. So there is no special reason why units of study in reading can't last, say, six weeks, as long as the teacher has enough books to sustain such a unit. (That is, a unit on fantasy can't last six weeks if teachers have no way to provision readers who are reading level N/O books with sufficient fantasy books at a level they can read with ease.) Let's imagine, then, that some units last a month and some six weeks, although you may decide differently in your school.

Unit 1: Building a Reading Life

When teachers meet to plan the sequence of their curriculum in reading, usually there isn't a lot of discussion about the first three units. It almost goes without saying that the first unit needs to launch kids' into their own reading lives, helping them choose just-right books, carry those between home and school, read for longer stretches of time, and work on basic comprehension. The unit needs to be straightforward enough that teachers are freed to conduct running records.

Building a Reading Life Stamina, Fluency, and Engagement

In this, the first unit of the year, we launch the reading workshop. We pull out all stops in an effort to help all our students to become avid readers. We wear a love of reading on our own sleeves, help students fashion their identities as people who care about reading, create a social life that revolves around shared books, and above all we help students develop a sense of agency about their reading lives, taking responsibility for becoming the kinds of readers who not only make sense of books, but who also let books change their lives. We meanwhile induct children into the structures, routines, and habits of a richly literate reading workshop. Students learn how to choose books that are just right in level and interest, to carry books between home and school, to collect and study data about their reading rates and volume, and they learn to push themselves to read with increasing stamina, fluency, and volume. In reading partnerships, children learn to retell and summarize texts and to share ideas that are grounded in the specifics of their books.

If youngsters have been in reading workshops for years, this unit will need to be spun out a bit differently than if this is children's very first experience in the unit, and in *Constructing Curriculum* you'll see the ways a master teacher taught this to brand-new third graders and the way a master teacher taught it to sixth graders who've been immersed in reading workshop for most of their lives.

Unit 2: Following Characters into Meaning

It almost goes without saying that by the time Unit Two rolls around, teachers will want to devote that unit to supporting higher-level comprehension skills around fiction reading. One of the most obvious ways to do this is through a unit that the kids will think is a unit on character, but that you'll teach in ways that spotlight whatever higher-level thinking skills you determine your students need. This is a description of this unit, as brought to life in the two volumes of Unit Two. You will probably teach both portions of this unit, one after the other, as a single coherent unit:

Following Characters into Meaning

Vol. 1: Envisionment, Prediction, and Inference

It is essential that stories ignite a vital sort of imagination, one that allows readers to live inside the world of the story, to identify with the characters, seeing and sensing situations from inside the characters' minds. This, the first portion of the unit, highlights personal response, envisionment, and empathy to strengthen that connection between readers and characters. In this volume, you'll also learn how to use informal assessment to help you clarify several reading skills progressions—learning what predicting can look like in early stages and then in advanced stages, for example—so that you can lay out learning pathways for readers, helping them to develop more powerful reading skills.

Following Characters into Meaning

Vol. 2: Building Theories, Gathering Evidence

Whereas the first portion of this unit, contained in Volume 1, helped children approach their study of character *aesthetically*, walking in the shoes of characters, seeing through the characters' eyes, empathizing, and predicting, in this second volume, the focus of the unit shifts so that now we help readers approach texts *effereently*, pulling back to develop a bird's-eye view of a text, gleaning facts and insights about characters that they then carry away from the text, synthesizing this information into evidence-based theories and talking about these theories

with others. Our goal by the end of the unit is for readers to be able to shift between these stances—with aesthetic reading enriching the efferent reading and vice versa—blending together the advantages of being lost in the text with the advantages of being analytical about it.

Although the units described above are foundational, you might decide to abbreviate one and extend the other during a subsequent year. Then again, after teaching these units for a year and learning from the professional development embedded in them, you might decide that some grade levels in your school will author new versions of these important units. In *Constructing Curriculum*, you'll see various ways that teachers have adapted this unit so that it's always fresh and tailored to specific grades, but frankly you could alter the unit simply by bringing a different read-aloud text front and center and by imbuing it with your stories and your kids' stories. That is, although Kathleen Tolan and I have woven *The Tiger Rising* through a character unit, you might be teaching seventh graders and might instead read aloud *Hunger Games*.

Unit 3: Navigating Nonfiction

After teaching a couple of units of study that develop your students' muscles for reading fiction, you will very likely want to shift to a unit of study that supports their abilities to read nonfiction, although at this point your students would also be ready for you to shift into genre-based book club units that we generally teach after four to six weeks of nonfiction work. You'll want to take account of your resources for nonfiction reading. If you have tons and tons of just-right books on a topic within your social studies or science classroom, then you have the choice of bringing down the walls between your reading workshop and your social studies or science unit, inviting students to read on a topic that you are studying. One of the units in *Constructing Curriculum* offers a template for doing this. But most of you will probably decide that a topic-based nonfiction unit could easily be taught in the spring, and for now you'll want to develop your students' muscles for reading nonfiction. This is a description of the way Kathleen Tolan and I decided to angle such a unit.

Navigating Nonfiction in Expository Text

Vol. 1: Determining Importance and Synthesizing

In this unit of study, we teach young readers that if they read nonfiction texts with an attentiveness to the underlying structure of those texts, this can help them take in, synthesize, learn from, and respond to large swaths of nonfiction

texts. That is, once readers recognize a text structure, they can use that information to structure their own reading, allowing parts of the text to coalesce into that structure, taking on greater significance, while letting other parts of the text fall away. In Volume 1 of the unit, then, we teach students that most expository nonfiction has a central idea and supporting evidence, and that once readers know this, they can read with an eye for that main idea as well as for supportive specifics, gleaned outlines and summaries that can then become foundational to their thoughts about the texts. This sort of reading helps readers get their minds around the main concepts that an expository text teaches.

Navigating Nonfiction in Narrative and Hybrid Text

Vol. 2: Using Text Structures to Comprehend

In Volume 2 of the unit, we teach students to read *narrative* nonfiction with attentiveness to structure, using story grammar to synthesize and determine importance across large stretches of text. Once students recognize that most narrative nonfiction has a central character with goals and struggles, that the texts convey an underlying idea, and that many nonfiction narratives culminate in an achievement or a disaster, we can help them use that information to structure their reading, allowing the events and details of the text to click into that narrative structure and therefore to be memorable.

For the last weeks of the unit, students will use all they have learned about nonfiction reading to pursue research projects in small groups on topics related to their interests. We teach students the strategies that readers use to synthesize information, to take on new vocabulary, and to deepen their thinking through writing. Once students have begun their research, we teach them ways to think critically about their nonfiction texts, examining authors' means and motives. In the end, our goal is to teach readers that each one of them must learn to find a unique angle on a topic, an angle different from that of the authors of the texts they've read. We coach children in ways to read to inform their own purposes, and in the end we structure an opportunity for them to teach others.

Unit 4: Tackling Complex Texts

By this time, you and your colleagues will have lots of options available to you. Most of the teachers we know best decide that their youngsters will profit from shifting toward book clubs (some people refer to these as literature circles) in which children talk not just with a partner but with a small group of readers and progress in sync with those readers through a sequence of related books. Book

club units of study can be overtly designed around a cluster of related reading skills—say, inference and interpretation—or they can be designed so that children, at least, think this is a unit about a particular kind of text (mysteries, humor, series books, fantasy, biographies) or around topics (social issue book clubs, freedom fighters). We have found that the most supportive, most scaffolded units for teachers and kids alike are those in which the whole class reads a particular genre, or kind of book, so generally the next unit of study will be book clubs that support kids work within a particular genre.

Of course, it taxes a school's resources if all children grades 3–5 are within one sort of book club unit, so generally teachers will decide on different genres for different grade levels. Most third graders seem to be reading mysteries much of the time, so this unit is a special favorite for that grade level (though its appeal endures across grade levels). It's common, then, for this next unit of study to be mystery book clubs for third graders and historical fiction book clubs for fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. (Fantasy, though, is also a great favorite, and certainly it is a favorite in the middle school grades.)

Although the children will think this is a unit on a genre, *you'll* know that you are in fact teaching the skills of proficient reading. If your children are reading mysteries, you'll probably highlight the skills of close reading, inference, and prediction. This unit is described in *Constructing Curriculum*. If your children are reading historical fiction, you could angle their work to especially develop their muscles in envisionment, in building the world of the story. Mary Ehrenworth and I made a different decision, as you will see in the following overview of the unit we wrote on historical fiction book clubs.

Tackling Complex Texts: Historical Fiction in Book Clubs ***Vol. 1: Synthesizing Perspectives***

In this first volume of the unit, we aim to teach readers to read complex texts with deep comprehension. With support from a book club, readers will learn to keep track of multiple plotlines, unfamiliar characters, and shifts in time and place. Historical fiction is uniquely challenging in that it requires readers to synthesize text about the evolving setting with text about the changing characters, who are likely to be vastly different from the readers themselves, and then readers must further synthesize that information with the text of the plot and, usually, with several crucial subplots, all of which often involve unexplained gaps in time and unfamiliar circumstances and consequences. You'll also teach readers how to construct a sense of the setting not just as a physical place but as an



emotional place, and in doing so, you'll help students read with attention to the mood in the text. A town that undergoes war or sudden violence will change rapidly, and readers of historical fiction need to notice ways that changes in setting affect different characters differently. In this unit, we rely on historical fiction to invite readers to work hard to comprehend challenging texts. In doing so, we aim to help students develop a passion for the genre and for history, and we aim to help them develop the imagination to walk in the shoes of characters—and people—whose lives are different from their own.

Tackling Complex Texts: Historical Fiction in Book Clubs

Vol. 2: Interpretation and Critical Reading

The second portion of this unit embarks upon the ambitious, intellectual work of interpretation. First within one text, then across texts, and then between texts and their lives, we teach readers to grow nuanced ideas and to read in order to be changed. As their books become more complicated, readers learn that those ideas are not just about what's happening but also about concepts. They learn not to recite back ideas a teacher gives them, but instead to develop their own ideas, doing the hard, intellectual work that children need to do in order to grapple with themes. Readers make their ideas more complex as they consider the perspectives of characters whose voices are absent as well as those whose voices are present in texts, and as they become not only participants in but also students of an era in history. Readers learn, too, to develop literary language for some of the things they are intuitively seeing in their books, coming to recognize and to use allusions, figurative language, and symbolism to convey ideas that are not easily contained in ordinary language. Although this volume begins as a study in deep comprehension of complex texts and specifically of interpretation, it ends by helping readers appreciate the fact that individuals can take action and make choices that change the world.

Authoring Your Own Units

By this time, you and your colleagues will want to think about all the work you have done in preceding years, asking, "Could some of that be brought into an upcoming unit of study?" Perhaps you taught an author study in a way that worked. Surely you could design a unit of study that invited young people to construct their own author studies.

Perhaps by this time in the year, you want to bring down the walls between your reading workshop, your writing workshop, and your social studies workshop and to show kids the possibilities of a unit that crosses all disciplines on a topic you love. Again, *Constructing Curriculum: Alternate Units of Study* has some help for you in the form of some units and some frameworks for units, as well as a chapter with some rules of thumb and suggestions for writing your own units, but you'll also want to rely on other resources as well.

Then, too, your children may have ideas for a unit, so you and your colleagues may decide to reserve one unit of study to author with your students and to use this as a way to add to your repertoire in future years. Go to it!

About the *Units of Study* Series

The *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* series brings you a rigorous and compelling reading curriculum, one that has been piloted in thousands of schools over a score of years. The series will allow your teaching to stand on the shoulders of a large thought collaborative. The ideas, methods, and classroom structures that you'll learn in this series have been under development for the past twenty years, by a network of professionals working together in lab-site classrooms, think tanks, graduate courses, funded research projects, summer institutes, reading clubs, and model schools. In all these sites, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project has researched, developed, field-tested, adapted, and collected evidence on and ultimately refined the literacy instruction that this series now conveys to you. Over the course of those years, this team has brought in and learned from many other reading experts, including Marie Clay, Randy Bomer, Donald Bear, David Booth, Peter Johnston, Pauline Gibbons, Nancy Anderson, Gay Su Pinnell, Dick Allington, Jerry Harste, Kyleene Beers, Smokey Daniels, Tony Petrosky, Ellin Keene, Lori Hellman, Stephen Krashen, Tim Rasinski, Steph Harvey, Frank Smith, and others. The series, then, is an ambitious undertaking!

Units of Study for Teaching Reading is intended to synthesize a school reform effort, a course of study in the teaching of reading, and a grades 3–5 reading curriculum; together, these three strands can help you bring all your students into a reading workshop characterized by deep levels of investment in reading and clear instruction that moves learners along learning pathways to higher-level comprehension skills. It allows you to learn to teach reading by inviting you to watch master teachers working with real kids and by meanwhile standing alongside you as you watch, helping you see the replicable methods that are being used, the responsive decisions that are being made, and the alternatives we could have considered instead. Meanwhile, you will come to understand a reading curriculum as it unfolds not just in your classroom but also across your district. You'll learn ways to provision whole schools for a reading workshop, to establish a system-wide method for assessing readers' growth and communicating that information to parents, and to plan a spiral curriculum across the years.



This series was not written from the armchair. It stands on the shoulders of the work of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. This organization involves sixty staff developers, several reading specialists, two data specialists, four former superintendents, and of course an extraordinary collection of graduate students. The TCRWP also involves a network of dedicated teachers, principals, and superintendents, many of whom have been contributors to the organization for several decades.

The methods for reading instruction contained in these pages have been shared with hundreds of thousands of educators, including those who attend the many institutes that the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project offers every February and throughout every summer. These institutes have been a way to pass the baton to others; those who attend the institutes have, in turn, created classrooms and schools that are beacons of excellence and teaching hubs for their region, and in this and other ways, word has spread. Over the years, more and more teachers and principals have found that the reading workshop, like its sister structure, the writing workshop, can give children unbelievable power as readers, thinkers, researchers, and citizens. Being part of this work has given teachers new energy and joy, reminding us of why we chose this field in the first place. Demand for support in the teaching of reading has skyrocketed. This *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* series is part of our effort to provide that support.

The Series Can Help You Teach in Ways that Are Differentiated

Units of Study for Teaching Reading starts by helping you put the bottom-line essentials of a research-based reading program in place and then helps you become a diagnostic professional who teaches in data-based ways. One of the premises of this book is that teachers can and must collect data that is as close to reading as possible—data about the number of minutes and pages that children are reading, about the levels of text difficulty in which children can be successful, and about children’s abilities to do whatever skills of proficient


reading you decide to highlight. The series goes further and helps you support and track your children’s evolving abilities to predict, envision, synthesize, find the main idea, and interpret. Too often reading skills are thought of as something that readers can do or cannot do; this series suggests, instead, that we need to

construct learning pathways so that we teach skills by moving kids along trajectories that we, meanwhile, are constructing and refining as we teach.

In each unit of study, you will learn a rich repertoire of ways to provide focused, explicit instruction for a handful of skills and strategies of proficient reading. Within one unit, for example, you’ll learn that you can rally all your students to read expository texts, paying attention to the main ideas of those texts, creating little mental outlines as they read. The crucial work will be for you to teach in ways that support all children doing this work within their zones of proximal development. For children who are reading the most accessible texts, those main ideas will be apt to be spotlighted in headings and

topic sentences. For children reading more complex texts, the main ideas may be embedded in paragraphs, and for those working with the most demanding expository texts, the main idea will be implicit, with the texts often containing a wealth of detail from which readers must learn to draw their own conclusions. Like any other essential reading skill, determining the main idea is not something readers learn to do once and for all. Instead, this skill, like every reading skill, develops along a pathway. This means that an entire community of readers can be invited to work toward a particular reading skill. No reader will ever stop working to determine the main idea, synthesize, read critically, and the rest. It’s just that the texts in which readers do this work and the nature of the work itself will become increasingly complex, and the scaffolds you provide will vary.

To help you support diverse learners as each one works in his or her way toward shared goals, the series will show you how to collect data you value and to work together with colleagues to provide data-based instruction in which you scaffold your learners so each works in his or her zone of proximal development. You will also learn ways to assess children to understand a specific child’s characteristic ways of working with texts and to use the structures of the reading workshop to create individualized ways of supporting readers in the particular skills they need.



Over the years, more and more teachers and principals have found that the reading workshop, like its sister structure, the writing workshop, can give children unbelievable power as readers, thinkers, researchers, and citizens. Being part of this work has given teachers new energy and joy...

The Series Is Designed Not Only as Curriculum but Also as Professional Development

Units of Study for Teaching Reading has been designed as a form of virtual staff development, with the demonstrations, information, and coaching folded into the support that can help you work with your children. The materials are carefully constructed so they provide you as well as your children with an intimate and intense course of study.

The series brings you some of the work that the organization I lead, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, has been doing for three decades as we support professional learning communities in districts ranging from rural towns in Arkansas and Maine to the buzzing metropolises of Seattle, Chicago, and New York City. We work also in large, systemic ways in nations such as Jordan and Israel, in rural schools in Mexico and the Caribbean, in international schools across the world, and in charter schools including Geoffrey Canada's Promise Academies in Harlem. From our deep engagement with an enormous variety of schools, we have learned not only about teaching reading, but also about teaching teachers and about the complex work of supporting school reform. Those insights on teacher education are implicit in this series.

We Invite You to Observe Us Teaching a Class of Kids Across the Year

Of course, one of the most beautiful ways for any of us to learn to teach is to watch a teacher-mentor at work within a classroom of ever-so-real kids. *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* invites you into our classroom, giving you the opportunity to join me and coauthors Kathleen Tolan and Mary Ehrenworth (and also our contributing authors and teacher-colleagues) as we teach a class of young people. You'll come to know the young people whose quirks and passions and struggles provide much of the poignancy in these books. You'll watch us go to the ends of the earth to lure, push, support, celebrate, and inform our strugglers—Gabe, Rosa, Tyrell, and others. You'll see us also draw chairs alongside readers who can read anything in the blink of an eye, and you'll join us in realizing that these readers pose their own sorts of challenges. One young reader makes such a compelling case against Post-its that we're totally stumped, another *can* read but chooses not to, and yet another sees so many symbols and

metaphors in any passage of any book that it's all we can do to resist breaking into peals of laughter at her earnest efforts to approximate T.S. Eliot. You'll watch boys in this class catch us by surprise by defying gender stereotypes, throwing themselves into an intensely intellectual and deeply emotional engagement with reading. That is, our kids will be your kids, posing all the challenges that all of us face day in and day out as we teach.

Teachers who have relied on *Units of Study for Primary Writing* and *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5* will find that this new reading series is even more grounded in classrooms than the writing series, containing five times as much video footage and revolving around a single, lasting community of kids. That was a special priority for me. I am convinced that too often reading curriculum comes to teachers in a way that is divorced from kids, without their voices, passions, and idiosyncrasies. I do not think we can learn to teach from a generic curriculum that has cleansed itself of the boisterous, intimate, complicated work of classroom teaching.

As you watch us work with this class (it is actually a composite class gleaned from five classrooms, representing very different contexts and grade levels), you'll see us mix inspiration, classroom management, demonstration, intervention, on-the-run assessments, one-to-one coaching, and small-group work into a curriculum for teaching reading—a mix that gives a classroom full of kids the education of a lifetime. And you'll see us learn from the kids with whom we are teaching—over and over, day in and day out.

You'll Be Able to Observe Minilessons and Learn the Infrastructure, Methods, and Content Necessary to Create Your Own Minilessons

In so many ways, teaching is a lonely profession. Most of us work as Lone Rangers day in and day out, month after month, and only rarely get the chance to watch another teacher in action. How can we possibly become masters of our profession if we are not given opportunities to watch what others do? And of course, the truth is that we need to watch not just one day, not just one flash in the pan; our work is long-haul work, and what counts is how it accumulates, across the duration.

