Scarsdale Elementary Schools

Balanced Literacy

inside front cover
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Elements of a Balanced Approach to Literacy Instruction

Introduction

The development of the Balanced Literacy Guide has been a complex and time consuming venture, but it is certainly well worth the effort. The Guide will be an essential element in shaping Language Arts instruction in Scarsdale. It provides a clear definition of approach and preferred methodology, with numerous examples to support that information. It is teacher friendly and based upon, not only what is considered current best practice, but also on the years of experience of Scarsdale's teachers.

The Guide did not spring forth, fully formed as did Athena from the head of Zeus. Its creation resembled more the labors of Sisyphus. As a penance, Sisyphus was forced to roll a giant stone uphill every day, only to see it roll down the hill at the end of the day * a never-ending task. At times the development and refinement of the Balanced Literacy Guide seemed like such a task, yet, such was the dedication of the Balanced Literacy Guide subcommittee, that they worked relentlessly for the entire school year to produce, edit and refine this Guide. Special thanks to those subcommittee members: Paula Bautista, Dylan Cadalzo, Trent DeBerry, Penny Hamlet, Carol Houseknecht, Christie Johnson, Deb Krisanda, Chrystal Lambert, Lorella Lamonaca, Lorraine Mannarino, Kate Marshall, Meghan Meyer, Amy Ogden, Ann Raimondi, Kim Theall and Maria Stile for their never-ending work. Thanks also to the writing team of Ellen Anders, Penny Hamlet, JoAnn Hindley, Carol Houseknecht, Cindy Sansone and Jim Sullivan for their work in making concepts appear understandable in print. But thanks must spread even further, from appreciation of the leadership and vision provided by Jim Sullivan, Helping Teacher and Paul Folkemer, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, to the input provided by the entire membership of the English Committee and in fact to the responses provided by many of the Elementary teachers in the District as the drafts took shape.

Sisyphus faithfully continued to perform his relentless task and eventually began to find joy in his daily work. May we all find joy in the teaching of Language Arts and may that never-ending task be made easier by the counsel of those who composed the Balanced Literacy Guide.

Gerry Young
Editor
August, 2006

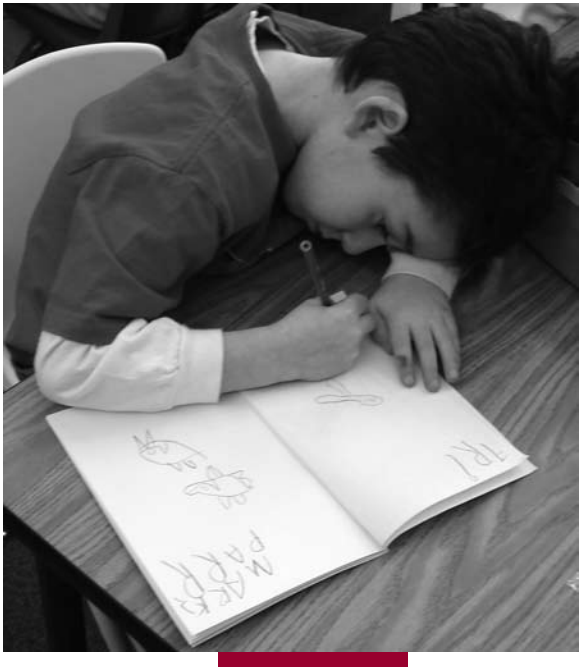
Table of Contents

Elements Of Balanced Literacy

Elements Of Reading Instruction

add note re bibliography and what is happening to this online

Elements Of Balanced Literacy




IN CONGRESS
The unanimous Declaration

Elements of Balanced Literacy

Overview

A balanced literacy approach focuses on two essential areas: reading and writing. This approach engages children in a variety of authentic reading and writing experiences… It benefits students in many ways: students develop a broad range of reading and writing abilities; both focused instruction and independent work are valued so there is a better chance to meet the needs of a diverse group of students; students learn basic information and skills but they also develop strategies that will help them apply their knowledge in a variety of reading and writing contexts; there is an emphasis on comprehension, which is the goal of all reading.

Pinnell, 2000

Literature is the mainstay of a balanced literacy approach. Literature includes fiction and nonfiction and encompasses content areas. Reading and writing are not compartmentalized, but rather combined to support student learning. Instruction takes place in whole-class, small-group and individual settings. The teacher continually demonstrates and models skills and strategies through mini-lessons.

Effective instruction involves:

- including the components of a balanced literacy approach on a daily basis with time for students to practice skills and strategies
- explicit instruction woven through the components of the balanced reading and writing program
- ongoing assessment and evaluation to monitor student progress

From grade to grade and from classroom to classroom, differences exist in the management of reading and writing instruction; however, the components of a balanced literacy approach should remain the same and include:

Elements of Reading Instruction

- Read Aloud
- Shared Reading
- Guided Reading
- Literature Study
- Independent Reading
- Word Study: Phonological Awareness/Phonics/Word Analysis

Elements of Writing Instruction

- Shared Writing
- Interactive Writing
- Guided Writing
- Independent Writing
- Word Study: Phonics/Spelling/Grammar/Punctuation

Explicit instruction is essential to ensure the development of effective reading and writing skills. By identifying the strategies and the skills used in the context of reading and writing, and then modeling them for students, the teacher helps students develop a clear understanding of how to use those strategies and skills. Explicit instruction in reading and writing is offered through mini-lessons, teacher modeling and thinking aloud, discussions, individual and group conferences.

Literacy instruction should be based on assessment information. It informs good teaching and documents individual learning throughout the year. Literacy lessons are best taught every day during blocks of uninterrupted time. These lessons should include intensive amounts of reading and writing. Instruction should include attention to letters and words and how they work. Phonics and word study is incorporated into the program. In addition, classrooms need to be equipped with appropriate materials and resources to meet the diverse strengths and needs of children.

Assessment and evaluation of student performance and instructional

practices should be done on an ongoing basis. Student progress should be monitored through running records, miscue analysis, anecdotal records, skill and strategy checklists, reading and writing inventories, student work samples, audio or videotapes of student performance, student self-assessments and other formal or informal, reading/writing assessment tools. Assessment should guide instruction.

Reading Instruction

Our model of reading instruction develops good literacy habits in students by engaging them in meaningful literacy activities. Students develop their reading skills and comprehension by means of these elements, which are the essential parts of a balanced literacy approach:

Read Aloud

Reading aloud to children is a key component in any balanced reading program. A daily Read Aloud time allows teachers and students to enjoy good literature together. Reading stories aloud, listening to fiction and non-fiction literature, helps readers develop an awareness of the rhythm of the language, an appreciation of literature and provides a model for both decoding and comprehension strategies.

We read to children for all the same reasons we talk with children: to reassure, to entertain, to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity and to inspire. Reading aloud allows children to associate reading with pleasure, creates background knowledge and provides a reading role model. Hearing books read aloud improves a child's ability to listen for periods of time and increases attention span. It allows children to interact with the reading, to make connections with personal experiences, and it extends student knowledge and understanding.

Not only do children hear fluent oral reading, but also reading aloud gives us all the opportunity to share our thoughts and imaginings, our reading habits and our values. Children begin to expand their imagination. Language acquisition increases when children hear stories being read with ex-

pression and dramatic flair. Reading aloud motivates children to want to select good literature on their own. Students come to understand that the time set aside for read aloud is important. Respectful listening behaviors can be established. By establishing this reading community as we engage children in read aloud, we help them develop a love of books and an awareness of the value of being a reader.

Calkins, 2000

Shared Reading

Shared Reading is an interactive reading experience that occurs when children join in the reading of a big book or other enlarged text. It is guided by a teacher or other experienced reader. The reading level of the book must be suitable for the children to be able to join with the group in reading. The reading process and the use of reading strategies are demonstrated through Shared Reading. The experience is an enjoyable one, shared by the children. Shared Reading provides excellent opportunities to demonstrate concepts about print and features of books and writing, to model thinking aloud strategies and additional comprehension strategies. An important reason for conducting Shared Reading is that children can learn to perceive themselves as readers in a risk-free environment and to enjoy the reading experience.