We hope readers of the *Units of Study* series will find that these books can do the work that literature has always done: bring you, the reader, inside a world, allowing you to experience that world as if you were a member of it. As we read



C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* series, we join with Lucy, Susan, Peter, and Edmund, pushing our way through the coats in the wardrobe, and suddenly finding there are no more furry coats in front of us, and that instead we are standing, looking at a glen of snow-covered trees. In a similar fashion, we hope you will find yourselves sitting on the edge of the carpeted meeting area, waiting for me to lean toward you from my chair at the front of the meeting area, and to say, "Readers, today I want to teach you that...."

Within this series, the teaching that you participate in has been set onto the page in ways that can be transferable to your classroom, if you wish. Because I've written the story of my teaching (and sometimes of Kathleen and Mary's teaching) with enough detail that you'll be able to picture the fine grain of it—imagining the specifics of how we gather kids into the meeting area, for example, and how we sometimes voice over their quiet reading to lift the level of it—you'll be able to participate vicariously in this teaching. I share the actual words of minilessons—some 150 of which are included in detail and dozens more in less detail—that you can experience, borrow, tweak, adapt, combine, dissect, discard, and outgrow as you wish. Most importantly, I always step back to draw from the specific examples the transferable techniques and insights that underlie the teaching you will observe. In this way, you can see theory and practice work in synchrony. But the analyses are sidelined, and the kids are front and center. They can't be put on hold, because the teaching unfolds in real time, with tomorrow just around the bend.

You'll Observe Small-Group Work, One-to-One Conferring and Assessments, and Learn the Replicable Principles Underlying These Workshop Components

Of course, teaching reading involves a great deal more than minilessons! We invite you to watch our conferences, our small-group work of all sorts, our read-alouds, our book promotions, our assessments—the works! Always, these will be unpacked so that you can learn transferable principles. As Kathleen or Mary or I lead a small-group strategy lesson you'll listen in. Before, during, and after that bit of teaching, I'll pause to reveal the simple, step-by-step methods that informed what might otherwise seem like an idiosyncratic interaction. Those teachable moments can be created and, yes, re-created.

The small-group work, one-to-one conferring, interactive read-aloud work, and use of formative assessments that you will witness are included not just

because they actually happened in the classroom we bring to you. Instead, the coauthors and I have made a point to use this series to bring our newest, state-of-the-art thinking on each of these topics to you. Typically, someone who cares terribly about one component of teaching reading writes a whole book on just that one component. This is all well and good, except that for those of us who live day in and day out in classrooms, the hardest part is putting the components together into a seamless whole. We chose another route. Instead of writing a book on using formative assessments to inform units of study in reading, or on expanding our images of possibility for small-group work, or on how a teacher can avoid feeling empty-handed when conferring with readers who are reading books we don't know, or on a year-long sequence of work to support writing about reading, we have treated these topics, and many others, as threads within the tapestry of this series. The art of teaching involves weaving best practices together, because an effective reading program must have enough coherence, simplicity, and flexibility to allow us to teach, expecting the unexpected.

You'll Find Explicit Instruction in Methods for Teaching Reading Well

I am convinced that teachers as well as kids benefit from explicit instruction, including instruction in research and theory as well as in methods of teaching. Embedded into the series, then, are mini-lectures and seminars on topics as diverse as ways to support fluency in proficient as well as in struggling readers and on ways to teach readers to think about the perspective from which a story is told and to imagine perspectives that are not revealed in a story. For example, we hope you'll find yourself feeling as if you've received admission tickets to a conference day on ways to link specific levels of text difficulty (M and N and O and P and so forth) into broader bands of text difficulty (K–M, N–Q, R–T) so that you can crystallize an understanding of the challenges readers encounter at different bands of text difficulty and make this knowledge portable and useful.

But the explicit teaching that you will receive is not just about the *content* of your reading instruction. There are a handful of *methods* for teaching reading (and writing) that you will use repeatedly, and those, too, are explicitly taught to you. Just as it is important to demythologize the skills of proficient *reading* so these become accessible to everyone, so, too, it is important to demythologize the skills of proficient *teaching*, sharing the trade secrets. It is past time to debunk the idea that powerful teaching is based on some inborn talent that some have and

others don't. All of us have some talents that can be harvested in the service of teaching, and all of us have areas in which we'll need to become stronger to teach as well as we possibly can. The good news is that teaching is a profession, and as such, it can be taught and learned.

The books will also accompany you, as a teacher, into your own classroom, providing scaffolding that will allow you to teach in ways that are patterned after the methods and content in these units. The books do not provide a script for your teaching, but they can shore up your teaching, providing you with the scaffolding necessary to teach in state-of-the-art ways, and then the books will function as a live-in coach for your teaching.

One of the distinguishing features about this series and indeed about the whole line of Heinemann's *firsthand* resources is the way in which these weld theory and practice. Too often, practical, nuts-and-bolts instruction is divorced from theory on the one hand, and from real-life classrooms on the other hand. *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* and its two sister series in teaching writing instead weave theory and practice together in a new way. The books show state-of-the-art teaching, convey the logic and information upon which that teaching is based, and pull the curtain back from this teaching to reveal the principles that informed the teaching decisions, the alternatives that could have been considered instead, and the transferable methods that underlie this powerful instruction. The books also aim to give you opportunities to teach and to learn teaching while receiving strong scaffolding, on-the-job encouragement, and guidance.

You'll Find, We Hope, Inspiration and Energy for Teaching and Children

We've written *Units of Study for Reading* to be inspirational. As more and more is asked of teachers, and more and more pressures are placed on those of us in this profession, it's important to remember that great teaching is the result of people digging deep inside ourselves to draw on the internal reserves of talent, energy, imagination, and love that we sometimes didn't even know were in us. No effort to lift the level of reading instruction will ever work if it does so by bypassing teachers—and this includes our personal lives, our relationships to literacy and each other, our reasons for choosing this profession in the first place, our dreams for kids, and above all our desires to fashion our own lives and to work with a sense of personal agency and professional judgment.

This is the opposite of a generic script for an impersonal sort of teaching. It is, instead, the intensely intimate story of my teaching—of our teaching. You'll hear about my new flat-coat retriever puppy, Emma, about my indomitable mother who has taught me so much about the need to protect a person's power and agency even when that person struggles, and you'll hear about my memories of reading *Exodus* when I was an impressionable adolescent and yearning for a cause worth living for. Like all good stories, the story of my teaching, of our teaching, has a universal message. We've written in ways that we hope will touch you, will remind you of your own stories, will inspire you to listen to your own children, and will encourage you to author your own teaching.

Although the coauthors and I have worked hard to make this a curriculum for you as well as for your children, the part that involves you requires *you*. In the end, the professional development is in your hands. The most important contribution the series can make is that it can help you and your colleagues fashion a community of practice, one in which your language and methods and, indeed, the journey of your teaching, is shared. It's heady, intellectual, joyous work. Welcome aboard.

The Series Is Designed to Support a Coherent Approach to Teaching Reading Across a School, and to Create a Community of Practice

Earlier, I cited a recent study by Bembry and others that shows that if a youngster has access to a strong teacher for three consecutive years, then that child's scores on standardized reading tests will be as much as 40% higher than the scores of students who meanwhile have not had that access to strong teachers. That is staggering data, yet those are the results we should be aiming toward.

I am convinced, though, that the children in this study and others like it benefit not just from the lucky break of landing in the classrooms of good teachers for three years in a row. Those "lucky breaks" happen in schools that are communities of practice, in schools that make teachers strong. These will be schools in which a spiral curriculum is planned, with one grade level standing on the shoulders of another. The teachers in such a school will meet across the grades to talk and think about how a unit of study in character will be different in first, second, third, and fourth grade. When will the emphasis on secondary

characters move front and center, instead of being something for more proficient readers? At what grade levels will teachers tend to emphasize that sometimes characters play a symbolic role in a story? These will be schools that think carefully about special support services, making sure that a child's work with a reading specialist is aligned to and not disruptive of the classroom work. This will be a school where there is a book room full of multiple copies of books for book clubs and guided reading and inquiry groups. This will be a school with a systemic approach to assessment, where teachers at the end of one year make book baggies full of just-right books for each child, so that for the first two weeks of the new year, each child is reading books selected at the end of the preceding year.

The days of classroom teaching being a solo endeavor are long gone. It is critical that across a school, teachers take up shared methods of teaching, because this means that when one teacher has special finesse with that method, others can use a prep to watch that teacher at work, learning from her. It means, too, that one teacher can head across the country to study from an expert, with everyone in the school waiting for the goods when that teacher returns, arms full of new information.

It is especially important for schools to become communities of practice because methods of teaching are also methods of learning. If every year, every teacher needs to induct kids into whole new ways of acting in a classroom, into whole new cultures and expectations, then kids spend half their time trying to adapt to the whims of each new classroom. How much better for a school to decide upon some shared methods, and to think about how, over time, children's roles will become more proactive, more complex, and more responsible!

I was just in Portland, Oregon, and a principal from outside the city said to me, "What your writing series has done is that it has brought my whole staff into a shared conversation. Our school has become a community of practice. We started out working 'by the book' and now we're dancing on the edges, looping in some other work we also love, addressing some issues unique to our setting, but, because of the units, we're doing this together, in a cohesive community of practice. I can't wait for your new series to do that same work for us in reading." I can't imagine a more important compliment.

For those who use this series, bringing it with you into the classroom each day and putting it at the center of professional conversations in your school, the books can be transformative. Whether you are a new teacher or you are a master teacher who has been heralded by your region as the best of the best, I am

passing the baton of all we've learned to you, inviting you to not only join but to also contribute to a community of practice. I do hope that if you and your colleagues start by working "by the book," you progress from that point, like the principal from Portland said of her staff, and "dance on the edges, looping in what you know and love" that is not here.

In the end, the books are designed to put themselves out of a job. They will bring not only your students but also you and your colleagues on a learning journey; as you use this scaffold to support stellar teaching, you will also kick it aside, using the principles embedded in the books to author your own mini-lessons, small-group work, and conferences in response to what you see your children needing. Send the ideas you author to our website so we can share them with the larger community of practice.

The Components and Structure of the *Units of Study* Series

This series supports a spiral curriculum in which four especially essential units of study adaptable for grades 3–5 are written in great detail, and ten other units are written in less detail. This allows you to progress from teaching that is heavily scaffolded to that which is less scaffolded, a progression that is not unlike the one you will offer your students. It also allows you and your colleagues to make decisions about how your teaching will progress as readers develop, with different alternate units being brought to life in third grade, fourth grade, and fifth grade, but with readers across all grades participating in the same core studies.

Sessions

Each unit contains seventeen to twenty-one sessions. A session represents a day, although sometimes teachers will take the content of one session and distribute it across two days. The components of each session are described below. The units are always divided into parts, or bends in the road, and in each part of the unit, the work that readers do is a bit different. In the nonfiction unit, for example, readers read expository nonfiction during the first part and narrative nonfiction during the next part. It is possible for teachers to teach the first part of a unit and to save the latter part for another year.

Each session contains the same component pieces. That is, each begins with a one- to two-page prelude and a "Getting Ready" section that helps you gather

resources and your wits so that you are ready for the day. On the CD-ROM, resources are provided so that you need to do a minimal amount of behind-the-scenes work to prepare for teaching. Each session contains a minilesson that lasts approximately ten minutes and that adheres to the same architecture. There are examples of the work that students did during this session in the *Units of Study* book and on the accompanying CD-ROM. The session then provides you with detailed help in the conferring and small-group work you are likely to do that day, a possible mid-workshop teaching point, and a possible share. Many, but not all, sessions are followed by an interlude designed to help you use data to inform instruction.

Prelude

To teach well, our teaching needs to come from deep beliefs about what learners need and about what matters in life, in school, and in the process of becoming powerful readers. The prelude for each session attempts to answer the question of why, out of all the world, this bit of teaching is so important that it merits the attention of all these learners. Of course, as part of this, the prelude situates one day's minilesson and workshop within the research and scholarship on that topic. The prelude is also a place for me to talk directly with teachers—call it a daily keynote address. I think that too often, words of inspiration are reserved for the large statewide conferences or the thick teaching volumes, and really, the inspiration that we need most is that which helps us take a big breath before the upcoming school day, reminding ourselves of the majesty and significance of the work we are attempting to do.

Getting Ready

You can think of this portion of a session as the string tied around your finger, reminding you of all the little (and sometimes big) things you need to orchestrate so that once a day's reading workshop begins, once you take your place at the front of the meeting and say, "Readers, can I have your eyes and your attention," you won't have to say, "Oops" and make your way through the sea of increasingly restless kids to the place where you left that all-important book, Post-it, or chart. The required materials are kept at a minimum, and when possible the CD-ROM contains charts, rubrics, and short texts that you need, but there is no way around the fact that to teach reading, you need lots and lots and lots of high-interest books at levels that your children can read.

Minilesson

Listen in while I teach children a ten-minute minilesson. You'll hear the actual language I use and hear some of what children say in response, too. It will be as if you're the visitor, participating from the margins of the class, watching how I convene children to the meeting area, doing so in a sequential way that teaches them what is expected and then holds them accountable to those expectations. Each reading minilesson will follow the same architecture, an architecture that also underlies writing minilessons, that relies the basic principles of effective teaching: Connection, Teaching Point, Teaching, Active Engagement, and, finally, Link.

Italicized Coaching Commentary

As teacher-educators, my colleagues and I often teach in front of teachers. We do this not to show one special minilesson, but instead to extrapolate generalizable principles from specific instances. As you read the minilessons and indeed most of the teaching contained in these books, I'll be at your side, ready to coach you to see why my coauthors and I have taught the way we have and to see the aspects of today's teaching that are transferable to other days. I'll help you see, too, the other choices we could have made, the assessment we'd be doing as we teach and the ways we'll use data to inform our continued teaching.

Conferring and Small-Group Work

Someone once said that we never step in the same river twice, and it is certainly true that when conferring and leading small-group work, children always catch us by surprise. Still, we need to plan to be ready for the unplanned. Certainly any experienced teacher who has taught particular strategies before knows in advance some of the challenges kids will encounter and some of the likely ways in which she's apt to respond to those challenges. This section accomplishes three goals:

- *This section will help you plan for your conferences.* On the one hand, the session on conferring and small-group work helps you to anticipate the ways in which you will differentiate your teaching in response to the very different readers in your classroom. Often this section is organized to show you how you might help students who are novice and those who are more proficient at the particular strategy you have taught that day. By showing you how you can differentiate your teaching of a host of different skills and

strategies, this section develops your abilities to teach responsively and to use data on the run to inform your teaching.

- *This section will help you widen your repertoire of ways to work with small groups.* These sections combine to function as a book on the topic of teaching reading through conferences and small-group work. Many teachers feel a bit at sea when we pull a chair alongside a reader, ask how's it going, and hear, "Fine. It's okay." What are we to say, to do, that can ascertain where the learner is in a journey toward skill development and that can help that learner develop skills that are just beyond his or her reach? You'll learn a repertoire of ways of leading small-group work. Those of us who teach reading as our lifework will want more than one way of thinking about the sorts of teaching we can do while working with a small group of readers. You'll see guided reading sessions, but more than this, you'll see expert teachers drawing from a wide repertoire of different ways for supporting young readers.
- *Finally, these sections will convey to you a wealth of content for your teaching.* During minilessons we invite readers to tackle important work, but much of our teaching happens in small groups and in conferences. By listening in on these, you'll learn scores of other possible minilessons and in general develop more expertise on whatever topic the minilesson addresses.

Mid-Workshop Teaching Point

It is inevitable that in the midst of a reading workshop, you'll want to interrupt the hum of the workshop to teach the entire class. Often this teaching helps translate the minilesson into practice or helps readers go a step beyond whatever they learned in the minilesson. Sometimes this teaching encourages readers to write in response to reading. During units of study that channel readers to spend some of the class time working with a book club of others who are reading shared books, the mid-workshop teaching point functions as almost a minilesson for book clubs.

Teaching Share

Often our best teaching is that which we do in response to kids' work. The teaching shares allow us to address the problems kids have encountered, to cite

particular examples of work that set the standard or pave the way for others, and to help kids integrate what they have done with what they learned earlier.

Anchor Charts

You will want to be sure that your teaching cumulates and lasts and that you encourage youngsters to draw on the full repertoire of all they have learned. One way to do this is to create anchor charts that are developed incrementally as your teaching proceeds and that provide an enduring reminder of all that youngsters have learned and can draw upon. The books themselves contain one version of every chart, but in the many photographs that show classrooms in the midst of these units of study, you'll see countless ways in which teachers and classes have made their own charts that are variations on those in the books. These are included on the CD-ROM, not as charts you will want to download and post—because your charts need to grow bit by bit on the heels of your teaching—but as mentor texts.

Assessment Sections

Each unit contains several assessment sections and, on the CD-ROM, informal assessment instruments, plus charts, rubrics, or lists that reflect ways in which we have analyzed data gleaned from these informal assessments. The assessment sections are deliberately interspersed into the unit, echoing the way assessment will be integrated into your instruction. You will see ways to create informal assessments and to mine them for insights that can inform your instruction and ways to be sure that your teaching is supporting students so they will do well on high-stakes tests.

Letters to Parents and Other Caregivers

You will want to communicate with parents and other care-givers so they understand a bit about your teaching. On the CD-ROM, you'll find letters to parents describing each of the four units contained within these books, in addition to letters that you might send home to inform parents about their son's or daughter's assessment data.

Bibliographies of Children's Literature

Each unit contains a book list, on the CD-ROM, of several hundred carefully chosen books, leveled and clustered into groupings that will be helpful for you. That is, the book lists for the historical fiction unit include books at a variety of levels, grouped by historical era. The book list for expository nonfiction specializes in books on high-interest topics, many of which are structured to help readers learn to ascertain the main idea and supporting information as they read. The expository books are clustered according to heavily scaffolded structures and more lightly scaffolded structures. There are a dozen topics around which the nonfiction books coalesce. All or most of the books on these lists are available through Booksource, in their Units of Study libraries.

The DVDs: Inside Views of Workshop Teaching and Workshop Classrooms

This series is supported by two companion DVDs that present views into reading workshops in a wide variety of school settings and with all kinds of teachers and children. These DVDs are meant to introduce the concepts of the reading workshop, help us create a vision for what is possible in the teaching of reading, and also to convey how both master teachers and less experienced teachers bring the reading workshop's structures and rituals to life with children. For each unit of study you can observe how my colleagues and I initiate minilessons, teach reading strategies, conduct conferences, and guide small-group instruction. The DVDs are ones that can be used as a resource for introducing a reading workshop, or later in a teachers' professional development they can be used as a resource for studying—and discussing, visualizing, and practicing particular facets of reading workshop teaching.

My hope is that now—with this book and the *Units of Study* books we've written for you, filled with all our wisest methods and brightest teaching—now, you'll decide to step into teaching alongside us for a time, bringing to the teaching your own wisdom and experience, your own knowledge of what is best for children. Together we can grow beyond even this, the very best teaching we've yet imagined for our children.

Building a Reading Life

STAMINA, FLUENCY, AND ENGAGEMENT



LUCY CALKINS ♦ KATHLEEN TOLAN

*This book is dedicated to
Jean Lawler, Our Rock of Gibraltar*



DEDICATED TO TEACHERS

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he series marks the culmination of several decades of research, and there isn't a sentence here that couldn't be footnoted. Hilary Clinton once said, "It takes a village to raise a child." As I get ready to send this series out into the world, all I can think is, "It takes a village to write *Units of Study for Teaching Reading, 3-5*."

Our thanks go first to our brilliant editor, Kate Montgomery. Kate was also the editor of the two *Units of Study for Teaching Writing* series. She and I developed this genre together, and I only agreed to tackle this enormous project after receiving a promise that despite Kate's new leadership role at Heinemann, she'd continue to be at the helm of this work. There isn't a word, a page, a decision, or a person connected to this series that hasn't run through her hands. How I honor her deft touch, which has brought shapeliness to the series, and her willingness to go to any lengths to surpass the high standards that have become our trademark.