One criterion for shared book selection is that the book have the possibility of multiple readings for enjoyment. Initially, it will be used to model strategies that good readers use. In subsequent readings, when the children feel successful at reading the book, more specific skills at varying levels can be addressed (e.g. return sweep, where to start reading, how to use punctuation and how to recognize dialogue.)

During Shared Reading, children should be gathered in an inviting area close to the book or chart so that they can feel a sense of shared community. The book should be placed on a chart or easel so that the children can see it easily. The teacher should use a pointer to guide the reading, pointing to the words as they are read. It is imperative

that the reading be done with phrased fluency when using a pointer, since there is the tendency to read word by word. This will model the way that children should read.

Guided Reading

The purpose of Guided Reading is for the teacher to support the children in reading materials they cannot read totally independently. This may be done individually or with a small group (no more than six) to support understanding of any aspect of reading. Guided Reading provides the necessary opportunity for teachers to teach reading strategies explicitly at the students' individual level. The specific instruction is based on observations of what the child can or cannot do to construct meaning. Teachers reinforce strategies and define the behaviors that good readers use, as the students read. Students must know what they are doing well and what they need to learn in order to mature as readers. The more students can articulate their strengths and their goals, the more proficient they will become at reading. In order for individual student goals to be set, teachers need to observe and confer with the readers. Observations of students during Guided Reading, individual reading conferences and running records help teachers to determine both student strengths and what they still need to learn.

Guided Reading groups should be fluid, changing whenever warranted.

Teachers organize Guided Reading groups according to specific student needs and a specific level of text with which students can work toward meeting their individual needs. Groups may be formed by reading level or by the need for specific skill instruction. Guided Reading groups should be fluid, changing whenever warranted. Continual assessment and observation of readers is necessary to keep the groupings flexible. Children may join or leave groups as necessary.

Literature Study

Literature study is an element of readers' workshop wherein small groups of students come together to discuss the same story, poem, article, or book. These conversations about literature with other students broaden and deepen thinking about texts. Discussions emerge from students' personal responses to the text and may focus on aspects such as: character, events, genre, author's writing style, and literacy techniques. Literature study is an opportunity for students to share their questions, insights, and responses to a given text.

Independent Reading

Children make great contributions to their own learning when they are given some control and ownership of the reading process. Independent Reading is a time when students self-select and read appropriate books on their own. Independent Reading provides an opportunity to apply strategies that are introduced and taught during teacher read alouds, shared reading, and guided reading. When materials are appropriate and students can read independently, they become confident, motivated and enthusiastic about their ability to read.

The self-selection process of Independent Reading places the responsibility for choosing books in the hands of the student. This teaches them that they have the ability to choose their own reading materials and that reading independently is a valuable and important activity. Students are taught to choose "just right" books, i.e. material that is at their independent reading level. Independent means 95% to 100% accuracy as defined by running records. These materials should be able to be read without teacher support. They must be encouraged to select a variety of literary forms. It is at the independent level that comprehension, vocabulary extension and fluency are improved.

Word Study

During reading, Word Study focuses on both decoding and deriving meaning from a text. Phonics instruction is the foundation of

Word Study. Good phonics instruction develops phonemic awareness, sound-symbol correspondence and provides practice in segmenting, blending and syllabication. Word Study builds on that foundation and teaches students to examine words to discover the regularities, patterns and conventions of English orthography and morphology which are needed to read and spell. Word Study also increases knowledge of word formation – the spelling and meaning of individual words. General knowledge is what we access when we encounter a new word, when we do not know how to spell a word, or when we do not know the meaning of a specific word. The better our knowledge of how words are created, the better we are at decoding an unfamiliar word, spelling it correctly, or guessing the meaning of a word. Whole class word study provides opportunities for investigating our systems and developing a foundation for figuring out unknown words when reading independently.

How do the elements of Reading Instruction work?