This book is dedicated to Jean Lawler. Each time that Kate and I have undertaken a *Units of Study* series, Jean Lawler has joined us at the helm of the *Units* team. Kate, Kathleen, and I could not have finessed this effort without her decisive and clear leadership, her keen understanding of this work, her unflagging attention to detail, and above all, her steady kindness. Jean and Kate led a whole team, and in subsequent Acknowledgments, I'll introduce you to the others who've been so invaluable.

At Teachers College, the one person who has been the sun, the moon, and the stars to this project is Julia Mooney, co-author of *Constructing Curriculum*. Julia oversaw the operation, orchestrated the players, synthesized drafts, and above all, wrote alongside Kathleen and I. She helped us bring conference transcripts to life, she brought her knowledge of literary scholarship to the text, and she helped smooth out and clean up our prose. There aren't words enough to thank her.

The units, and indeed the reading workshop that is implicit in them, were first pioneered more than twenty years ago. At the time, Randy Bomer, Associate Professor of Literacy at University of Texas, Austin, Kathy Collins, author of *Growing Readers*, and Kate Montgomery, our editor, joined me as the leadership team behind this work, and their influence is part of the DNA of this work. Kathy has especially continued to bring her spot-on sense of kids to the endeavor, helping us bring our young readers to life.

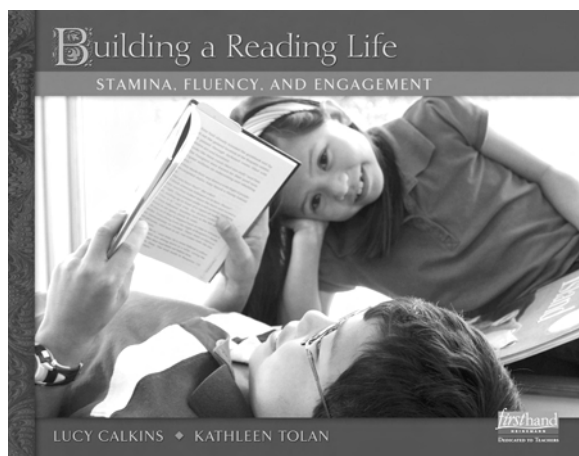
The units of study in these books have been developed, piloted, refined by the entire Teachers College Reading and Writing Project staff over decades of work in thousands of classrooms. The ideas couldn't possibly have emerged from a lone writer or two, sitting at our desks. Instead, the ideas have come from the 60 staff developers who constitute the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project and from thousands of classrooms across the nation.

The TCRWP's staff developers meet for a full day, one day a week, to study research, to pore over data, to learn from each other and our teacher-colleagues' best thinking, and to work toward creating more coherent, more powerful, more effective methods for teaching reading and writing. Our best thinking about literacy instruction is always in the process of being piloted and revised based on what works and what doesn't work. The series, then, owes its life to the staff of the Project. A few people have played an especially important role. We thank Lainie Powell, Rebecca Bellingham, Lea Mercantini, and Melanie Brown for their research in our pilot classrooms and for joining us in the effort to collect, select from, and organize children's work, book lists, anchor charts, and the like.

The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project is composed of not only a team of staff developers but also a network of teachers, principals, and superintendents, many of whom have worked shoulder-to-shoulder with us for years and have become some of the nation's wisest literacy leaders. Because Kathleen and I wanted to teach these actual units of study, as they are written, so that our books could show you the kids' work and our responses to that work, we asked six especially wonderful teachers, grades 3-5, to help us pilot these units of study in their classrooms and to allow us to study their children's reading. Those teachers then helped us revise and (rewrite totally) based on their students. We are grateful to those teachers—Katie Evan, Erin Hanley, Molly Feeney, Kathy Doyle, Sarah Colmaire, and Randi Bernstein—and to their children. I describe these teachers in more detail in subsequent Acknowledgments. Their input has made these lessons far more responsive and more powerful, and their children's presence in the *Units* breathes life into the series.

Finally, I should address the nature of my collaboration with Kathleen, for it is that collaboration that brought this book to life. Kathleen is simply the best teacher of reading that I have ever known. She is Senior Deputy Director of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project—a role that leads her to be at the cutting edge of all the organization's work with curriculum and methods. She has special responsibility for coaching and supporting the upper grade staff developers in the organization. She also works extremely closely with teachers and principals in remarkable schools to help those schools continue their learning trajectories. Kathleen's focal schools serve both ends of the economic spectrum, and in both contexts, she helps people make dreams come true. Kathleen and I developed and revised the ideas in this unit of study together, we brought those ideas to life in classrooms together, and we learned from the students' work together. She was especially helpful in keeping the units grounded in very specific classrooms. My thanks, then, go above all to her. She has been a perfect partner.

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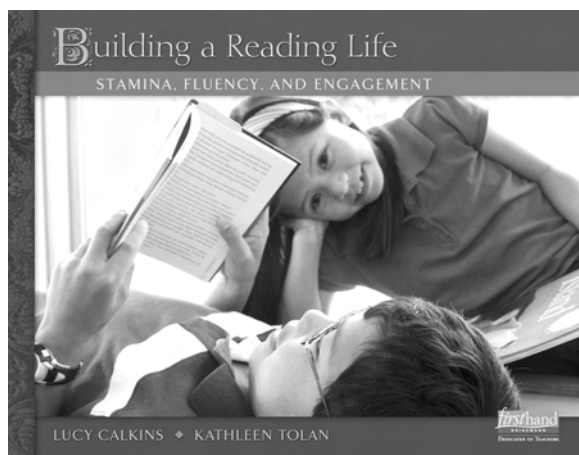
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Introduction

The Unit in a Nutshell



In this, the first unit of the year, we launch the reading workshop. We pull out all stops in an effort to help all our students become avid readers. We wear a love of reading on our own sleeves, help students fashion their identities as people who care about reading, create a social life that revolves around shared books and above all, we help students develop a sense of personal agency about their reading lives, taking responsibility for becoming the kinds of readers who not only make sense of books but who also let books change their lives. We meanwhile induct children into the structures, routines, and habits of a richly literate reading workshop. Students learn how to choose books that are just right in level and interest, to carry books between home and school, to collect and study data about their reading rates and volume, and they learn to push themselves to read with increasing stamina, fluency, and volume. In reading partnerships, children learn to retell and summarize texts and to share ideas that are grounded in the specifics of their books.

SOME HIGHLIGHTED SKILLS: *reading with fluency and stamina, monitoring for sense, retelling*

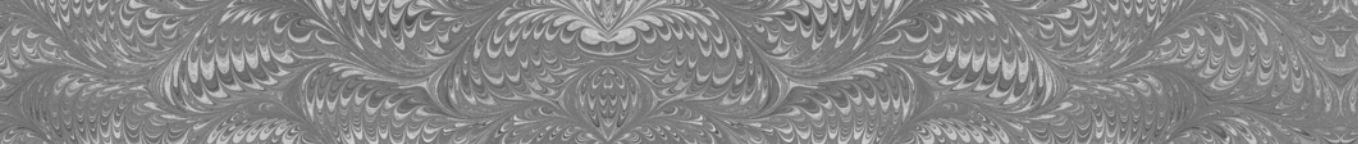
OVERVIEW OF THE UNIT

Tap Students' Energy for Reading by Inviting Them to Re-Create Themselves as Readers

At the start of the year, the goal is to help each child build a reading life and get started doing the work that readers do. We know that children will be creating identities, assuming roles within the classroom community, and we want to do everything possible to lure children to take on the role of being avid, powerful readers.

We start this by explaining that readers benefit from asking ourselves, “When has reading really worked in my life?” Then, we figure out the conditions that allowed that reading experience to work so well—so that we can re-create those conditions. We channel these discussions so that we highlight whatever it is we plan to emphasize during this first month of the year. As readers reflect on what has worked for them, they also imagine what might work for them now and in the future. Then we can collaborate to make the classroom into a place where reading is the best it can be. Kids, meanwhile, also make places for reading in their homes; it is helpful to talk and think about developing habits, tools, and places that support reading not only in the reading workshop but also across people’s whole lives.

Our goal is for each child to compose an identity of “I am one who reads.” As Peter Johnston writes in *Choice Words*, “When authors write novels, they create characters—people who say this sort of



thing, do that sort of thing, and relate to people and things in these sorts of ways... This is not just what authors do; it is what people do with themselves. They narrate their lives, identifying themselves and the circumstances, acting and explaining events in ways they see as consistent with the person they

take themselves to be..." (Johnston, 2004).


It is this environment—of eager self-creation—that we want to create.

As teachers, all of us have seen those nose-in-the-book readers who walk from their desks to the meeting area, nose still in the book, who only reluctantly and at the last minute lower the book to listen to what we have to say and, even then, whose eyes shine through tears over the heartbreak and drama within the pages of their beloved book. For many of us, we've come to think that those True Readers are born that way—

there is something different in their DNA. This unit and this year challenge that assumption, taking up the idea instead that reading—yes, Real Reading, avid Nose-in-the-Book Reading—is too important for us to relegate to DNA. And so, this unit is a time to help students role-play their way into being the readers we long for them to become.

To one child we say, "I think that maybe, before now, you just didn't have the right books in your hands—but what I'm realizing about you is that when you do have the perfect book—you read non-stop!" To another reader we say, "The way you pay attention to people and really understand what makes them tick shows such a talent for deep reading. Reading *fiction* has everything to do with reading *people*—and your people skills are going to serve you so well as a reader, you'll see." In these and other ways, we begin the year by doing everything in our power to help readers give reading (and themselves) a chance.

One of the most important ways in which we recruit kids' investment in reading is by asking them to play an active role in co-creating the reading workshop. With kids' help, we organize book bins and library shelves, combining books into text sets that capture their imagination. One bin may be titled, "Sad Depressing Books That Make You Cry and Cry" and another, "Light Sports Books." Kids will invent ideas for making reading "hot." One may suggest, as some of our kids have, that all the kids bring their best books in from home and then the class will organize shelves with titles such as "Daniel's Favorites" or "Tyrell's Best." A child who loves mysteries might agree to help decide on new mysteries to buy for the



One of the most important ways in which we recruit kids' investment in reading is by asking them to play an active role in co-creating the reading workshop.





class, and to do book-promotion talks about mysteries. Another may suggest the class begin leaving Post-its on books that function like miniature reviews: “If you are the kind of kid who *loves* horses and wants to own the whole *Misty* series, you will *love* this book.” Books, like movies, might get rated through a complex system of stars and numbers—developed, of course, by a youngster.

It is a small step to go from bringing out individualism within a reading class to helping support an interdependent, interpersonal community in which children with particular knowledge and skills teach others. The teacher’s role, then, involves developing local experts, and also includes orchestrating classroom life so those local experts’ talents become distributed. This might sound like: “Let’s all see if we can study what Brian does to make time for reading at home and see if we can learn from what he does.”

You may be surprised at this emphasis on inviting youngsters to take active roles co-authoring the reading workshop. With today’s urgency to achieve, is there really time for this?

My answer is that today’s urgency makes it more necessary than ever that we tap student motivation. Take a second to reflect on yourself as a learner, asking, “When in my life has my learning curve been sky-high? How can I create similar conditions for my students?” And I am very sure that if each of you thinks about those moments when your learning was off the charts, you’ll think of a time when you pored your heart and soul into an endeavor and were willing to do so because this was work you chose to do, where your voice and contributions mattered, where you made decisions and watched the results of those decisions and then tempered what you were doing in light of what you were learning. Kids are not all that different than you and I. They, too, want to work with heart and soul on projects that matter to them, on work in which their voices and contributions matter. And their willingness to work hard, to persevere, and to remake themselves is critical to the success of our teaching.

The Logistics of the Workshop: Establishing Routines and Expectations

During the first few days of school, you will want to induct children into the routines and expectations of reading workshop so that they can carry on as readers and so that you are free to teach.

Learning the Workshop Rhythms

You’ll teach children to gather quickly and efficiently for whole-class instruction, emphasizing the importance of children listening (and not constantly interrupting) during the minilesson. You’ll teach children to expect that although the minilesson will be an occasion for them to learn a new reading skill or strategy, during any one day’s reading time, they will need to draw on *many* of the skills and strategies they have been taught up to and including that day. You’ll also induct children into the rhythm of reading, jotting a bit, and eventually talking about their idea (perhaps written on their Post-it) with another person.

Reading Lots and Lots

It is important that the logistics of the reading workshop support the essentials of reading—and nothing is more essential than kids having large chunks of time for reading. I discuss the importance of reading volume elsewhere in this book, but for now, it is important to mention that early in the year you will establish the expectation that during the reading workshop, every child will read, read, read, progressing through books that are just-right for that child.

Using Reading Logs


Whenever someone aspires toward a goal, it can help to collect data that provides feedback. People who want to run faster or to lose weight or to develop muscles keep scrupulous data, poring over the data to track their progress, and in the same way you will probably want to induct children into a system for collecting data on their volume of reading. During your first unit of study, then, you'll probably rally kids to become invested in reading logs in which they record the titles, levels, pages, minutes, and places of their reading. Many September conferences will reference these logs. You might say, "I notice you've been reading faster. Has it been hard to hold on to the story as you read faster?" If a child's pace has slowed, you might ask, "What's slowing you down? I notice you read less today. What got in the way?" The log will also influence your observations. If you see from a glance at a child's log that the child is making slow progress through a book, observe the child as she reads silently, checking if there are any noticeable reading behaviors that might be slowing the child down. Does the child move her lips while reading, move her head from side to side, point at words as she reads, use a bookmark to hold her place as she reads, or read aloud to herself? If the child does any of these things, you will want to intervene. Tell the child that he or she has graduated and no longer needs to do those behaviors.

Reading at Home

You'll also institute a system for a take-home reading. If nothing else, each child has a take-home book baggie. The important thing is that the child needs to read the *same* book in home and at school, carrying the book between places. The reading logs can help you and the child monitor the amount of reading the child is able to do at home.

Working with Partners

At some point during this month, you'll establish reading partnerships, linking together children who can read the same books at roughly the same rate. These relationships have everything to do with building a culture that values literacy—the most important way to do this is to make reading into a richly social activity.



Unless children are reading books they can read with 96% accuracy, fluency, and strong comprehension, it is superfluous to worry about minilessons that teach strategies for identifying with characters or developing theories!

Usually classrooms do not have enough duplicate books for partners to read in sync all the time, but even a little of this is tremendously helpful. If partners can't read the same books, they can *swap* books, which means they will often know each other's books. Even if partners are not reading the same book in sync with each other, they can support each other in a variety of ways. During reading, they can use Post-its to mark confusing words and during partner time, return to these places to word-solve together. They can mark places where they have strong reactions to the text. Then one partner can read one of those sections aloud with strong feelings (good for fluency), and then they can talk about what happened in that section and why they reacted so strongly. Partners can listen to each other retell, asking questions to clarify and dig deeper into the story. You might want to teach your students the kinds of questions that could help them do this work. For example, it's helpful to ask questions about the main characters: "What is Mr. Putter like?" "Why did he agree to keep the dog?" These kinds of questions encourage a reader to not only explain what's happening in the story but also to think more deeply about *why* those events are happening. In addition, these questions are ones children need to ask themselves as they read.

Choosing Just-Right Books

But reading won't amount to much until children are choosing just-right books. Unless children are reading books they can read with 96% accuracy, fluency,

and strong comprehension, it is superfluous to worry about minilessons that teach strategies for identifying with characters or developing theories! In another section of this volume, I detail procedures for assessing readers and matching them to just-right books. Those assessments occur at the start of this unit. Once you've determined books that are just-right for a particular reader, you'll probably give that child a personal bin or baggie in which he or she can keep a few just-right books. It helps to get the child started enjoying these books if you rave about a few you believe will be perfect for that child.

The books a child keeps in his or her bin will all be equivalent in level, save for two instances. First, an English language learner who is literate in his or her first language will read more difficult books in the native language, and easier books in English. Second, when a child is transitioning to a new book level, that child's book bin will contain books at both the comfort level and the new instructional level. Ideally, the latter will be books you have introduced to the child; this works especially well if there are two or three books in a series, and you introduce, and even read aloud, a bit from the first of those books.

Writing on Post-Its

By the end of the month, readers will do some on-the-run writing, probably on Post-its, as they read, and these will then be brought to the partner conversations. This writing work (brief though it must be) and the partner conversations (which will again be brief) are absolutely essential elements of a reading workshop.

These structures need to be in place by the end of the first week. You definitely don't have time to institute these structures gradually! It is often helpful for children to sit beside their partners during the reading workshop so the transition from reading to talking doesn't usurp valuable reading time (although sometimes this leads children to talk/read/talk/read throughout the reading workshop, which is not what you have in mind).

Teach Readers to Read with Stamina and Fluency, Monitoring for Sense and Using Fix-Up Strategies When Meaning Breaks Down

Every unit of study features a few especially essential reading skills. This unit spotlights the importance of reading with stamina and fluency and of using knowledge of narrative text structure to comprehend, recall, and retell books. Readers learn to choose just-right books and to read with alertness and engagement.

Engaging with Books

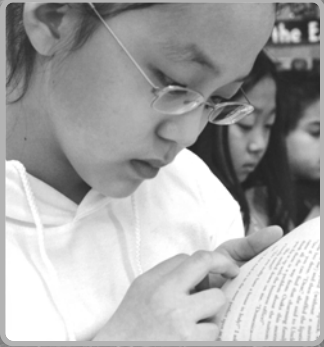
The first step toward helping students build their relationship to reading is to make sure that every child is reading with engagement. It is invaluable to steer children toward high-interest books and to talk up those books. When books are exciting, kids pick them up, start reading, and stay with them. Of course, part of this task also includes teaching kids when to put books down. If a child finds that reading a particular book feels like a chore, then he needs to recognize that something is wrong.

Empathizing with Characters

You'll help children experience the lost-in-a-book feeling that is so essential to reading fiction, and you'll support this engagement first and foremost by reading aloud to them and teaching explicitly about the experience of participating in a book in this way. In order to encourage empathy with characters, you'll look up from your read-aloud and say things like, "He must be so sad," or "I was thinking about him all night...I'm so worried about him." You will help children care about characters by modeling how to talk and think about them as if they are real people. You will encourage children to turn and talk in ways that promote identification with the character. For example, you might say, "How do you think he's feeling right now? Turn and talk." Or, "I'm worried about her. Aren't you? Turn and tell your partner about your worries." Of course, the next step would be to urge each child to listen as if he or she were one of the characters. "Show me on your faces what Annemarie is feeling *now*," you might say. Or, a bit later, "Use your body to show me what's happening to Annemarie now."

Monitoring for Sense

You'll also teach children to monitor for sense, both by showing that sometimes as one reads aloud, something will happen in the book that makes us go, "Huh?" That monitoring for sense is a crucial part of reading, and you'll show readers that when the meaning of a text breaks down and they say, "Huh?" they can then engage in problem-solving strategies to regain a hold on the text—or they can locate a more appropriate text. These are tall orders—especially considering that we are just getting to know the children!

**IN THIS SESSION,**

you will teach children that readers identify and use our best and worst reading times to help us learn how to change our reading lives for the better.

Learning from Best and Worst Reading Times

Lf I asked each of you to name your overarching goal for your children as readers, my hunch is that you'd answer, "I want my children to become lifelong readers." These are strong words; this is perhaps the most important goal that a teacher of reading could ever hold. You are saying, "Hold me accountable for my kids initiating reading in their own lived lives."