Element	Value
Read Aloud The teacher reads aloud to the whole class or small group. A carefully selected body of children's literature is used; the collection contains a variety of genres and represents a diverse society. Favorite texts, selected for special features, are reread many times. K-2 Read Aloud is the primary element for teaching reading comprehension to nonreaders. 3-5 Read aloud at this level involves the teacher reading aloud one text to the entire class. Listening comprehension becomes critical.	**Provides opportunities for:** • reading for enjoyment • modeling of oral reading and comprehension strategies • expanding knowledge of language • building vocabulary • fostering a classroom community of readers • enlarging and encouraging student thinking • discussion of a common text • a resource text to be used for writing and other activities • reading in the content area 3-5 • discussions including character development, theme, author's purpose, point of view, colloquial expressions or figurative language • gathering evidence from the text to support an opinion • broadening knowledge of genre elements • developing critical and analytical thinking • making connections between curricular areas • developing multiple ways of connecting with literature
Shared Reading A learner or group of learners listens and follows along while an expert (teacher or able student) reads with fluency and expression. Text used can be big books, poems, songs, stories, charts, raps, the morning message or student writing. K-2 In primary classrooms, the teacher and students read together, students chiming in when able. For non readers and emergent readers, this is an essential element for teaching decoding and concepts of print skills. 3-5 At the intermediate level, this involves everyone reading the same text at the same time. Non-fiction takes on greater importance at this level. Examples of texts: Time for Kids, National Geographic Explorer, short stories, poems.	**Provides opportunities for:** • a purposeful and enjoyable reading experience • reinforcement of language and word study • immersion of students in rich language without concern for reading level • teaching high-frequency words and conventions of print naturally through repetition and word by word matching • building reading fluency, confidence, and vocabulary • enhancing reading comprehension • creating a body of known texts children can reread and use as resources 

Guided Reading

Guided reading is small-group instruction designed to expand students' ability to process text with understanding and fluency. The group should have similar reading needs and be no larger than 6 children. Based on assessment data, groups should be flexible and change frequently to address the growing needs of students. The duration and frequency of meeting with each group varies depending on the needs of the students and the schedule of the day.

K-2

For pre-emergent and emergent readers, guided reading can provide the opportunity for direct teaching of skills, strategies and word study.

3-5

At this level, Guided Reading involves reading individually or with a small group where the teacher explicitly teaches reading strategies at the level of the individual or group.

Provides opportunities for:

- direct teaching of skills and strategies based on the needs of the students
- discussing vocabulary in the context of the book
- developing reading fluency
- reading many texts in different genres
- explicitly teaching phonics and word study

3-5

- teaching how to navigate and interpret non-fiction texts
- previewing texts before reading, eg. headlines, bold print, illustrations, word boxes, etc.
- using short texts such as poems and short stories

Literature Study

Literature study enables students in heterogeneous groups to engage in extended discussion of an age-appropriate text. Literature study groups are also called book clubs, literature circles, literature discussion groups, or response groups. The teacher's role is to facilitate discussion groups and teach students effective routines for interaction and in-depth discussion.

K-2

Literature study begins to be modeled and explored through small group or whole group read alouds. Students may practice discussing literature in partner reading and small group conversation.

3-5

Literature study involves groups of children reading texts independently and coming together for discussion, facilitated by the teacher.

Provides opportunities for:

- the reader to develop a deeper understanding of a text-self, text-text and text-world connections
- learning about the craft of writing
- discussing significant issues in high quality texts.

3-5

- discussions focused on social issues or themes
- the study of author's craft as a model for writing, i.e. a study of memoir or poetry.

Word Study

Word study in reading focuses on both decoding and deriving meaning in a text. It enables children to learn new vocabulary in context and out of context

K-2

For pre-emergent and emergent readers, word study focuses on decoding and encoding.

3-5

At the intermediate level word study involves the teacher explicitly teaching specific skills and concepts, such as the use of context to derive meaning.

Provides opportunities for:

- developing phonemic awareness
- learning the structural analysis of words
- expanding vocabulary

K-2

- activities that include rhyming, using manipulatives, blending and segmenting sounds, high-frequency words, word families and the structural analysis of words

3-5

- the teaching of word analysis skills, synonyms and antonyms, understanding unfamiliar multi-syllabic words, root words, prefixes and suffixes, multiple meanings, precise word choice.