My worry is that sometimes we *say*, "My goal for my children is lifelong literacy," but then we end up teaching toward

much smaller goals. I think it happens this way. We launch the year, hoping our kids will love reading. Within just a day or two, our hopes are dashed. It becomes clear that teaching reading will be about battling apathy, disengagement, and resistance. Meanwhile, we are surrounded with reminders that we will be held accountable for our children's progress in reading, and the thought scares us. If we are going to be held accountable, we are determined, therefore, to hold our children accountable, as well. And so we work zealously to

GETTING READY

- Create a class meeting area, framed by your classroom library, that ideally is carpeted and comfortable. At the head of the meeting area, place your chair and an easel containing a pad of chart paper with plenty of markers. You may also want access to a white board. This space and these materials will be a part of your daily practice.
- You may want to establish temporary partnerships and a temporary seating chart until you have determined students' reading levels and can assign partnerships. Many of you will decide instead to just allow children to sit as they chose for now and to talk with whichever classmate is handy.
- On chart paper write, "This makes me think that to make reading the best it can be, I should..." You will point children's attention to this chart during the minilesson.
- Cluster kids' desks to form tables and place a bunch of books in a bin at each table. The books should be high-interest and either easy or just right for readers at the table. If you group children with an eye toward reading levels, remember these initial groupings will be temporary until you've actually determined reading levels.
- You may assign one child at each table to be a table monitor, who takes out and puts away book bins each day.
- Make sure there is a stack of Post-its near the book bin at every table cluster.
- Develop a system for children to check out and return books from the class library. For now, you may want to create a sheet at each table for children to sign out and sign in books. Later on, you'll probably want to think of a longer-term solution. Also, you may want children and their caregivers to sign a contract agreeing to contribute to the class book fund if the child neglects to return a book. If you decide to do so, you may want to send those contracts home today.
- See the *Resources for Teaching Reading* CD-ROM for additional examples of minilessons that show how repeating your teaching point several times enhances children's learning.

be sure that kids' reading is something we can see, check off, count, and measure. Meanwhile, for our children, reading becomes a process of answering questions, defining terms, listing traits, and filling in questions on ditto sheets. And pretty soon our teaching has lost touch with the goal of helping kids author lives in which reading matters. We are, instead, teaching toward smaller goals: Can children recall the name of the protagonist's sister, differentiate similes from metaphors, answer the cause-and-effect question at the end of the chapter?

I think that when we teach, we need to remember that human beings want to work with heart and soul on endeavors that matter.

I am convinced that our teaching can be more powerful than this. I'm convinced that when children begin the year, resistant to reading, this is mostly because they've had few opportunities to build lives in which reading matters and fewer opportunities still to learn alongside a mentor who wears a love of reading on her sleeve. I'm convinced that if our real goal is to help children become avid readers, initiating reading in their own lived lives, then we need to give them the conditions that we, ourselves, want as readers—and these include time, choice, companionship, and opportunities to grow. I'm convinced that we do ourselves and our children a great disservice when we buy into the belief that they will only work hard if they're forced to do so.

Let me show you what I mean. Think of a time in your life when your work was as good as it can be. Actually do this. Thumb through your teaching memories, settling upon a time when your teaching felt alive and vibrant and good.

Now hold that time in your mind and ask, "What was it about that one time that made my work good?"

I'm pretty sure you are not saying, "Work was good because I could come in late, leave early, cut corners, slack off. No stress, no pressure. I could put my feet up on the table and munch chips." No. My hunch is that you are probably saying that your work was good when you poured yourself with heart and soul into an endeavor that mattered, when so much was expected of you that you weren't sure you could rise to the occasion, when your work added up to something big and beautiful. You probably thought of a time when your work was hard, but it was important, and it was yours. You were able to make decisions, to draw on your own strengths, to go for goals you chose.

I think that when we teach, we need to remember that human beings want to work with heart and soul on endeavors that matter.

In this minilesson, you do not make reading into something small. Instead, you say, "My goal is for each of you to do nothing less than build a life in which reading matters." You say to children, "It is always, in life, *My Life*, by me." You say, "Go to it." Then you give readers books, time, company—the three things readers need most—and you pull your chair alongside them to learn how you can help.





MINILESSON

Learning from Best and Worst Reading Times

CONNECTION

Tell children reading can be good or not so good, and we can make it good from now on.

“Readers,” I said. “Could I have your eyes and your attention, please?” I touched my eyes and then scanned the group as if collecting the children’s attention. “I’ll wait.” I let the silence gather. “What I want to say is incredibly important so I need your eyes and your ears.

“Readers, notice that we have gathered as a community in a special place—our library; we’re surrounded by books. I want to talk with you about reading, and about our lives. This will be a year when we all, every one of us, can make reading the best that it can be. We’ll work on building our reading lives into exactly what we need them to be.

“I don’t know each of you yet. I don’t know the stories of you, Kobe, and you, Emma, as readers, or of the rest of you. But I know that for me, there have been times in my life when reading has been the worst, *the pits*—when reading has made me feel frustrated and bored. There have also been times in my life when reading has been *the best thing* in the world. This year, we’re going to work together to make our classroom into a place where our reading is the best that it can be. I’m not sure what we’ll need to do in order to do that—we’ll have to decide how our time will go, how our library will go, how our conversations will go. I will need your input, so you’ll need to study how reading has gone for you, and how it could be better.”

COACHING TIPS



Beginnings matter. We must open our lesson with a tone that expresses that the words to come are important. I do this by saying “Readers,” and then I pause, scanning every face until all eyes are on me before continuing. Then I begin.

The way you talk to your kids in your minilesson matters tremendously. You need to figure out how to make these words feel right coming out of your mouth, or you need to change them so they work for you. Your attention needs to be not on your words, but on your kids and how they are hearing you. Think of this text like a blind man’s cane. That blind man’s focus needs to be through the cane and on the sidewalk itself, as if his fingertips are there on the sidewalk and the grass. If the blind man’s focus was, instead, on the grip of the cane, then the cane wouldn’t connect him to the world. In a similar manner, your attention needs to be through the words of the lesson and on to your kids; the words are only intended to help you reach them, not to become the new focus of your attention. You might glance at what I’ve written as you teach or (better yet) make your own version of it, but you need to lean forward, look your kids in the eyes, and talk intimately to them.

Don’t be surprised that today and for a few weeks, you will find yourself struggling to figure out how you can use these books. We hope you’ll eventually settle on several ways to use these books as you reach toward your goals for yourself and your students.

Name your teaching point. Specifically, teach children that people sometimes pause to reflect on our lives and then make choices and changes. In this case, we'll do this with our reading lives.

"Readers don't just read books; we build reading lives, 'author' reading lives, in which reading matters. For each one of us, it is always "My Life," by me. And each one of us has choices. We can make lives for ourselves in which reading is the pits, or we can make lives for ourselves in which reading is the best it can be. Today, I want to teach you that to build powerful, wonderful reading lives, we need to reflect on our reading and then make wise changes so reading becomes the best it can be for each of us."

TEACHING

Set children up to notice that readers pause to reflect on times when reading has been the pits and times when it has been the best it can be. Recall and sketch a bad and then a good time, using this as an invitation to reflect and resolve.

"When a person decides to be a singer or a soccer player, we do stuff with singing or with soccer and then pull back and think, 'What's working for me? What's not working for me?', and we use our answers to those questions to help us author lives in which singing (or soccer) is the best it can be.

"The same can be true for reading. We do stuff with reading and then pull back and think, 'What's working for me? What's not working for me?' And we use our answers to those questions to help us author lives in which reading is the best it can be.

"Sometimes, when I am in the midst of reading, I pause and think, 'Is this working? Not working?' Other times, I think back over my earlier life as a reader. I remember particular times and then think, 'Was that reading time working for me? Not working?' Watch how I do this, because in a minute, you're going to have a chance to do it, too."

The teaching point is the crux of any minilesson. You signal that you are at this crucial part of the minilesson when you use the words, "Today, I want to teach you...." Say these words as if they have great weight, as if they will create a hush in the room and a deep attentiveness. Be sure your voice intonation changes and you use gestures to highlight the juxtaposition between reading that is "the pits" (spit that word out) and reading that is "the best it can be" (say this melodiously). You'll return to the phrase "the best it can be" often throughout this year since that is our overarching goal.

In A Guide to the Reading Workshop, I explain that it is ideal for you to put each of these minilessons into your own best words. Make your own adaptations. The exception to that may be the teaching point, at least for a time. Until you are accustomed to the minilessons, you may find you either read the teaching point or, better yet, say it by heart. We want to keep these teaching points brief, interesting, and usable again and again. You'll find the teaching point will be repeated within the minilesson because we are trying to put words in kids' mouths—minds—so that they can remember them later, so they can use these lessons about reading (and life) over and over again throughout their lives.

The teaching method I will use in this minilesson is demonstration. I'll dramatize the way I go about doing what I hope children will do. Usually a demonstration is preceded by the teacher telling children what it is the teacher hopes they notice in the demonstration and what they'll be able to do afterward with what they notice.

Demonstrate your recollection of bad and good times reading by thinking aloud.

“So, let me think about a time when reading didn’t work for me. Hmm, . . . I’m thinking back to when I was your age. Let’s see. . . . When was reading pretty much the pits for me? Oh! I know!

“When I was your age, this girl in my grade—Gretchen Sarnejoki—was into this science fiction series. She carried thick books around like they were the coolest things.

“One day, I asked to borrow one of Gretchen’s thick books. I couldn’t even read the characters’ names. It was awful. I kept falling asleep. But I carried that book around for weeks, pretending to read it. That was one time when reading was the pits.

“Of course, there have also been times when reading was the best it could be. Let me think of one time in particular. Oh! I know! When I was a bit older than you, I read a book called *Exodus*. Late at night after my mom called, ‘Turn off the light,’ I kept reading by flashlight under my covers. I remember reading faster and faster, my heart pounding, desperate for the kids in the story to escape the Nazis to reach safety! And I remember longing to be part of a cause like theirs. Now when people ask me how I came to be a teacher, I sometimes say, ‘Because of the book, *Exodus*.’ It taught me that I want not just a job but a mission. That book was so important to me. That was a time when reading was the best it could be for me!

In this instance, I am thinking aloud in front of the kids. It is as if I have opened my brain up so kids can see me in the process of mulling over my memories. Whenever I think aloud, I try to signal that this is what I am doing. I’m no longer reading the words of the book. My eyes look up toward the ceiling; my voice conveys that I am musing.

If, as you tell your story, you hear talking, you might look in the direction of the children who are talking and stare hard at them, putting your finger to your lips. And then quickly get back to what you were doing.

I decided to illuminate the fact that sometimes readers try to impress others and sacrifice their reading lives as a result because I expect many children in the class do just that. You can share your own reading story, of course, but try to share a vignette that is detailed and brief—a tough combination—and that resonates for your kids.

In this minilesson, the children each sketch a positive memory of reading and then share the story of that moment. The fact that children sketch rather than simply recall these memories adds complexity to the minilesson because it means that youngsters need pen and paper on hand. You can forego the sketching if you decide to do so and rely only on children’s memories instead.

This personal story, and consequently the minilesson, is longer than ideal, but it is crucial to start the year off by being real with your children. You may decide to extend your own reading story just a bit, as I have. Be mindful, though, that the choice to keep kids in the meeting area comes with a cost: less time for children to get lost in their own reading. You will always want to crop every possible minute from a minilesson. Be sure you don’t get into a back-and-forth exchange during your minilesson since that will usurp kids’ reading time. Use every possible device to keep your minilessons as brief as possible—while still making them powerful.

"The important thing, readers, is that we not only pause to remember, or to notice, whether reading is or is not working for us, we also mine those times for insights on how reading should go in our lives. We go from noticing that our reading is working or not working, to thinking, 'This makes me think that to make reading the best it can be, I should...' (and I gestured at the words I'd written on chart paper). [Fig. I-1]

This makes me think that to make reading the best it can be, I should...

"I'll show you what I mean. When I think about that time I pretended to read one of Gretchen's books even though it was totally confusing, I wonder what I can learn from that. Never to borrow Gretchen's books? Never to read fat books? That's not it at all. Never to read science fiction? No, that's not what made it awful. Now that I'm really thinking about it, I'm realizing that the heart of what made that reading experience the pits was that I was faking it. I was trying to impress people, trying to be cool, carrying a thick book around, but it ruined my reading life since I couldn't really read it. This makes me think that to make reading the best it can be, I should not fake reading. I need to have the courage to say, 'This is too hard for me' if it is too hard for me! Or 'I like mushy romance stories!' if I like them, even if other people don't."

Debrief, naming what you have done that you hope children will learn to do also.

"Readers, I hope you notice that readers don't just *read*. We also build reading lives for ourselves. To do this, we pause to reflect, 'When was reading the pits for me?' and 'When was it the best it can be?' And then we figure out how these reflections can help us learn how to change our reading lives for the better." [Fig. I-2]

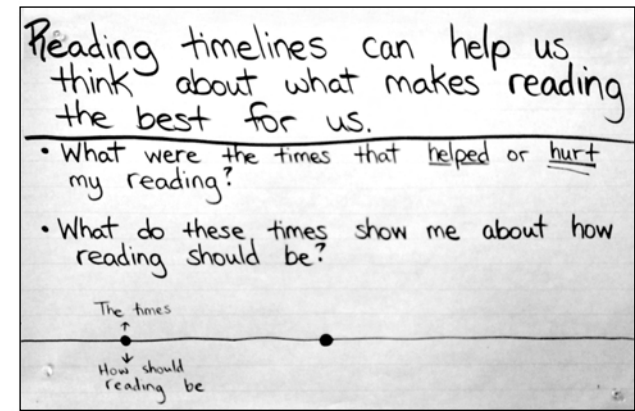


Figure I-1

If you ask children to timeline their lives as readers, you can then help them mine those timelines for insights that can inform the new year.

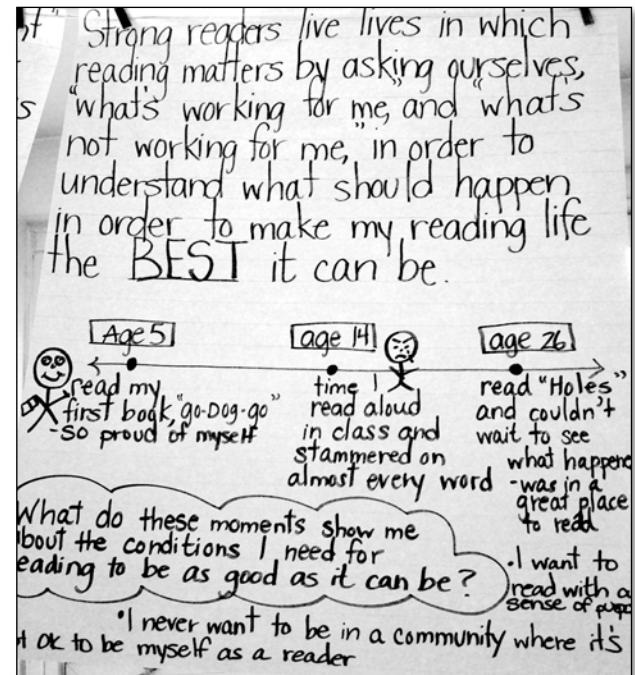


Figure I-2

By asking children to reflect on their reading lives, recalling what has and has not worked, teachers set the tone for the unit. This conveys the message that *this year, in this room, reading will be great.*

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

Invite readers to try the process you've demonstrated. In this case, ask them to start by remembering times in their lives when reading either worked or did not work for them, and to talk about that one time.

"So, let's try that. Right now, will you think back over your whole life as a reader? Think of the bad times, when you felt horrible as a reader." I paused and let them actually leaf through memories. "Thumbs up if you've thought of at least one time when reading was the pits for you. [Fig. I-3]



Figure I-3
Knowing that Grace struggles to find a quiet place suggests she may benefit from working in a "private office" within the classroom.

When you teach minilessons early in the year, you are not only teaching the specific content of the day; you are also teaching your kids how minilessons tend to go. You are teaching kids the roles you hope they'll play in these minilessons. You may want to watch a minilesson on the DVD to see ways in which you can handle the predictable problems. For example, you'll want to think now about what you will do when a kid blurts things out in a loud voice.

Notice in this minilesson that when we want children to do some mental work, it helps to leave space for it. Silences are very important; they signal "Do this now." When you ask kids to think and then you stop talking, the resulting pool of silence means that you expect the voice in each child's mind must be his or her own voice, not yours.

Notice that I often ask children to use a thumbs up gesture to signal when they are with me. I expect children will keep their raised thumbs close to their chests so they don't create a hands-in-people's-faces effect. I definitely do not wait to be sure every child has produced a thumbs up before I proceed. I tend to expect well over half the children will signal they are with me, and then I move on.

"Now think of a time in your reading life when reading was just about the best it can be. Think of a particular time, perhaps a particular book." I paused and let children do this thinking. "Thumbs up if you've thought of one time when reading really worked for you." I noted many thumbs going up. [Fig. I-4]

"Will you find someone sitting next to you and talk to that person about the time reading worked? Or talk about the time reading didn't work and what made it the pits for you as a reader." After a moment, I pointed to the chart from earlier and called out, over the buzz, "This makes me think that to make reading the best it can be, I could. . ." I provided children with time to make some resolutions based on what they'd figured out.

When we first taught this session, we asked children to sketch out the bad and good memories they selected to help them hold these long enough to reflect upon them. We later decided this extra step—the sketching—was probably not helpful, because it didn't seem to be a technique children would use again to help them make decisions about how to change their lives. But you'll decide for your own class.

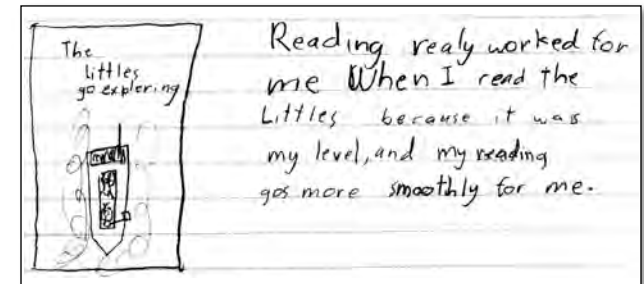


Figure I-4
When students articulate what works for them when they read, they take ownership of their reading lives.

Today, when readers turn and talk with a neighbor, they create very temporary arrangements. To keep things straight, I refer to these as reading friends or neighbors, and not as reading partners. The latter term is reserved for the more formal, long-term arrangements that you'll establish once you've assessed readers, you need to know those who are reading books at similar levels of difficulty in order to establish long-term partnerships. In this book, I establish these partnerships in Session XI. (This gives you a deadline for assessing your readers.) At that time, for example, two children who are reading books that are level S/T might become partners. Ideally, I partner children who are friends already or who are likely to become friends because I want them to know the joy of sharing books with a friend.

Debrief, citing what a child said and emphasizing that your students' ideas will shape what the class does this year.

"Readers, can I have your eyes?" I paused and waited for their attention. "I heard Gabe reflect on a time that reading went well for him. It was last summer at his grandma's house in Montana. He decided what was so perfect about that reading time was that he had a quiet place for reading. So Gabe's got the idea that this year, he could create a place for reading, a very quiet place, at home. Gabe, I hope you *also* make a very quiet place for reading here at school!"

"The rest of us might want to think about Gabe's idea; we too could set up spots for ourselves where we can go to read. Gabe also said it was great when he had four Matt Christopher books in a big pile, and he's given me the idea that this year, maybe we should each have a short stack of books beside us as we read—books to look forward to next! I know many of you have come up with other ideas about what you need for reading to work for you. We'll need to build our lives to make sure we're working with those ideas!" [Figs. I-5 and I-6]

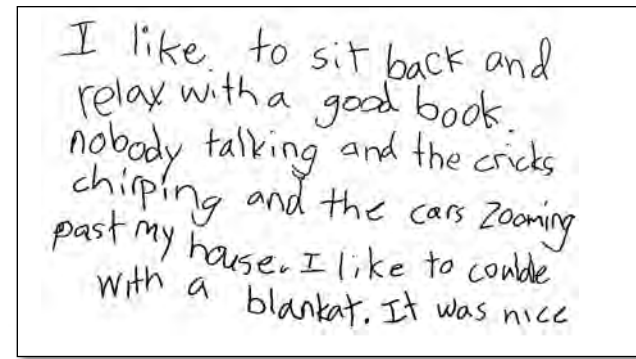


Figure I-5
Children's reflections on their reading lives reveal a lot about them as readers.

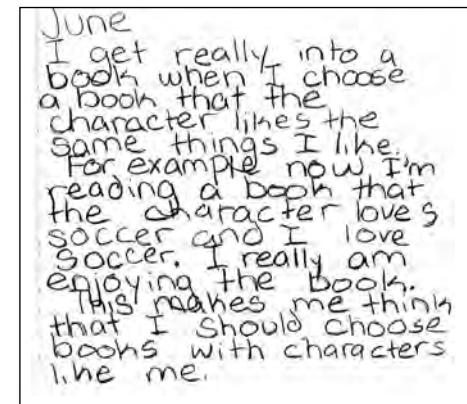


Figure I-6
When children talk about times when reading has worked for them, they help you create a buzz around reading.

Send children off to read, helping them manage the transition.

“On this very day, you are going to have time to read—and to think about what works for you as a reader. Table 1, I’ve put together a bin of books that I know you’re gonna love. There are old favorites here, and some quick reads that you can zoom through. There are probably also some books that make you say, ‘No way! This one does *not* feel right for me.’ That’s fine because you are the boss of building your reading life. You can go back to your table and get started reading from that bin.”

After that group dispersed, I talked in a stage whisper to the readers remaining in the meeting area, knowing what I said was heard across the room. “Look, Isaac has already settled into reading! So has Tyrell! Let’s see how the other readers at Table 1 start reading.”

Then I dispersed children from another two tables, saying, as they traveled to their seats, “I can’t wait to watch *you* settle into reading.” Eventually, all the children were sent back to read. As I moved among the tables, I said to all the children, “I’m looking for nose-in-the-book reading.” I tapped one child’s book as if to signal, “eyes here.” I made a “What’s going on?” gesture to another child as if asking, “Why aren’t you settled into the seat?”

Remind children that whenever they are trying to improve at something, they can pause to ask themselves, “Is this working for me?” or recall a time it has worked. Then, they can figure out what supported the success and build that into their lives.

After a bit, I said, “Readers, after you’ve read for a bit, pause and think to yourself, ‘Is this reading working for me? Not working for me?’ because you need to author a reading life for yourself. And you have choices. You can make a life in which reading is *the pits*, or you can make a life in which reading is *the best it can be*. And you will be the author of your reading life forever and ever, not just today, and not just in this class—you always have that strategy to use, of looking at your bests and worsts, then making wise changes so that reading becomes the best it can be.”

Notice that you have reiterated the exact words you used in your teaching point. Minilessons rely on oral language to communicate and most orators know repetition is important—hence King’s repetition of “I have a dream...” or Kennedy’s of “Ask not what...but ask...” (See the Resources CD-ROM for other examples.) When you repeat the exact words of your teaching point many times, your words stand a chance of becoming part of your children’s thought processes, and a part of their language. Plan to return to the words of previous teaching points throughout the unit of study and the year.



CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

Manage the Workshop By Filling It with Respect for Reading

As you launch your first day of your reading workshop, your goal will be to create a well-managed workshop that brims with reverence for reading and to help each of your children feel recognized and at home within this workshop.

Manage Through Creating a Reverence for Reading

It may feel as if you are being pulled between the contrasting goals of, on the one hand, establishing the management structures that will keep your children working productively and, on the other hand, instilling reverence for reading. The secret is to convey to children that the reason they need to use every minute of time with care is because the reading workshop provides such a precious opportunity to read. During the first day, convey an enormous sense of urgency. “This reading workshop time is so incredibly precious. I can’t wait for all of you to have this chance to read.”

Today and throughout the first portion of the year, you’ll want to provide scaffolds that help children transition from the meeting area to their own independent work. After you send children off from the minilesson, you will probably circulate quickly, using nonverbal signals to draw their attention toward reading. A child is still chatting with a classmate; I catch her attention, make a “shh” gesture, and pantomime opening a book as a

way to say, “Get started.” I leave a quick note folded on another child’s desk: “Reading time is precious.”

Of course, once you’ve circled the room, settling children, you’ll want

to pull in to talk with individuals. Before you draw a chair close to a child, think for a moment about your goals. All of us, when we enter a new community, are given the chance to reauthor ourselves—in this case, you’ll want to help children who have always seen themselves as resistant to reading see themselves and portray themselves differently. Remember educator Jerome Harste’s wise advice: “I see our job as teachers as that of creating in our classroom the kind of world we believe in and then inviting our children to role-play their way into being the readers and writers we want them to become.”

Especially during these early days of the year, I try to follow Dr. Spock’s advice. He wrote, “Catch children in the act of doing good.” I sometimes

alter his advice to say, “Catch children in the act of *almost* doing good.” For me, this means that if I see a child who appears to be daydreaming instead of reading, I am apt to say, “Oh my goodness. That book has gotten you thinking so, so much! I can just see the wheels of your mind churning. The same thing happens to me when I read—sometimes my mind gets so full of thoughts that I need to put the book down for a second and just think.”

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT

Readers Choose Several Books at a Time So We Always Have One to Read

“If any of you finish your book and need to choose another one, would you let me know because I’d love to help steer you to some great books. And as I get to know the books that you want to read, I might even suggest you start reading with one particular reading partner, someone I think might like the same sort of books.

“And after I’ve met with you and given you a book bin for yourself, when you do go to the library, I suggest you choose a couple of books to keep in your bin. If you choose three or four books at a time, think of it like you have a short stack of books on your bedside table, waiting to be read. That way when you finish one book, you can go straight to the next without delay. When you choose a stack of books, think about choosing books that go together: three books in a series, or three books by an author, or three dog stories. That’s what lots and lots of readers do. Of course you’ll also remember to choose books that you can read easily and smoothly. You can resume your reading.”



If I notice that a few children at one table are not focusing on reading—one is staring off into space, another is flipping through books in the table-top bin, and a third is adjusting her watchband—when I approach the group, I'll let them see me coming and correct their behaviors so that I can say, "I noticed that a few of you had taken a little break from reading, and just now, you got yourselves started reading again—all on your own. That is so smart. Sometimes we *do* take a quick break from our reading to gather our thoughts or to think about what's going on in the book, and it is just the smartest thing in the world to be able to say, 'Break's over,' and to get back to work. I'm really impressed that you are the kinds of readers who can say, 'Break's over' and return to your book."

If I see Tyrell and Gabe wrestling over a book from the series *The Secrets of Droon*, I will *not* say, "Will you two quit fighting and do some reading? You are always coming up with some excuse not to read!" Instead, I'm going to interpret the event, to them, as one involving reading and the best of intentions, saying: "I'm not surprised you are wrestling for the chance to read a favorite book. I know just how that feels—I have so many books I'm dying to read, too, and it's so frustrating when someone else wants the same book!" Of course, you'll still need Tyrell and Gabe to find a way to settle the matter between them. So you might say something like, "I bet you can figure out a way to settle this ol' 'two-readers-want-the-same-book' problem quickly so you won't miss precious reading time. Take a second and figure it out quickly." Even while ending a tussle, you can convey confidence that your children are eager learners, good citizens, and responsible decision makers. Once Tyrell and Gabe solve the problem, I can tell the class in a mid-workshop teaching point, "Listen to this reading problem and solution Tyrell and Gabe just worked through!" I can explain that in life, it sometimes happens that two people are dying to read the same book, and that's what had happened with Tyrell and Gabe. I can shine a spotlight on the fact that they resolved their struggle on their own, saying "Eventually, though, they worked it out. Tyrell offered to be next in line for the book and Gabe said 'Thanks, and when you read it, I'll show you the really cool parts!'"

In countless ways, then, I'll coach children toward working productively while also conveying the message that I know they love reading and that they are no doubt dying to use every minute to read, read, read. It is crucial to work toward creating a culture in which reading is valued. You can do this by shining a spotlight on whatever children do that matches your hopes.

Help Each Individual Child Feel Recognized as a Reader

As you confer with children, you'll want to compliment the child in such a way that you help that child construct a positive self-concept as a reader. As you do this, you can also help the whole class see that there are lots of ways to be successful as readers within your class. For example, if you sit beside a child who keeps reading even after you've signalled you want to talk, you can help the child see his actions as significant. "You finished reading that passage before looking up. You seem to be the kind of reader who gets really drawn into a book! I bet that when I say, 'Let's gather in the meeting area,' you'll be the sort of reader who walks over like this. (I act out a child who walks, nose still in the book, to the meeting area.) Am I right? Is that the kind of reader you are?"

You may notice a child looking for a second book by an author she read recently, and you might seize this opportunity to address the whole class for a moment. "Jasmine just asked if I could help her find another book by Judy Blume because, as Jasmine put it, she was 'whisked away' by *Fudge-a-mania*. When we love a book, it makes sense to look for others by that author since it's likely we'll love those, too. And Jasmine just told me that she'll read this second book differently than the first because now she'll notice how it fits with the first book, and she'll notice the ways Judy Blume tends to write, in general. That makes sense, doesn't it? If you are reading a second book from one author, you might borrow Jasmine's technique of thinking, as you read, about all the books the author has written." The truth, of course, is that you had this idea well before Jasmine, but in every way possible you'll want to help children feel as if their good ideas

are shaping the reading community within the classroom. Especially in the case of quiet children like Jasmine, you'll want to make a big deal of contributions they make to the community.

Another way to support a child's developing notion of herself as a reader is to connect the work she does in her life with the work she does in her reading. For example, if Brianna selected as her favorite part of her book a passage that contained details about relationships and very little action, I might say, "Do you know how unusual it is for a reader to say that his or her favorite part is a bit of text where there is no high drama, no fast-paced action—where instead of *action*, where there is *interaction*? I have a hunch that you are a people person in life as well as when you read. I've noticed you watching kids in the class, noticing how others act and, probably, how they feel, and my hunch is that you read people in books that same way. That is a really cool gift, a talent, and it probably makes you into a thoughtful and sympathetic reader."

You might feel uncomfortable deducing these sorts of things from just the page that a child has selected as a favorite, but you could do a lot worse than going around the classroom, saying to kids, "I've been watching you, and it seems to me that you are the kind of reader who has learned to . . ." and then coming up with something wonderful to say about each child. You will certainly see more in your children if you aim to tell them something beautiful you notice about their relationships with reading. Then, too, you'll be conveying to children that their actions matter to you, that you want to get to know them, that you see great possibilities in them, and that they have talents, proclivities, ways with books that even they may not yet have recognized. Does one child hold a book carefully? If so, suggest this is a person who knows that books are nothing to snuff at. Does another child walk quickly from the meeting area to his or her reading spot, not wasting a precious moment of reading time, suggesting he knows how to use his every moment really well? Tell him! When you pull your chair alongside one reader, does she say, "I'm okay, I don't need a conference. This is a good part." Does it seem as if she is waving you away? Does another child laugh aloud as she reads? If so, tell these children that you've noticed these crucial signs of engagement, and that these signs suggest they are making reading the best it can be!





TEACHING SHARE

Readers Learn More from Best and Worst Reading Times

Help children develop systems for managing their reading lives. In this case, suggest they use Post-it notes to mark their places.

“Readers, can I stop you? We just have a couple of minutes before it is time for math. I know your minds are full of ideas about whatever you’re reading. Right now, place a Post-it note—there should be some in your tabletop basket of books—in your book at the spot where you’re leaving off, and jot your name on it. The Post-it note will be a bookmark so tomorrow you’ll know where to start reading. Put your book back into the tabletop basket and then come join me in the meeting area.”

Ask children to continue practicing the strategy introduced today, offering a way for them to use it more deeply. In this case, push them to think exactly how they can make their reading lives stronger based on their reading experiences.

“We’ve been thinking a lot today about the ways in which reading has worked well for us, and ways it sometimes has not worked well for us. Right now, I want you to talk once more about a time reading was great, or a time it was the pits. And this time, when you talk, be sure you add a little extra depth to your conversation, pushing yourself to think (and I gestured to some bullet points I’d written on the chart), ‘This makes me think that to make reading the best it can be, I should...’

COACHING TIPS



On this first day, the children and I convene in the meeting area for the teaching share, but often I will conduct the share while they’re still in their reading spots. For now, they’ll sit next to anyone, but eventually, I will direct children to sit beside their long-term reading partners. I’m convening them today because one of my biggest goals right now is to bring the class together as a community.

“So let me show you what I mean: One of my best reading times was that time I told you about when I read *Exodus* under the covers. I know that time was great because I loved the book I’d chosen, but it was also great because it was totally silent in my room in the middle of the night, and there was nothing distracting going on around me—in fact, the covers blocked out everything except me and that book! Now, you all have done some remembering like that, and here’s the part where you have to push yourself extra hard. You’ll want to add more thinking: “This makes me think that to make reading the best it can be for me, I need to not only find some great books, I also need to find some times and places that are very quiet and don’t have a lot of distractions. So reading at the bus stop, which I had planned to do, might not be the best for me after all. It might be that I need to plan to read late at night again. I’ll have to think more about that.”

“Now, did you see what I did? I tried to stretch my idea of what makes reading good for me into now. Okay, it’s your turn to do it. I’ll give you and your neighbor a few minutes to talk while I add to the chart, and then we’ll gather back together. Go ahead.”

This makes me think that to make reading the best it can be, I should...

- *Find some great books*
 - *Find a quiet place and time without distractions*
 -
-

Ask children to share their thinking in twos. As they do so, coach them to push themselves to use the strategies more deeply so that they can do this today and forever.

I listened in as Fallon talked with Sam. Fallon, chewing on the end of a braid said, “I think reading works for me when I don’t have to sit at my desk. At home, I always stretch out on my bed or the couch to read. It’s more relaxing that way.” She flopped back on the rug dramatically, arms crossed behind her head. She added, “This makes me think. . .um. . . we should be able to sit where we want during reading.”

This is the first share of the year, so I want to make sure they have an opportunity to actually share with each other. It’s a prompted share in that I gave them a prompt that will get them started and will guide their conversation. This can be a helpful scaffold for a while until children are used to talking about their reading, but you should expect that before long, share sessions will be less scaffolded and less controlled. You’ll also notice this share matches the mid-workshop teaching point and the minilesson. This, again, is meant as a means for providing support.



Sam didn't respond immediately but stared up at the ceiling for a minute. He leaned forward, his small hands pressed to his temples. Then he spoke slowly, deliberately. "For me, reading works best when I am in a series, like *Harry Potter*. I really like those books."

"What do you like about them?" I prompted, knowing Sam was still thinking.

"Well, it's like you get to travel into this whole other world. And when you read another book in the series, you already know all about the world and how it works. And you know the characters, too, and how they change—like in *Harry Potter*, they all grow up and they do different things at school and learn new magic. Some people get bored by series books but I don't. This makes me think that we should be able to choose what books we read."

Convening the class, I said, "Readers, as I listened in to you, I took notes. You're teaching me the things I need to consider as we coauthor our year of reading. When I hear many of you say things like, 'Reading works best when I can choose my own books,' it makes me think that this year you need choice. When I hear you say, 'I like to talk about my books because it helps me understand them,' this makes me think that maybe we should get reading partnerships going. When I hear that you don't like books about the olden days, this makes me think I need to teach some strategies for reading books that are set in different times because I'm pretty sure I could help you find ways to like those books. We've got so much to think about! Remember, whenever you want to grow at something, in reading or in anything else in your life, you can always think back on your experiences and think 'When did this work for me?' We can use the answer to that question to help make whatever it is we're trying to do into the best it can be."

Don Murray, the father of the writing process, has often said that any course in reading and writing whose goal is to empower children must begin with silence—a silence children must fill. During this first day, you have not exactly been silent, but you have conveyed to children that this is their year, their reading time, and that your job will be to help them make reading into something that works for them. Conveying this message needs to be a big part of what you aim to do over these first few days.

Be sure you actually take notes as children talk with each other so that you can cite their words. Your attentiveness to their achievements will make a world of difference.



First Things First

I wrote *Living Between the Lines* when my sons were three and five years old. In the book, I told the story of teachers in schools with which I worked, writing a letter home to their students' parents, asking the parents to write the teacher a letter introducing their son or daughter. I enclosed the letter a group of teachers had sent home. It went like this:

Dear Parent,

I'm writing to ask you to help me become a partner with you in your child's education. I will only have your child for a short time in this trip through life—just one fleeting school year—and I want to make a contribution that lasts a lifetime.

I know my teaching must begin with making your child feel at home in my classroom, and with helping all the children come together into a unique learning community made up of particular, unique individuals, each with his or her own learning style and interests and history and hopes. Would you help me teach well by taking a quiet moment to write me about your child? What is your youngster like? What are the things you, as a parent, know that would be important for me to know? What are your child's interests? I want to know how your child thinks and plays and how you see your child as a learner and a person.

In that book, I included a few of the responses, letters the teachers received such as Barbara Novak's, which began, "As I begin to think and write about my one and only child, my first thought is to thank you for wanting to receive my insights on him. I've just watched Joshua and his two cousins set up a lemonade stand on a warm Saturday afternoon. I love the excitement, gleam, and joy he's experiencing as he sets out to do business." The letters that the teachers received were each utterly distinct, yet each letter was filled with a reminder of the infinite preciousness of this one individual in the eyes of those who love him or her.

A year after *Living Between the Lines* was published, the day came when I stood at the end of my driveway, my son at my side, waiting for the flash of yellow through the trees to tell me the school bus was rounding the bend. It pulled to a stop in front of us, and I kissed Miles good-bye,

gave him a last squeeze, and watched as he clambered up the tall steps, turning to give me that last smile. I walked back to the house, wiping the tears from my eyes, remembering the words of author Elizabeth Stone who said, "Making the decision to have a child is momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking outside your body."

Then that afternoon, while checking the time, waiting, waiting for that flash of yellow to round the bend and for Miles to be home again, I went to the mailbox. And in it was a letter from Miles' teacher. I opened it and began to read:

Dear Mrs. Calkins,

I'm writing to ask you to help me become a partner with you in your child's education. I will only have your child for a short time in this trip through life—just one fleeting school year—and I want to make a contribution that lasts a lifetime.

How I laughed aloud to see my letter coming back to me! That hadn't been my plan, it had been in the book simply as an example, but I, for one, didn't care. The invitation was there, and how glad I was to sit at the kitchen table, and begin to put my child onto the page. I made a copy of the letter I wrote. It's in the file bearing my son's name, the one with all the little certificates and love notes and dried clover from all those years. The other day, when Miles left for the West Coast, for his first grown-up job, I went through that folder again and found the letter I'd written to his teacher. It is eight pages long! How Miles's teacher must have hooted and hollered to see my tome in her mailbox! But how important it was for me to be able to say, "Let me tell you about my son..." and to put him on the page, in all his complexity.

On these first days of the school year, when the pressure to assess kids and match them to books looms so very large, it's good to get letters from parents that remind us of how this child plays and works. If Ms. Grimes was going to teach Miles, it was good for her to know that he was making a Roman road smack in the middle of our lawn, with a layer of pebbles and then a layer of mud poured into a makeshift frame

he created with a ladder lying flat. I will never forget the author Avi's words to teachers: "If you are going to teach me to read and to write, first you need to love me."

So our first job, as teachers, is to fall in love with each and every child—right away. That is not always easy at the very start of the year, when we are still mourning the loss of last year's kids, but the truth is that youngsters know when they are surrounded by positive regard. They know when they are in a place in which they can take risks, reveal their vulnerabilities, aspire toward big goals.

I recommend you find ways straightaway to invite your students to teach you who they are and what they care about. During those first days of the school year, when no one is yet accustomed to sitting at a desk all day anyhow, set children up to do the things that will help you construct a sense of this child as a reader, a writer, a person. Perhaps you'll want to ask children to draw pictures of one time in their lives when reading was the best it could ever be and one time when reading was the worst it could ever be. The important thing won't be the pictures but will be the shared stories that children swap about their reading histories as they share those pictures. Perhaps you'll want to give each child a square of the bulletin board, and ask the child to bring in stuff that shows his or her history as a reader. Imagine if you were asked to fill a square of the bulletin board with things that show *you* as a reader. Which books, of all that you have ever read in your whole life, would you choose to put into that square? What ways of responding to reading would go there? It's not lightweight work to take the time to construct images of who we are as readers and to put those out into the world.