Writing Instruction

Our model of writing instruction fosters the building of a community of writers by providing students with support, not only from the teacher, but also through collaboration with peers and through independent efforts at writing. This approach provides opportunities for students to write about topics of their own choosing, to experiment with elements of craft and to learn and incorporate techniques of revision and editing, by means of the following elements which are the parts of effective writing instruction:

Shared Writing

Shared Writing or Modeled Writing is an approach in which the teacher and children work together to compose messages and stories. Children provide the ideas and the teacher supports the process as a scribe. The message is usually related to some individual or group experience. The teacher provides full support, modeling and demonstrating the process of putting children's ideas into written language. The text becomes much richer than children might be capable of writing themselves. Finished chart stories remain on display so that children may read them over again independently. Students may illustrate the finished text.

Interactive Writing

During Interactive Writing the teacher works with the class or a small group to create written text together. The group agrees on what to write through discussion and negotiation. In order to produce the written words, students articulate the sounds with the teacher and then write the letters and chunks of words that they hear. The teacher may fill in parts of words or whole words, depending upon the pace of the lesson and the group's stage of writing development.

Interactive Writing is used to create stories, to write poems, to retell favorite literature, to develop recipes, directions and lists. The pieces created by the students become a part of the classroom environment

and are used for reading and rereading. Interactive Writing provides an opportunity for modeling the writing process. The class may use the pieces of writing for Shared Reading or students may enjoy reading them independently.

Guided Writing

Guided Writing allows teachers the opportunity for on-the-spot coaching while children are engaged in the process of writing. When several children have a similar need, the teacher forms a group to address it. Sometimes children have trouble finding a topic to write about. Sometimes they are having trouble correctly using periods or quotation marks. Sometimes they want to try a new genre, but don't know where to start. Whatever the issue, small writing groups help children to acquire strategies and the skills to address them.

Taberski, 2000

Independent Writing

The most crucial aspect of the writing workshop is students working independently on their writing. While the students are writing, the teacher uses the time to confer individually with the student writers. During that conference the teacher notes individual strengths and needs. This assessment for each of the writers in the class will help to determine future instruction at both individual and group levels.

Word Study

Word Study in writing focuses on the development of spelling skills and the study of grammar and punctuation. There should be an extensive range in activities as students move to acquire reading and writing skills throughout the elementary years. Word Study begins with the development of phonetic spelling and continues through learning the structural analysis of words and grammar and applying the rules of punctuation. Spelling is part of this study. Spelling skills should not be developed in isolation. Just as competent readers use many different strategies to read, competent spellers use many strategies to spell unfamiliar words.

How do the Elements of Writing Instruction work?

Element	Value
Shared Writing The teacher and students compose the text together. The teacher writes on chart paper and models important concepts such as how to compose a story, and how to spell words. 3-5 Shared writing can be used to demonstrate how to respond to literature, write letters, take notes in the content area, and revise and edit.	**Provides opportunities for:** • modeling writing in new genres • focusing on letters, words, and sounds • learning about writing • composing familiar text for independent reading • practicing revision and editing skills 3-5 • composing responses to literature • letter writing • composing class charts for author/genre study • composing class lists of reading and writing strategies/techniques • writing poetry as a class • practicing reading strategies such as note-taking, webbing and concept mapping • practicing revision strategies • practicing editing strategies
Interactive Writing Interactive writing is similar to shared writing; however the students sometimes do the writing. K-2 In primary classrooms this activity is often done in small groups due to the wide range of student abilities.	**Provides opportunities for:** • using all of the activities listed in shared writing • developing spelling skills • introducing and reinforcing letter-sound correspondence • learning about writing • composing familiar text for independent reading • group interaction • producing published work
Guided Writing Children learn to write by being actively involved in the writing process. Students plan, draft, revise, edit, and publish their own work in a variety of forms. The teacher guides the student through the process and provides support through mini-lessons and conferences. K-2 In primary classrooms this involves instruction of composition and encoding skills, and coaching students while they are writing, either independently or in small groups.	**Provides opportunities for:** • students to behave like writers • writing for different purposes • writing across the curriculum • communication of thoughts and ideas • authentic use of writing conventions (spelling, punctuation, grammar) • applying the qualities of writing introduced during mini-lessons • creativity 3-5 • conducting mini-lessons on: a) author's craft such as: leads, endings, descriptive language, dialogue, sensory images b) audience and purpose such as: persuasive writing, expository writing, narrative writing c) grammar, spelling, punctuation and other writing conventions • holding teacher and peer writing conferences to guide students through the writing process of prewriting, drafting, editing, revising and publishing

Independent Writing

Independent writing is an opportunity for children to write without teacher intervention or evaluation. The student takes responsibility for his or her own writing. Examples include reading journals, writer's notebooks, and content area observations and connections.

K-2

In primary classrooms this can range from drawing and labeling to composing text.

Provides opportunities for:

- building fluency
- building stamina
- establishing the writing habit
- making personal connections
- promoting critical thinking
- using writing as a natural, pleasurable activity

3-5

- using notebooks to practice a technique introduced through a mini-lesson
- responding to literature
- writing summaries, responses, essays, speeches, presentations, journal entries and note-taking in content areas

Word Study

Word study in writing focuses on development of both spelling skills and knowledge of grammar.

K-2

In primary classrooms this can range from supporting students in the developmental process from phonetic spelling to conventional writing.

3-5

In intermediate classrooms it focuses on the study of words: their spelling, structure, usage as well as the conventions of grammar.

Provides opportunities for:

- teaching explicit spelling skills
- learning the structural analysis of root words, prefixes, suffixes and spelling derivatives
- enhancing understanding of grammatical rules

3-5

- exploring words for the purpose of synthesizing spelling rules e.g. when adding "ed," what are the rules for changing the root word?
- selecting words from their own writing to add to a personal spelling list of words to learn
- replacing words from their writing with more interesting words by using a thesauras
- studying words and word parts (prefixes, suffixes, root words based on their language origin and meaning)
- conducting word sorts based on word parts, parts of speech, or content area meanings
- identifying grammar conventions in everyday reading and applying them to their writing