Perhaps you'll ask each child to read something—perhaps a poem or a picture book—and to leave Post-its that show what that child was thinking, and then you can teach children to conduct reader studies, noticing the kinds of thinking that each tends to do different sorts of thinking. This would allow you to begin to develop some language about how each of your readers is different from each other reader because each child tends to do different sorts of thinking. "You've got this way of reading and asking questions that get right to the heart of everything. It's such a special thing because you take us into really deep conversations with those questions. I hope over the year, you teach us all about how you do that." That child might be reading books that are the least complex of any being read in the class, and yet the child is not just a reader who is work-

ing with that level of text. She is also an inquirer and a teacher of inquiry to the class. From the very start, then, you will want to highlight that readers are more than just a text level. Once you match kids to books, chances are good there will be talk such as, "I'm an N reader." You'll want to have the goods to counteract that, at least a bit. "You are also our class expert on the sports page, aren't you? I can't believe that you actually read it every single day before you even come to school!"

Once you've allowed each child to begin to tell you the story of who he or she is as a reader, then yes, I also believe it is urgent to match kids to books and to get each child started reading texts that are roughly in that child's reading range. You may be uneasy about matching children to books—and believe me, you won't be alone in that. I do not know anyone who thinks that leveling books is a science or that our efforts to use running records to match kids to the level of text difficulty they can handle are anything but rough approximations that allow us to steer kids toward books that are apt to be within their range. But most of us believe this work can be empowering when done in a system that is imbued with respect and appreciation for each individual. And we believe that because reading matters, doing whatever it takes to get the books that kids can actually read into their hands matters, too.

Before You Begin: Leveled Books and a System for Assessing Readers

As I've written in *The Guide to the Reading Workshop*, there are certain aspects of assessment that need tending to even before school begins. (You will have all the work you can handle in these first few weeks of school with these twin tasks of establishing the foundation of your reading workshop and assessing your readers, so any work that you can do before the children walk into your room—grab the opportunity!)

You, and hopefully your colleagues as well, will need to have already chosen a system for leveling books, whether it is based on the Fountas and Pinnell system or the Development Reading Assessment (DRA) system, and you will need to have already leveled a portion, perhaps two-thirds, of your classroom library before the children arrive in September.

You also will need to have already established a system for assessing readers. Again, as I've written more about in *The Guide to the Reading Workshop*, Fountas and Pinnell and DRA each have assessment tools available that

can help with this, as does the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project website, <http://frog.readingandwritingproject.com/assessments.html>. With the help of one of these sets of tools, and your already leveled books, you will be all set to begin assessing your readers, even on the first days of school.

Assessment Goal for the First Weeks of the Year

In these first weeks of school, our first priority will need to be matching each child with a book—a stack of books—really, that he or she can read. This is not the time to dive into conducting any one assessment in depth, discovering every detail of that reader's strengths and preferences and needs. For now, it is more critical that we buzz through the whole class, conducting quick assessments with lots of students, assessments that allow us to make sure that all the students are launched into reading just-right or even easy books. It's more important that we get everyone reading and, better yet, reading with a partner at about the same text level, than that we collect complete, detailed, perfect data on each child. We'll need to aim for every child to be roughly assessed within the first two weeks of the school year. There will be plenty of time afterward to conduct more detailed, rigorous assessments and to follow up on all the questions that our initial assessments will provoke. We need everyone reading, right away, so that we can teach.

This emphasis on conducting lots of assessments quickly and efficiently cannot, however, mean that we stop the assessment of a child once we find the first level at which she reads with 96% accuracy and adequate comprehension. To find a reader's just-right text level, we need to continue assessing her reading as she works with increasingly difficult texts until her comprehension of the text begins to break down, in other words, until her "ceiling level" is established. We also cannot chop off or even cut short the part of the assessment where we assess understanding. Assessments that consider only accuracy and not comprehension are utterly worthless. Reading is not reading if a child does not understand the passage enough to retell it and to answer a few literal and simple inferential questions.

What Does Assessment Look Like during the First Weeks of the Year?

No matter which of the several assessment tools you and your colleagues have chosen, the assessment work of these early weeks will be essentially the same: We'll be taking informal running records.

Here's the process in a nutshell. We give a leveled text to a child to read. Meanwhile, we hold a form that reproduces a portion of that leveled text. On this form, we note exactly what the child says and does as he reads the text. We note not only if the child has read the words on the page correctly, but also if the child corrects himself or substitutes in words to take the place of the words in the text. Then, we ask the child to retell the text, and we ask a few simple questions about it. Using a set of criteria, we'll determine if the child has understood the story well enough so that we can ask him or her to try the same process again with an even harder leveled text.

Using records from the previous year or some quick questions and observations, we should be able to start the process with a text that is slightly too easy for the child to ensure the child will have great success and be at ease for the assessment. Once we've figured out the text level that is just right for the child, we can show him how to find books at that level in the classroom, or we can offer him a stack of books to choose from. The child will then be able to keep a short stack on hand, perhaps in a bin or baggie, to read for the coming weeks.

As I've mentioned in *The Guide to the Reading Workshop*, Marie Clay, the founder of Reading Recovery, has written a short, accessible book on this topic, *Running Records for Classroom Teachers*, and if you don't have an assessment tool that guides you through this process, I suggest that you learn to conduct running records from the master by referring to this book.

A Sample of a Beginning of the Year Running Record

Here is an example of a running record a teacher conducted at the very beginning of her school year. You'll see that she abbreviates the analysis of the details of the reader's miscues and instead looks for wider patterns in his reading. Is this text level comfortable for him, yet still challenging enough for him?

Leveled Text Excerpt and Tyrell's Reading and Retelling

The teacher uses forms she downloaded from the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project website, and you could do this too if you are not already using another assessment system. Or you can simply make a photocopy of the leveled text you are about to give the child so that you can have something on which to mark the child's reading and something to leave in the folder you are creating for him as a record of the assessment you are conducting.

Set 1 Teacher Copy: Assessment for Independent Reading Levels
Levels L-Z (Fiction/Narrative) Level L

Reader's Name **Tyrell** Grade _____ Date _____
Excerpt from *Meet the Molesons*, by Burny Bos, pp. 18-20
Level L 195 words

Independent Level: ☒ Yes ☐ No
Accuracy Rate: **97%**

Book Introduction: Say this to the reader before he or she begins the student copy of the text: "Dug and his sister, Dusty, are playing with their mother's make-up before school one morning. This story will mention chicken pox. Chicken pox is a virus that makes you break out with red spots all over your body. Please read aloud the first section. (Point to the line on the student copy to show the child where the first section ends.) After this part, you may read the rest silently. If you need to, you can reread the first part. When you are finished reading, I will ask you to retell the important things that happened in the story."

During & after the running record, you may make these observations & notes to inform instruction:

3- Self corrects
NO - Pauses while reading to think
YES - Uses more than one strategy to figure out unfamiliar words
YES - Miscues make sense
uses own lang. - Miscues fit the syntax or structure of the sentence
Not on the first read - Miscues look similar to words in the text read
Figures out the meaning of unfamiliar words—If the child mispronounces a word during the running record, ask the child if they know the meaning of the word when they finish reading the excerpt
What does I mean in the story?
Person's
What does it mean in the story? I don't know

Running Record: For the first 100 words, record the reader's miscues (or errors) above the words as he or she reads. Later, you may or may not code them, using miscue analysis (MSV). Stop when the child has made five miscues and go back to the previous level.

	E	SC
One morning Dusty and I were getting	MSV	MSV
ready for school. I found Mother's red	MSV	MSV
lipstick in the bathroom.	MSV	MSV
I opened it up. It made red dots on my	MSV	MSV
face. I put some more on. Great!	MSV	MSV
Dusty noticed. "You look like you have	MSV	MSV
chicken pox."	MSV	MSV
"Oooh," I said. "I don't feel well. I think	MSV	MSV
I have to stay home from school."	MSV	MSV
"Give me that!" Dusty took the lipstick.	MSV	MSV
Soon we both had "chicken pox."	MSV	MSV
We went back to bed.	MSV	MSV
"Time for school!" Father called.	MSV	MSV
"Oooh!" we moaned.	MSV	MSV
Father ran in. "What's wrong?" he cried.	MSV	MSV
"We are sick," I said in a (100 words) weak voice.	MSV	MSV

***** (Reader may read silently from this point on.) *****

Set 1 Teacher Copy: Assessment for Independent Reading Levels
Levels L-Z (Fiction/Narrative) Level L

"We can't go to school," Dusty said. We were very happy.
Father nodded. "You are right," he said. I purred like a cat.
"It looks like a bad case of chicken pox." "This is heaven,"
You will have to stay in bed." Dusty said. "I
Father looked worried. "I am afraid it never felt so
will be boring for you," he said. good being sick!"

Father brought us But when Mother came home after work,
cakes, mint tea, she called for us. This is it, we thought.
and books. Now we're in trouble! (195 words)

Total miscues including self corrected: **6**
Self corrections: **3**
Miscues reader did not self correct: **3**

Accuracy Rate: Circle the number of miscues the reader did not self correct.

100%	99%	98%	97%	96%
0 miscues	1 miscue	2 miscues	3 miscues	4 miscues

96%-100% accuracy is necessary to determine the reader's independent reading level. Try a lower level text if the reader made 5 or more miscues.
* If the child makes the same miscue repeatedly, count it as one miscue.

Literal and Inferential Retelling or Summary
Say, "Please retell the big or important parts of what you just read." Write notes regarding the student's retelling or summary on the back of this page. If the student has trouble getting started, prompt him/her to look at the text. Say, "What happened first?" Make a note that you prompted the student. Some students will retell the story sequentially in response to this prompt, while others will summarize the gist of the story. Either response is acceptable here.
Use the Retelling Rubric and Sample Student Responses to determine if the child's retell and response to the comprehension questions are acceptable. If a student is not able to retell but is able to answer the comprehension questions, note that this student will need extra work on how to retell a story.

The boy and the girl got "sick" w/ chicken pox. They stayed home from school. Then they played in Mom's lipstick to show they had chicken pox. Mom got mad. They had fun being sick.

Set 1 Teacher Copy: Assessment for Independent Reading Levels
Levels L-Z (Fiction/Narrative)

Comprehension Questions Section: Analyze the student's retelling/summary to see if it contains information that answers each question below. If a question was not answered in the retelling, ask it and record the student's response.

1. **Literary Question:** How does Dug get the red dots on his face?

Dug got "sick" w/ chicken pox, He used lipstick.

2. **Literary Question:** Where are Dug and Dusty supposed to be?

In school but they are playing sick.

3. **Inferential Question:** What do you think is going to happen when Dug and Dusty see their mom?

Their mom will be mad because they played with her make up.

4. **Inferential Question:** Dusty says, "I never felt so good being sick!" What do you think Dusty meant by saying this?

They had fun playing sick.

Oral Reading Fluency Scale – Circle the Appropriate Level

Fluent	Level 4	Reads primarily in larger, meaningful phrase groups. Although some regressions, repetitions, and deviations from text may be present, these do not appear to detract from the overall structure of the text. Preservation of the author's syntax is consistent. Most of the text is read with expressive interpretation.
	Level 3	Reads primarily in three or four-word phrase groups. Some small groupings may be present. However, the majority of phrasing seems appropriate and preserves the syntax of the author. Some expressive interpretation is present; this may be inconsistent across the reading of the text.
Non-fluent	Level 2	Reads primarily in two-word phrases with some three or four-word groupings. Some word-by-word reading may be present. Word groupings may seem awkward and unrelated to larger context of sentence or passage. Beginning a little expressive interpretation, frequently first seen when reading dialogue. <i>staccato</i>
	Level 1	Reads primarily word-by-word. Occasional two-word or three-word phrases may occur—but these are infrequent and/or they do not preserve meaningful syntax. No expressive interpretation.

Adapted From: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2002 Oral Reading Study.

Final Score

- Yes No Was the reader's accuracy rate at least 96%?
 Yes No Did the reader read with fluency? (a score of 3 or 4 on the Oral Reading Fluency Scale)
 Yes No Did the reader correctly answer at least 3 questions in the Comprehension Questions Section?
 Yes No Did the retelling/summary express the important things that happened in the text?

(Is this the student's independent reading level?)

- If you did NOT answer "yes" to all four questions in this Final Score box, try an easier text. Keep moving to easier texts until you find the level at which you are able to answer "yes" to all four questions in the Final Score box.
- If you circled 4 "yes" answers in this Final Score box, the student is reading strongly at this level. However, it is possible that the student may also read strongly at a higher level. Keep moving to higher passages until you can no longer answer "yes" to all four questions. The highest level that showed strong reading is the independent reading level. For example, you might find that you answered "yes" to all four questions in the Final Score box for level P, then a "yes" to all four questions for level Q, but only three "yes" answers for level R. Level Q is the highest passage on which you were able to answer "yes" to all four questions in the Final Score box. Level Q is the current independent reading level for the student.

Drawing Conclusions Based on Tyrell's Running Record

As we can see from the teacher's records, Tyrell read this passage with only three miscues that he didn't correct, and only two of those miscues didn't quite make sense in the passage. This is a high accuracy rate for him reading at this level—97%, in fact. His reading, however, did not sound smooth. It was staccato, and his phrasing was awkward and unrelated to the meaning of the passage. Did he understand the passage well and just not read aloud well? The teacher asked him a few quick questions: "Who is 'I' in the passage?" and "What does 'it' mean right here?" and from his answers, it was hard to tell if he understood the passage.

Tyrell's retelling of the passage is a bit scrambled, but on the whole, close to the text. He answers three of the four comprehension questions correctly, but one of the inferential questions he misses. Taking all this into account and following the formula applied to running records, this text level, text level L, could be Tyrell's reading level for the time being. Although Tyrell's comprehension and facility with this text was not extremely strong, his teacher still wanted to try one text level more with him, in case he could manage that one, too. She gave him an excerpt to read from text level M, but her running record showed that his accuracy would not hold him at that level.

Tyrell's teacher explained to him where in the classroom he could find some level L texts and gave him a stack to look through for himself, choosing some to reserve in his own personal short stack.

Assessments on a Shoestring

Of course, even conducting these super efficient, slightly abbreviated, informal running records, it will still take you two weeks before you have gotten to every child. What will you do to support matching children to texts when you haven't yet gotten to them? There are several other ways to make informed guesses about children's text levels quickly. Of course, these assessments are much less reliable, but they are only intended as stopgap measures, until you work your way over to each child.

Teach children the "Three Words" guideline. Dick Allington has invented a quick, rough rule of thumb: If there are more than three words on a page that you don't know, that text is probably not just right for you. While, of course, this is only meant to be the roughest of rough guidelines, it can be a help to your readers. We could teach them this guideline and let them self-assess the level as they begin choosing books for themselves.

Set up tables of children likely to be at a certain level, give them the books, and observe. You'll be surprised how much you can estimate about a just-right reading level for a reader from across the room! Are the children engaged? If not, quickly modify your guesses about levels until they seem to be. You'll get to a fuller assessment later.

Rely on last year's level. If you have records from the child's teacher of the previous year, try that level. Likely, it will be easy for the child and therefore a much better match for the child than a book that is too hard.

Explain the logistics of the assessments to the readers in clusters. When you conduct assessments, bring a cluster of children to your area, and then you can explain what you'll be doing just once to the whole cluster of children. After your explanation, you can ask all but one child to sit nearby and continue their independent reading as you turn to the first child to be assessed.

Conduct two assessments in tandem. During the running record process, a child reads aloud a leveled passage as you mark his reading. Then the child continues reading that passage silently. While one child is silently reading the rest of the assessment passage, try asking a second child to begin his reading aloud. Then, as the second child shifts into reading the second half of the passage silently, you can turn back to the first child.

I've written about some of these and other ways to streamline running records in the conferring and small-group sections within each session, and you will no doubt invent your own ways. For now, though, let me say that while you assess your individual students, conducting some form of running records, the whole class will meanwhile be reading books at levels that you ascertain from whatever data you have—conversations with colleagues, test score levels—and are apt to be in the ballpark for your particular readers. From a distance, you can scan the scene as readers read these leveled books, and you can look for signs of engagement or disengagement that will let you know whether the book a child is holding is at least roughly appropriate for that child.

**IN THIS SESSION,**

you'll teach students that readers know it's important to occasionally stop and analyze our reading and then make resolutions to change how we read in the future.

Making Honest, Important Reading Resolutions

There's nothing like the start of a new school year—or of a new initiative. One of the great joys of teaching is the fact that every year we have the chance to start again, with renewed energy and resolve. We as teachers all know the excitement of new school supplies, squeaky clean notebooks and plan books, newly waxed classroom floors, clean desktops, and a whole

host of new names on a new class list. Who are these children? What will they be like, and how will they work and play together as a group? We anticipate the year with butterflies of anticipation.

Of course, we are nervous and excited not only because we wonder who the children will be. We are also wondering who we will be during the year ahead. We face the new

GETTING READY

- Prepare a pocket folder for each child, perhaps labeled “My Reading Life,” containing a stapled-together packet of blank reading logs. Either you or the child will also want to stash a collection of blank sheets of paper in this folder. This will serve, for the time, as a stand-in for the reading notebook that you'll eventually give each child. Some of you may decide to launch the notebook now. Either way, distribute during the teaching share.
- Provide each table with a stack of small Post-it flags for marking favorite passages during today's reading time. Another option is to ask children to supply these for themselves. Either way, you will not want to distribute Post-its each day.
- Suggest that children store a pen and some Post-its, which they will need for this and for future minilessons, in their pocket folders.
- You will want Post-its and pens on hand in the meeting area to distribute to children who don't bring them.
- You'll want access to either blank chart paper or a white board to write log information during the share.
- At the end of today's active involvement, you will ask children to write their New School Year's resolutions perhaps on strips of paper. In which case, you will need to cut white construction paper into strips and bring those strips with you to the meeting area.
- Prepare to assess at least four or five readers with running records during this workshop session. You will probably assess all the readers who are clustered around one tabletop book basket, and they will probably be readers who read in roughly around the same range of text difficulty. You'll want to have previewed the texts you are asking them to read and to duplicate enough forms so you have enough for each child.
- Consider how children will carry their books and other reading materials between home and school. We've suggested giving each reader a gallon-size plastic baggie, although there are other, more stylish options, as well.

school year asking ourselves, “Who am I as a teacher? Who will I be this year?” After all, if the class will come together like a drama, with each person stepping into the role that will become his or her part to play, we will also be assuming a role, becoming a character. One of the beautiful things about our profession is that we have a chance each year to remake ourselves.

After all, in order to set realistic, meaningful goals, both we and our students need to reflect on our strengths, weaknesses, and hopes, and then we need to make manageable action plans that will help us reach our goals.

If you haven’t had a chance prior to now to imagine ways in which your teaching will be even better than it was last year, it’s important to take that time now. You may be tempted to spend your free time cleaning the supply closet in your classroom or searching for that one perfect read-aloud that you know is somewhere. But the truth is that the supply closet can wait, and so can the search for the perfect book. The single most important thing you can do right now is to plan to become the teacher you want to be. “If you don’t have a dream,” as they sing in *South Pacific*, how will you make a dream come true?

In our attempts to shed old skin and to become the teachers we aspire to be, many of us begin each year with a

little list of New School Year’s resolutions. We hope to be more organized in our teaching, so we scan teacher supply stores looking for the just-right plan book that will help us reach our goal. We want our teaching to be more responsive to our kids, so we resolve to interview each of our children at length in order to come to know our children as people. The important thing is that we not only make resolutions, but we act on them, figuring out systems, methods, and mentors that can help us achieve those goals.

Just as it is important for us, as teachers, to nurture dreams for ourselves, so too, it is important for us, as teachers, to nurture the dreams children have for themselves. And now, the start of the year, is the perfect time to invite children to imagine the ways they’ll change in the upcoming year.

Children, like teachers, enter the new school year with butterflies in their stomachs. “Will my friends be in my class? Will my teacher be nice?” youngsters wonder. Lurking beneath these questions, there are other questions that are rarely articulated but even more real. “Who will I be this year, in this class? What is the story of this world that I’m joining, and who is the character that I will play?”

To imagine the ways they want to grow and change, we need to help students devise systems, plans, and mentors so they can reach their own goals. The process of coming up with New School Year’s resolutions can be nothing more than a cute way to fill those empty September bulletin boards—or it can be a way to help children author their own lives. The thinking work behind creating and keeping resolutions is serious mind work and life work. After all, to set realistic, meaningful goals, both we and our children need to reflect on our strengths, weaknesses, and hopes, and then we need to hone those into manageable action plans that will help us reach our goals.

Whenever any of us aspires to shed the old skin and to become someone new, it helps to be surrounded by a supportive community of people who are engaged in similar lifework. In this lesson, you will help children rise to the occasion of this new beginning.





MINILESSON

Making Honest, Important Reading Resolutions

CONNECTION

Tell children that teachers make New School Year's resolutions in September, at the start of a fresh year of school, and give an example of one of yours. Suggest that your students can do the same each year.

Before the children convened, I said, "Readers, join me at the rug. Please bring your book and a pen.

"Readers, eyes this way." I noticed that Lily was sitting with her back to me, absent-mindedly twirling her hair, chatting with a friend. I touched her shoulder, so she'd know to pay attention, meanwhile addressing the whole class. "Eyes this way."

Once I had everyone's attention, I leaned forward and talked directly to the class in a manner that suggested I was sharing a secret.

COACHING TIPS



It doesn't matter what words you use to gather kids' attention as quickly as possible, but we recommend using concise phrases and using them consistently. In these first few days of school, it's vital that children learn that when you say, "Eyes this way" (or whatever cues you use), this is not an optional thing to do. To convey this, I suggest waiting until every child is on board. Then continue speaking. I don't want to embarrass Lily in front of the whole class, yet I want to hold her accountable to the task at hand. I want to be sure to help her develop the habit of getting ready right away. I also want the other children to see that "Eyes this way" means all eyes this way.

“Can I tell you a secret about teachers? Don’t tell them I told you this, but September is like New Year’s for teachers. You know how people make New Year’s resolutions in January—like ‘I’m going to run every day’ or ‘I’m going to stop eating hard candy’ or ‘I’m going to start keeping my room clean’? Well, every August, right before school starts, many teachers make New *School* Year’s resolutions, hoping that we’ll have the best year ever. I do this, too. This year, I promised myself to keep track of all of the books I read aloud, recording them in this notebook. I decided to do this because I want to make sure I’m reading aloud a more balanced diet, one with different kinds of texts. I also promised myself that I’d interview you all because I want to listen to true stories from your lives and to use your stories in my teaching.”

Name your teaching point. Specifically, teach children that it is wise to seize opportunities, like the start of a new school year, to look backward into one’s history and forward into one’s hopes.

“I’m telling you this because today I want to teach you that people who take care of ourselves—as athletes, as musicians, and as readers, too—know that it is important to sometimes stop and say, ‘From this moment on, I’m going to...,’ and then we name our hopes, our promises, our New Year’s resolutions. After that, we make sure our important resolution changes how we live in the future, so that our resolution will come true. Readers do that, too. We stop, we promise, and we look forward, saying, ‘From now on, I...’”

One of the most important jobs that this portion of the minilesson needs to accomplish is that it must connect us with kids. Of course, there are many ways to draw in kids. One, for example, is to tell a personal story. (“Can I tell you about something that happened to me, long ago when I was about your age? One day, I...”) Another way to connect is to show children that you have thought long and hard about them, trying to select the right thing to tell them. (“Last night, I lay in bed thinking and thinking about what the one, most important, suggestion I could make might be. And finally, this morning when I was eating my breakfast, I realized that I do have a tip that I can give to you as readers, a tip that I think will make a world of difference. Are you ready to hear it?”) This minilesson demonstrates yet a third way to draw in readers: I act as if I’m sharing a secret. Who doesn’t want to hear a secret?

My larger point is that as you read through these sessions, you’ll want to become accustomed to seeing each session as not only the story of what I did when teaching a class of children, but also as a template for how minilessons might go. If you notice a minilesson begins with a story that seems to have very little to do with reading, then it will help if you deduce from that example a transferable point that often, when teaching the mind work of reading, we talk about something that is not reading and then draw a parallel to reading. Today, I shared one particular secret—that grown-ups make New Year’s resolutions. But had I decided that the minilesson would launch partnerships, I could have turned this to be a secret about partnerships. “Can I tell you a secret?” I’d have said, “Grown-ups don’t want to read all alone. Most grown-ups have a reading friend.”

TEACHING

Teach children that new resolutions can make a big difference if they are important and realistic. Show children how you go about making such resolutions.

“Yesterday, we talked about how looking at best and worst times can give us ideas for ways we might change our lives. Today, then, we can figure out exactly which big changes we most want to work toward and some of the ways we can get there.

“Since we are building a reading life that is the best it can be, we will need to occasionally stop, think of best and worst times, and bring in more of the best. To do this, it helps to occasionally stop and decide on resolutions for ourselves. The thing is—we can make those resolutions and they can mean very little, or we can make them and they can make an enormous difference. Let’s think for a few minutes about how to be sure that we become the sort of readers who really, truly *do* build spectacular reading lives.”

“Resolutions should be *important*. If I really do want to author a rich and interesting reading life, then my resolutions need to help me make *important* progress toward that goal. I can’t have ten goals—but I can make sure I’m steering myself in a direction that I think matters.

“Resolutions also need to be *realistic*. For example, I know it would be really great if I kept a record of *everything* I read—not just the texts I read aloud. Then I could really make sure that my reading life is balanced, and that I read across a wide variety of genres. But I am not organized enough to keep a record of every text I read—that is just too ambitious for me. It’s more realistic for me to aspire to record the texts I read aloud to you.

“So let me think, for a minute, about an important goal, one that will take me far—but one that is also doable, realistic. While I think of a goal for myself, think of one for yourself, too, because in a minute you’re going to have a chance to share an important goal you have for yourself.

Notice that today’s session fits tongue and groove into yesterday’s. You should be accustomed to minilessons that are extensions of each other. Notice that I return to the key phrases from Session I’s teaching by referring to our talk about the best and worst times. Obviously, if our teaching is going to make a lasting difference, then kids need to carry what we say from one day to the next. Many children aren’t accustomed to teachers and curriculum that accumulates, however. Part of what you are doing during these earliest sessions is that you are inducting children into the norms and customs of workshop teaching—in this case, getting them used to the idea that the lessons from each day are carried forward, not left behind.

There are many studies that list the skills of proficient readers. Interestingly, those studies rarely cite “initiates reading” or “reads with stamina” or “makes time for reading” within the list of skills. Instead, these reports say that proficient readers visualize, ask questions, infer, determine importance, and interpret. Proficient readers do those things—but they also carry books with them, reading often in a day. They read for long stretches of time when possible and have friends with whom they discuss texts. You’ll see, therefore, that this series of books supports the proficient reader’s full repertoire of skills, strategies, and life habits.

“Hmm,... What I’m thinking is that I’m the sort of person who loves to read, if only I allow myself to do it. Sometimes, though, I end up postponing reading ‘til just before I go to sleep, and then my problem is—I *do* go to sleep. I open a book to read, and my eyelids start drooping. Has that ever happened to any of you?

“So I’m going to make a goal. In the year ahead, I want to read for more time every day. Specifically (I like to do that with my goals—to make them very specific), I’ve decided I’m going to try to read at least thirty more minutes than I usually do, each day. It used to be that I’d only read right before bed, but now I will plan to read at other quiet times in my life—maybe at the waiting room at the doctor’s and dentist’s office? That’s always quiet. And also, when I *do* read before bed, I’ll go to bed earlier, so I won’t be so sleepy, or I’ll sit in a chair rather than lying down so I don’t fall asleep.”

Debrief. Describe the parts of your demonstration in a way that will help children transfer the outline of your thinking into their own minds. In other words, describe the strategy in a way that will be useful beyond this situation.

“Did you notice that to make a resolution, I thought about something that would really help my life? (Frankly, for me, the most important thing of all is making time for reading, finding time to read more each day.) I also set a goal that is realistic, not too far from what I’ve been able to accomplish already: Thirty more minutes isn’t *that* much more. And, I tried to come up with some specific ideas for how I’ll meet my goal—like suggesting maybe at the end of an evening I need to sit up in a chair to read instead of lying down in bed.”

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

Ask children to make their own New School Year’s resolutions. Ask them to share with a neighbor.

“Now it’s your turn to begin thinking about your New School Year’s resolutions. Take some time to think about something important you’d like to change about your reading life.” I let some silence permeate the room, and then as I continued to speak, I did so in a way that suggested children would still be mulling this over as I spoke. “It helps to be completely honest with yourself about the strengths and weaknesses of your reading life and of yourself as a reader. Remember to think about something you could *do* in the year ahead that would make an important difference.”

Notice that I often include parenthetical tucked tips into my mini-lessons, and usually these parenthetical comments extrapolate larger, more transferable points out of the minilesson. These tucked tips are not always in parentheses, but they generally feel as if they are included to enrich the main drift of the lesson.

Note that after demonstrating, I routinely step back and name what I’ve just done in a way that is applicable to another text, another person, on another day. I hope this will make my teaching explicit and transferable.

During the silence, I try to think of another goal I could adopt that would help my own reading. I’ve found that even when the room is silent and everyone is thinking, I can provide a powerful model if, instead of using the time to cast an eagle eye over the classroom, I actually sit in front of the children and do the mental work I hope the kids will be doing. As I do this, I am still taking stock of the children and estimating how many are with me.

Noticing that a fair number of children didn't seem to have any idea of how to make resolutions, I began providing more scaffolding. I said, "For some of you, your goal might be to get back into reading series books, because you notice when you are into a series, you tend to read a lot. Some of you might resolve to take more time choosing good books so that you don't just plug along through books you don't like." [Figs. II-1, II-2, and II-3]

"Okay, turn and share one of your New School Year's resolutions with a neighbor. Tell your neighbor your resolution and talk over some specific ideas for how you might actually go about reaching your resolution." [Fig. II-4]

Restate, with scaffolding if necessary, some of the New School Year's resolutions you've overheard children make. Propose a public holding place for all the resolutions.

"Readers, eyes up here. How inspiring you are! I heard so many ambitious, wise, honest resolutions. I heard one of you say that it's been hard to concentrate when you're reading. So you plan to work on really focusing while reading, and you'll need to get a reading spot that allows you to be alone. That's such an honest resolution. I heard one of you saying you wanted to try reading science fiction since so many of your friends have enjoyed it, and you've never tried it. That could be a fun goal to fulfill! I'm thinking we could keep track of our reading resolutions on a bulletin board. Sometime today, during reading time or later, let's each of us record our most important reading resolution on one of these white sheets of paper." I held up strips of paper I'd cut. "We'll make a big display of them. That way we can look back on them and say, 'We've almost met all of our goals!' And we can say, 'I can help Kobe or Gabe or Kaylie meet a goal if I...'"

As they talk, I pay close attention, listening for resolutions that apply widely to the class—these resolutions I would prepare to share. If the resolutions children talk about don't seem developed enough to actually have traction in readers' lives, you may want to provide more scaffolding for children. For example, you might say, "You are on such a smart track when you say you want to be a better reader. What do you think are some specific ways you could do that?"

My goal is to take my book I'm reading with me wherever I go so when I'm on the subway, I'll have my book.

My goal is to find text I love because then I'll want to read. I'll ask my friends about texts they really like.

I'm going to read as many just right books as I can.

Figures II-1, II-2, and II-3

These students are making goals and plans that reflect the conversations occurring in their classroom.

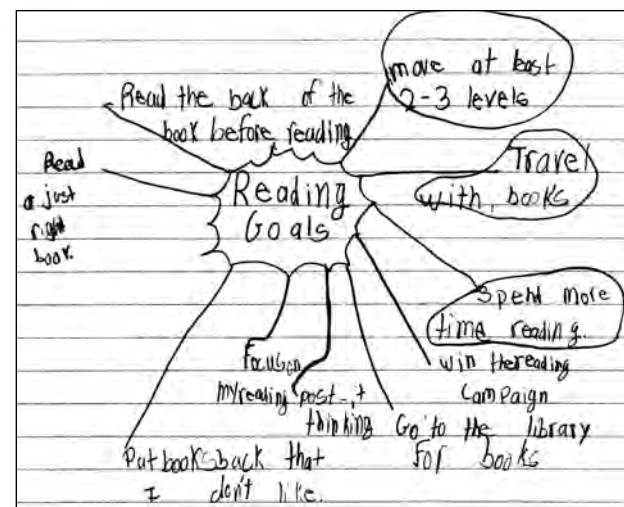


Figure II-4

In some classrooms, students made webs and lists of their goals. The important thing is to rally them around the important work of authoring their own reading lives.

LINK

Send children off to resume reading. Ask them to flag sections in their books that they particularly like.

“So, as you will every day, today you’ll have time to read. I know each of you used a Post-it note as a bookmark. Please leave that marker on the page where you *begin* reading today, because later you’ll calculate how many pages you read in a day.

“Keep your resolution and ideas about how to make reading the best it can be in mind, today and from now on. You are in charge of your own reading, so make wise decisions!

“You will also see that I left some special flag-like Post-it notes in your bin of books. As you read today, would you flag places in your book that you especially like—just two or three places.

“Tables 2 and 3, you can go back to your tables and get started reading.” As the children settled into their work, I chronicled what I saw. “Let’s watch and see if these readers immediately get their books from the bin and read. Look, Josh is already looking for a page he can flag! Sam’s reading, but he’s got some of those Post-its ready at his side. Wow, look at Table 2. The whole table full of kids is already reading!”

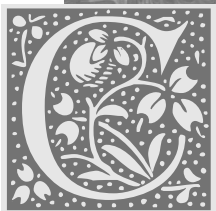
Then I signaled that Tables 4 and 5 could get started. “I can’t wait to watch you settle into reading.” When several children didn’t move efficiently to their reading spots, I walked over to them and quietly said, “Let’s not waste another second of reading time. You’ve had enough time to settle. Please take your book out and begin reading.” As soon as readers at Tables 4 and 5 were seated, I signaled for the children still remaining on the rug to move to their reading spots.

During the share session at the end of today’s workshop, children will be asked to fill out the first entry in their reading logs, so it will be important for them to maintain a record of the page on which they started reading. If you notice some children neglect to leave their Post-it on the page where today’s reading began, remind them to do so as you confer.

Notice that in today’s link, you send children off to read. You don’t send them off to do the work you demonstrated in today’s minilesson—although of course that work now becomes part of their repertoire. But your minilesson is not an assignment channeling children toward the work of the day. The content you teach in one day’s minilesson needs to last a lifetime.

There is a saying: “What you expect, inspect.” Your children will learn to read from reading itself. So, you need to pay attention to kids actually doing the work entailed in reading.

You’ll notice that I pay a lot of attention to transitions. This is temporary. A month from now, the minilesson will end with a send off: “Off you go!” But for now, I’m apt to send children from the meeting area to independent work, one table at a time, and to do this sort of sportscaster talk, naming what I see children doing as they move from the meeting to independent reading. I definitely do not want children to return to their seats and sit idly until I’m able to give each child a personalized jump start. In classrooms where teachers take the time to teach children how to get themselves quickly to their independent reading, this transition can take a minute or two. In other cases, transitions can take away ten minutes of precious reading time. So don’t hesitate to convey very clear expectations—go so far as to model how a reader walks quickly and directly from the reading area to his or her seat.



CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

Learn Tips for Making Your Assessments as Efficient as Possible

You will need to decide whether you will spend another day rallying children's enthusiasm for building a reading life or whether you can now shift toward a focus on assessment. If you decide on the former course, you might ask children to read aloud favorite passages (they will have flagged these) and then use this as a way to talk up each child's identity as a reader. "So you're the kind of reader who appreciates. . . ." Meanwhile, you can note the child's ability to read a text at that level. That is, if you see a child reading a level T text with gusto, then a day from now, when you take running records of this child's reading, you'll know to start at or beyond that level.

In his book, *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers*, Richard Allington presents research that demonstrates that when children do not have the opportunity to read lots and lots of books with ease, their reading suffers in dramatic ways. Once you have read those studies, I expect you'll feel as urgently as I do that you need to conduct quick assessments so that you can expeditiously match children to books they can read with at least 96% accuracy, fluency, and comprehen-

sion. Many children lose ground dramatically during a summer without reading. You can't afford for them to continue that downward slope once the school year has begun.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT

Readers Talk About Our Goals

"Readers," I said, in a voice that was intended not as a showstopper, but as a voice-over, accompanying their work, "in two minutes, we'll stop to talk. You will need to have flagged a passage you love." After another minute or two, I said, "Right now, find someone beside you with whom you can talk. Shake hands—don't leave anyone out." They did this as a way of making the links official, and I gestured for a few children who would otherwise have been left out to become triads.

"Each of you should have been checking in with yourself today as you read, thinking, 'How is reading time going for me today? What can I do to make reading time as good as it can be?'"

"Will one of you tell the other how reading has been going and what you have done to make it as good as it can be?"

As children talked with each other, I said, over them, "When you talk with a friend, make sure you lean across your desks so the other person can actually hear you, and make sure you don't mumble into your collar. These need to be real conversations."

Children talked for just a minute or two. "I know you both may not yet have had a chance to share—that's okay. Some days, one person will talk, other days, another will." I noticed some children were still talking, so I paused. "Eyes up here." Once the class was absolutely silent, I continued, "I love the way you are making decisions so that reading works for you—
continued on next page

Aim to assess all your children within the next week. That timetable may take your breath away, and yes, it is possible to proceed more slowly, but you should feel very uncomfortable if your plan is that your children will spend weeks holding books they can't read.

In *A Guide to the Reading Workshop*, I outline a streamlined way to conduct initial assessments. Essentially, you'll need to rely on scores from standardized tests, on data from your children's reading during the previous year, and on your quick assessments done as children read from table book baskets to estimate the approximate level of text difficulty that each child can handle. If the child can read the passage with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, progress up levels until the child reads a passage that is too hard, at which point you'll examine the child's "miscues" to glean what it is that the child can and can't do at the too-hard level.

Use Every Available Minute and Person to Help Conduct Initial Assessments

Try to assess at least five children a day so that within just over a week, each of your children will be reading from his or her own bin of just-right books, sharing that bin with a matched partner. This is an ambitious goal, but it is possible.

It helps to start with the decision that your assessments needn't be perfect. Although you will eventually want to secure detailed information about children, especially your strugglers, for now you need to conduct initial assessments that are designed to get every child in the class reading books that are in the ballpark of just right for that child.

Use every minute and every spare set of hands to make sure your kids are assessed immediately. Ideally, your school has a reading specialist who can help teachers with assessments. If that's not the case, then consider other professionals. If your school works with student teachers, you could ask the university to teach methods of assessing readers early on in their methods courses so student teachers arrive with experience conducting and analyzing running records. If the university is not prepared to do this, then you might set up training sessions for student teachers within (or across) schools in your district. In many schools, music, art, and science classes may not yet have been launched, and ESL and speech teachers may not yet have their full complement of children. Ideally the principal will call, "All hands on deck," and recruit folks to join in the emergency effort to get all children's reading off to the strongest possible start. This plan may sound as if it imposes a heavy load on your colleagues; that is true, but at the same time, the school will be sending the message that all teachers are reading teachers.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT

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because after all, *you are the author of your reading life*. You are the boss of your life. If the book you are reading is too hard for you—you don't have to come and ask me if you can switch. No way—you are the author of your reading life! And if you want to reread the funny parts of your book—do you need to raise your hand and ask? Of course not. Because *you are the author of your reading life*, you will make these decisions.

"Are you ready to do something that I absolutely love doing as a reader?" They nodded. "I absolutely love turning to my reading friend, someone who truly cares about reading as much as I do, and saying, 'Listen to this amazing part of my book.' Then I read that part to my friend, and we talk about it. (When we have time it is especially fun to then *reread* the part in an even better way, this time reading to bring out the coolness—the funniness, or the excitement, or the beauty.) Right now, will one of you go to a part you have flagged and

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Consider assessing outside the regular school day. Can you bring in a couple of children before school or during lunch? Perhaps children from three classes can convene in the auditorium for a giant chorus practice, and the teachers from those classes can use that time to assess, assess, assess. Perhaps there can be a midday recess for this first week of school, with a handful of children from each class staying in each day for intensive assessments. All of these trade-offs will be worthwhile ones.

In some schools, at least some children in each classroom will be asked to come to school during the week or two before the year begins for an orientation session. As part of these sessions, the reading specialist or literacy coach or an especially skilled classroom teacher conducts an assessment. This, then, means that everyone can be assured that at least those children are well-matched to books and will travel an appropriate course. Hopefully, if a few children enter the school year already matched to books, the teacher can use these

children as gauges. If a child reads as well as one who has been assessed as reading *Magic Treehouse* books and other level M books, then that other child, too, will probably be reading a similar level.

Bring a Cluster of Children to You and Assess One Child While Others Are "On Deck"

The reading workshop itself can provide many opportunities to assess. In *A Guide to the Reading Workshop*, I suggest that for just a week or two (no longer), you may want to seat children so that those who seem to be somewhat similar to each other as readers are clustered at a table with a basket full of books that you suspect will either be just right or too easy for them. Include a few books that are harder, as well. As you move

among these children and observe them working with books that are at similar levels (with a few noted exceptions), you'll find that, even before you take each child aside for a more formal assessment, you'll be able to ascertain each child's relative abilities reading those books. This will help you hone in on each child's just-right reading level. That is, although you will have seated children at a particular table because data suggests they'll probably be similar, you'll find one who seems notably stronger, or one who is struggling much more. Although the judgments you'll be making will be extremely crude, don't hesitate to make observations such as these and to use them to inform your work with running records. Doing so will streamline your formal assessments, saving time and angst for everyone.

When you are ready to conduct formal assessments, I strongly recommend that you bring three or four children (who you believe will be reading at the same level) to the place where you'll be doing this assessment. If you bring one child alone, then you need to tell that one child what you'll do, then work with him, then send him back to his seat, get another child, wait while the child makes her way to your area, explain what you will do all over again, and so forth. More time than you realize can be consumed with the logistics. If you bring a cluster of children to your area, then you can explain what you'll be doing just once to the whole cluster of children, and then steer three children to turn their backs to you and to read their independent books, while meanwhile, you work one-to-one with a child who reads the assessment passage aloud.

I recommend that you start, always, by asking the child to read a passage that you believe will be a bit easy. It is depressing for a child to begin with a too-hard text and to regress down levels toward easier and still-easier texts. If, as the child reads along, you notice the child struggling with several words, then do not wait before intervening to say, "Thanks.

Can we try something different now?" If the child generally reads correctly, without becoming derailed by more than a few unfamiliar words, then you'll want to take great care to notice the child's fluency. Does it sound as if the child is talking? It should. If it is apparent that the passage is *way* too easy, you could pause midway and say, "Thanks. Can we try another passage?"

Once the first child has read 100 words aloud to you while you have recorded the child's miscues (more on this in a minute), the child can shift toward reading the remaining portion of the selection silently (although, in an ideal world the child would actually read the *first* half of the passage silently and the *last* half aloud). Meanwhile, you can tap the shoulder of a second child and get that child started reading what will presumably be the same passage. Now you will record what this second child does with the first 100 words, just as you did with the first child, only on

another piece of paper. By the time the second child passes the 100-word mark, you should see the first child has finished up reading the entire passage, and so you can return to the first child, this time asking comprehension questions. In this way, you can assess two children at one time, while another two are waiting in the wings.

You may worry that the children could possibly overhear each other's reading, but frankly, if you turn children so their backs are to you and to the child who is reading aloud and if you get those children who are not being assessed at the moment immersed in their chapter books, very few will care to listen to a friend's reading. Even if they *do* glean a word or two, this won't allow them to fake being able to read something that they can't read.

The advantage of asking several children to read texts that are in the same range is that *your* preparations for the day's assessment work will be much easier. *You* need only read and think about a couple of passages.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT

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read it aloud. Don't read more than, say, two paragraphs. Then will the two of you talk about what makes that part good? If you have time, reread that part really, really well."

After a bit, I said, "It is time to return to silent reading. You have already read for fifteen minutes. Notice how many pages you read in that time. Now, you'll have another fifteen minutes for reading. If you read the same number of pages, what page will you stop on? Mark that part with one more Post-it note, sort of as a goal post. You know how some athletes run every day, pushing themselves to run faster and farther, and that way they strengthen their muscles? Readers sometimes do the same thing, pushing ourselves to read a bit more. Go ahead and get started."

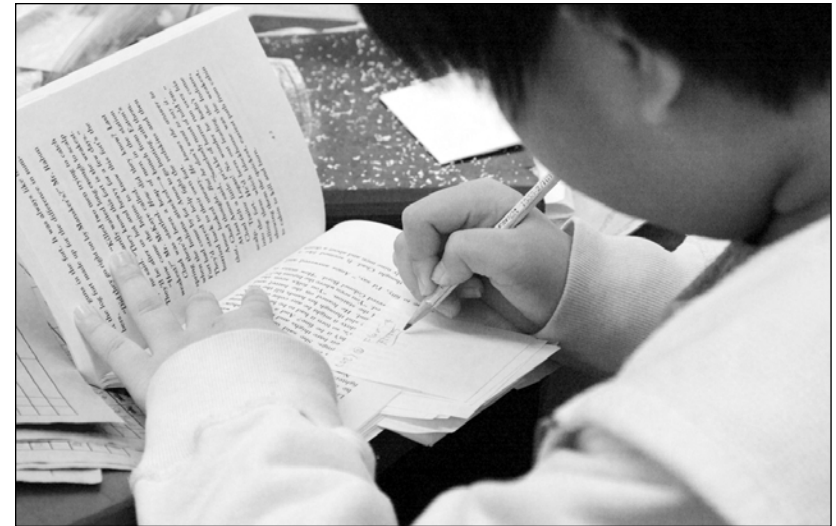


Then, too, watching roughly similar children handle the same passage differently will help you discriminate among the reading abilities and imagine the partnerships you'll soon establish.

Corners You Can't Cut: Analyze Miscues as the Child Reads a Slightly Too-Hard Text

A word of caution: Often you'll find that there is not a lot to record. The child's reading may well be practically flawless. You may be tempted to declare that you have found the child's just-right level. But remember, you can't determine a child's just-right level without determining the ceiling for that child. So if the child reads one level flawlessly, you need to move to a higher level, and even perhaps to a third level, progressing until the child encounters a text that is too hard—and at that point, you *will* find yourself recording ways the child struggles. That is, if there is not a lot to record, you need to progress to higher reading levels so that you reach a place where the reader does make a significant number of mistakes. Only then will you be able to analyze the sources of information that children do and do not draw upon when reading slightly too-hard texts. This knowledge will help you know how to help the reader's process.

It is always eye-opening to notice what the child does and does not do when he or she is reading a text that is too hard, so this final running



record will probably reveal the most to you. It will show you not only that this level is beyond the child's reach, but it'll also show you what falls apart first for this child. The child's miscues will act as windows, helping you to see what the child holds onto, and lets go of, once the child's reading begins to break down. Until the child makes miscues, you won't be able to see whether this is a reader who holds onto *meaning* at all costs, generating words that make sense but do not match the actual letters on the page, or whether this is a child who holds onto the *visual* aspects of reading, diligently saying the sounds of the letters but letting go of meaning. You need to know what it is that each of your readers does and does not do when a text becomes hard if you are going to help each reader develop the capacities needed to tackle those just-too-hard texts.

You will need to make a decision whether, once you have assessed children, you want to channel the children whom you have assessed to select a stash of just-right books from the classroom library or whether for now, you'll simply want them to make good selections from those tabletop baskets, saving the opening of the library (Session VIII) for when the whole class has been assessed.





TEACHING SHARE

Readers Keep Records and Research the Ways Our Reading Changes

Distribute pocket folders containing blank reading logs, and ask children to record, study, and talk together about their data.

“Readers, you have now read for another fifteen minutes—so you’ve read a half hour in all. Will you use a new Post-it as a bookmark. Bring your book and a pen with you, and come to the meeting area. Tables 1, 2, and 3, come quickly please. The rest of you get ready to join us in a minute.” Once half of the class had settled in the meeting area, I signaled for the other readers to assemble.

“Class, I’m giving each of you a pocket folder, entitled “My Reading Life.” This is going to be *your* folder to hold the tools that will help you study your reading life—what’s working, what’s not working, how you can make it the best it can be. This isn’t a way for me to keep track of you; it’s a place for you to be honest about your reading, a tool to help you grow as a reader and to make your reading life your own. This folder has a packet of blank reading logs—I’ll tell you about this in a moment—and blank sheets, which will be used to collect your jottings and sketches. You will keep this “My Reading Life” folder the whole year—using it in class and then bringing it home every night—and it’s important that you have it with you here every day.

“Let’s open up our folders to the reading logs.” I searched the rug to see that every reader’s packet of reading logs was on his or her lap. “Eyes, please.” I waited. “Your log looks just like a packet of paper, but this will be the single most important paper that each one of you will have this year. You’ll end up with about thirty sheets like this one. These will allow you to keep track of and to study your reading.

COACHING TIPS



A group of teachers piloted this draft of these units of study. At the end of the year, when they reflected back on what had worked particularly well, they all spoke of the importance of the logs, and especially of helping children regard these as tools for self-reflection. They emphasized that helping children become invested in their logs became a concrete way for children to become invested in the idea that they were the authors of their reading lives and that their choices and decisions mattered.

You’ll no doubt think this speech about reading logs is a bit over the top, but frankly, you have a lot of un-teaching as well as teaching to do. Chances are very good that last year’s teaching began the year insisting that children log their reading, and then these logs fizzled out. Those logs will have ended up scattered here and there, half-done. They may have been a travesty anyhow, with children recording what they believed the teacher wanted to see, not the truth. You can reverse these habits around logs, but you won’t do so unless you realize that your teaching needs to help kids understand that this will be a new year.

At the celebration on the last day of this unit of study, you can suggest children move many of the items they have collected in these folders into a reading notebook that you will give them at that time. These folders will, at that point, become only the container for the child’s ongoing collection of logs. Don’t tell this to the child—but if you’d considered bypassing the idea of pocket folders, know that decision will affect the celebration.

“Let’s fill in the first entry on your log together. Write today’s date (I wrote it on the white board) and record an *S* because we are reading in school (not an *H* for home). Write the title of the book you have been reading and the author—write two titles and authors if you finished one book and started another, and if you aren’t sure of something leave it blank for now. Then look for the color dot on the spine of your book and record that color in the square on your chart marked *Level*. We’ll talk about levels later. Record, too, the page and time at which you started and finished reading—I’ll write today’s start and finish times on the board so you can just copy them. Use your Post-it notes to figure out the page on which you started reading today and the page on which you finished reading. [Fig. II-5]

Teachers, it’s important to emphasize that these logs are tools for self-reflection. It is very easy for children to feel as if these are the teacher’s way of checking up on them, and of course the great risk is that children will start fabricating these logs, recording whatever they think you want to hear. Because children will keep the logs out on their desks every day as they read, it won’t be easy for them to exaggerate the amount of reading they do at home. If they exaggerate the number of pages they read at home, then during the independent reading workshop, they will need to jump ahead in their reading, leaving great gaps in the text. You’ll want to make sure the logs are out while children read, and that you look at them, to make them trustworthy.

Date	School/Home	Level	CHECK OFF THE NUMBER OF BOOKS YOU READ TODAY	Time Begin	Time End	How did you feel about reading today
9-10	School	J		1:30	2:00	

Date	School/Home	Title	Level	Page Begin	Page End	Minutes Read	Rating
09-10	S	Stone Fox	P	1	30	20	4

Figure II-5
Children reading books leveled A–J will often read several books during one day’s workshop, so listing titles and authors for each may be too time-consuming.

“Today, you read for thirty minutes, so record that in the Total Time column. Here’s the important thing. When you have finished logging your reading, study your chart. Do some math with your data. Think about how much you read in the first fifteen minutes—it won’t be on the chart, but you have a Post-it note in the book to show that—and how much you read in the second fifteen minutes. Was one more or less than the other—and why might that have been the case? In a minute, I’m going to ask you to share what you observe about yourself with someone sitting nearby. For now, just study your log.” After a minute of silence, I said, “Thumbs up if you noticed something,” and when half the class indicated they’d noticed something, I said, “Tell someone near you what you saw.” [Fig. II-6]

Date	H or S	Title of Book	Author	Time Started	Time Stopped	Total Time	Page started	Page Ended	Total Pages	Genre	Color
9-4	S	Little Lefty	Matt Christopher	10:05	10:30	25	3	41	38	FICA	G
9-4	H	Little Lefty	Matt Christopher	4:46	5:10	26	41	50	39	FICA	G
9-5	S	Little Lefty	Matt Christopher	10:16	10:41	26	51	131	50	FICA	G

Figure II-6
Of course, the real treat is the opportunity to put a log smack in the center of a reading conference.

I listened in as Grace said to Izzy, “I noticed that I read twenty-six pages in thirty minutes. That is just about one page a minute. Wow, I’m pretty fast, aren’t I?” She smiled, clearly pleased with herself.

As children talked with each other, I voiced over, “Wow! Some of you are coming to discoveries about how much of a page you tend to read in a minute! Some of you are noticing differences between how much you read today and how much you usually read. Because you are the author of your reading life, you are going to study the records you keep across the whole year.”

Channel children to begin carrying books between home and school, recording home reading on their logs. Ask them to make and sketch a reading place at home.

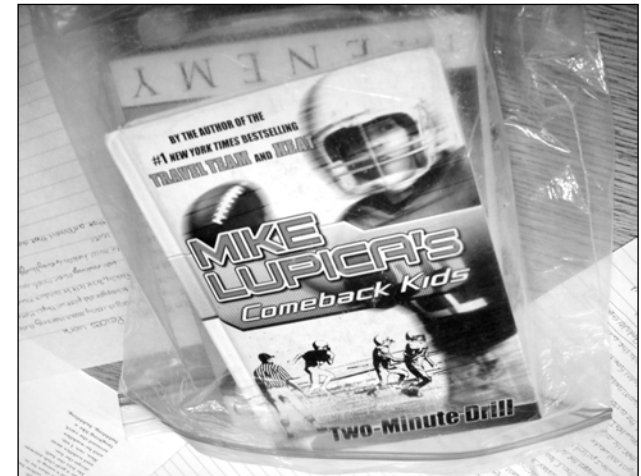
“Class, I’m going to give each of you a big plastic bag so you can take the book you were reading today home and continue reading it tonight. Put your reading folder with the logs right in this baggie and tonight be sure you record your start and finish times, and the number of pages read. It will be really interesting to see whether you read more at home or at school, won’t it be?”



“One more thing. Readers, when you read tonight, will you keep in mind that readers don’t just read books. We author lives in which reading matters. And one way to do that is to think about how you can use what you know about yourself as a reader to make sure that you make wise decisions. Yesterday, some of you wrote that you realize you need quiet places to read—so tonight, when you are reading, find yourself a quiet reading place. You might have to move a lamp, or to establish some family rules like ‘No Bothering Me When I . . .’

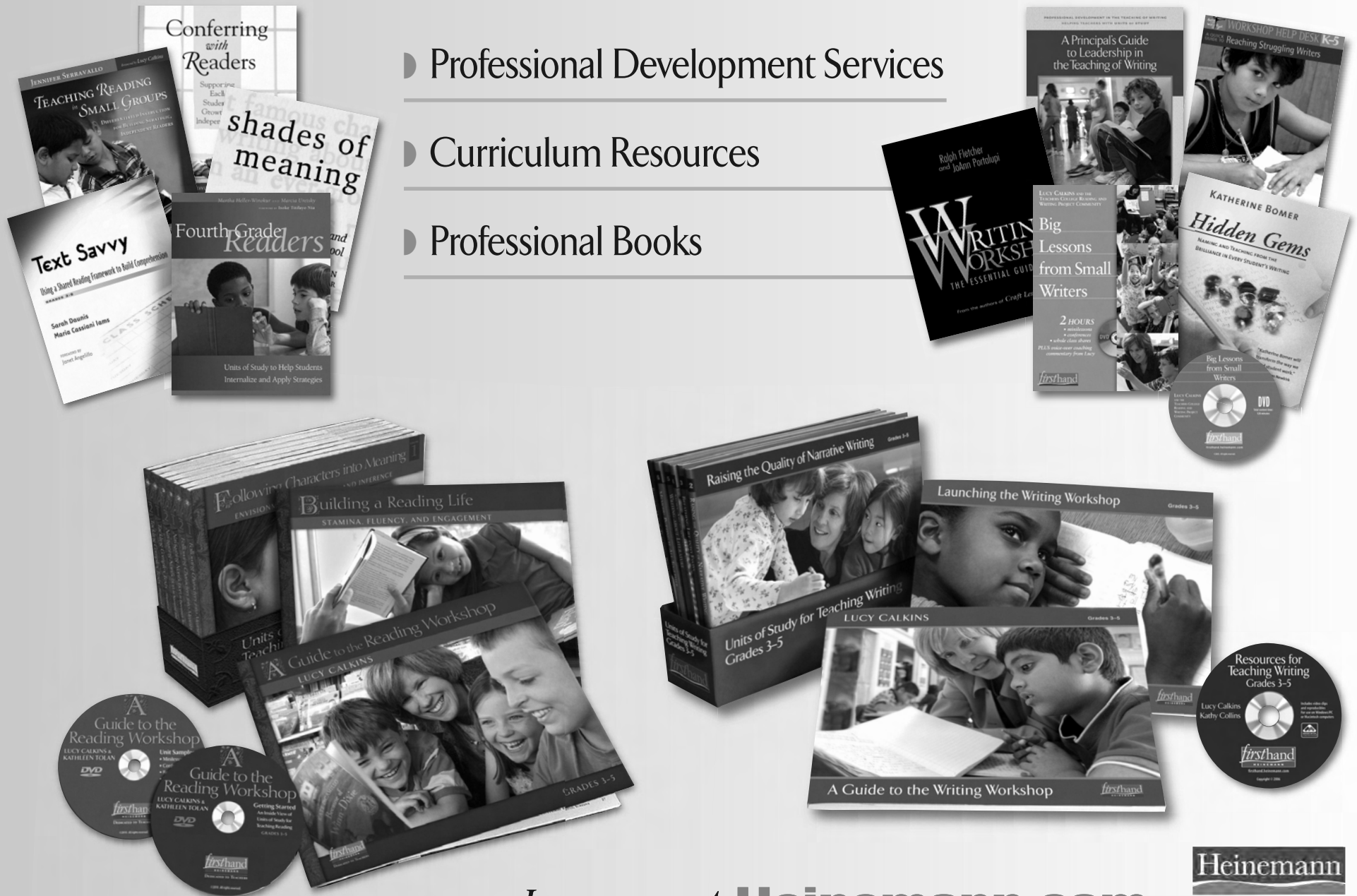
“Would each of you be willing to sketch a picture of yourself reading tonight and show in the picture what you do to make reading work for you? Bring that sketch, your reading log, and your reading book with you to the meeting area tomorrow. You’ll take your book baggie home every night, because you’ll want to be reading at home every night.”

Not only do I want children to conceive of themselves as avid readers at home as well as at school, but I want these conceptions to become the reading roles and identities that children take up for themselves. I make a big deal out of remembering to bring book baggies home and back to school every day. My dramatic reactions to children who forget are sure to be effective reminders for the future.



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