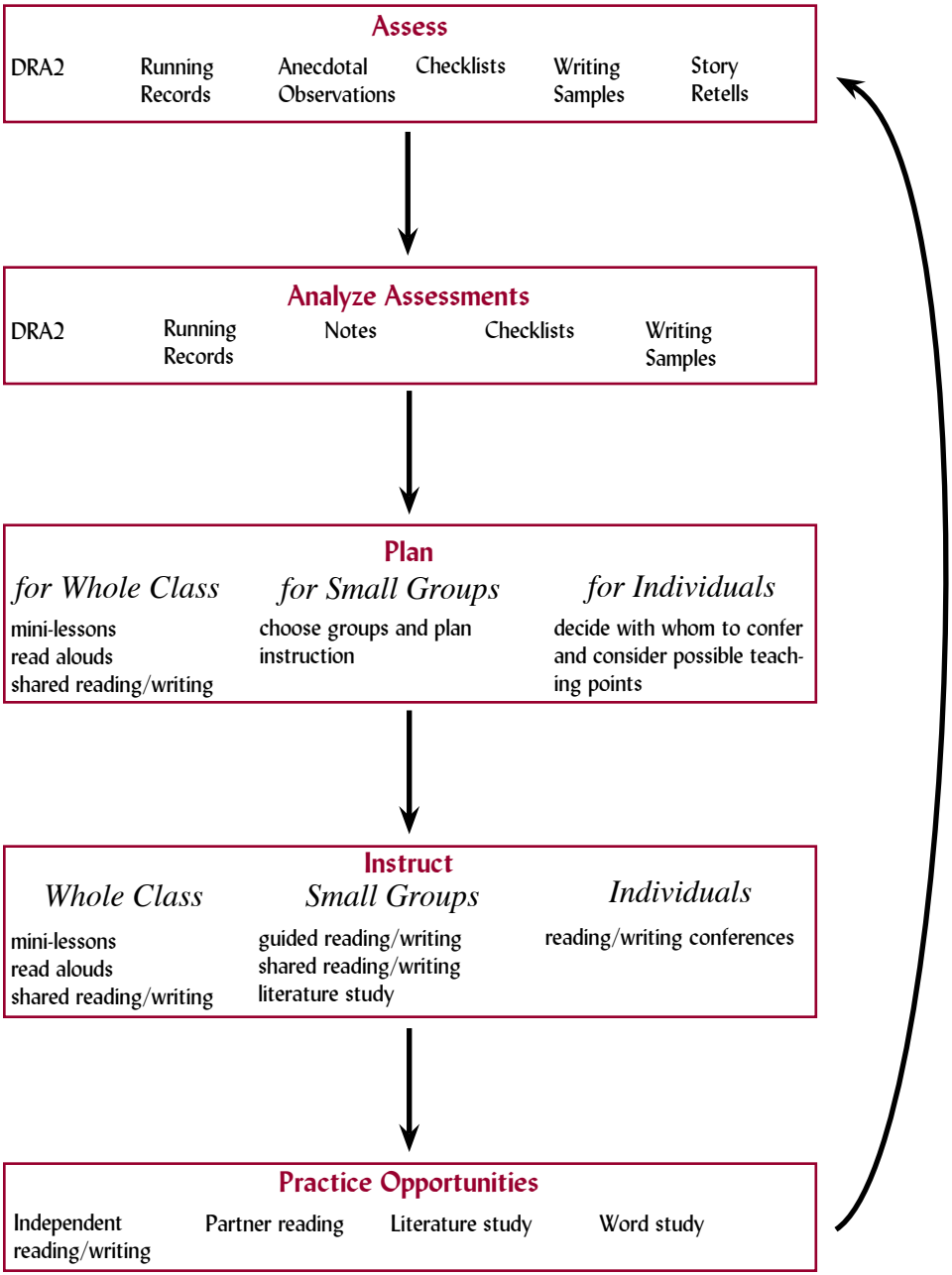
PLANNING FOR INSTRUCTION

"Effective teaching begins with what we know about learners and their literacy levels. Continual observations of what students do as readers and writers provide us with the evidence of their learning. We need to collect, manage, summarize and communicate this information in order to plan successfully for students."

Fountas and Pinnell

Teachers cannot plan without assessment information that indicates what the students can already do. Planning involves choosing appropriate learning objectives for the individual student or group, as well as approaches and materials that will best achieve these objectives. All of this is based on a sound knowledge of each student's skill level. The process of assessing, planning and teaching is cyclical and constant. The flow chart illustrates this process.

Planning Chart



Organizing and evaluating assessment data is key to planning. Using assessment information and observations, the teacher develops goals for each student. Checklists can be especially helpful when organizing information related to students' strengths and needs. A checklist provides an effective and efficient record of the needs for the class. The teacher can effectively target strategies and skills, to group students with similar needs and determine whole class patterns as well. When planning instruction that students will receive in whole-class, small group, or individually, think about:

What skills and strategies do many of the children seem to need at this time?
Which text or texts will support the skill or strategy?
What skills and strategies will need to be taught over a long period of time?
Which skills and strategies will require just a quick mini-lesson or two?

Sibberson and Szymusiak, 2003

Getting Started – Things to Think About

What are the essential comprehension strategies that should be included in reading instruction?

"Probably the most important characteristic of effective readers is that they are active. Readers use all kinds of knowledge to make sense of what the author has to say. This means that they do much more than absorb the author's message; instead, they transact with it."

Rosenblatt, 1978

"The term transaction implies that readers bring understandings and ideas to a text in order to get meaning from it."

Owocki, 2003

"Researchers in the field of reading feel confident that they have identified the most important comprehension strategies."

Pressley, 2001

Below is a brief description of seven strategies that are commonly referred to in the professional literature as facilitating comprehension. Keep in mind that most strategies operate simultaneously during any given reading experience. Readers naturally use these strategies because they need them to make meaning of the text. During lessons, you may focus on one particular strategy in order to highlight it and help your students understand it better. Ultimately, that is what we must help our students learn.

Good readers use these 7 thinking strategies to unlock meaning:

1. ***Create mental images***: Good readers create a wide range of visual, auditory, and other sensory images as they read. They become emotionally involved with what they read.
2. ***Use background knowledge***: Good readers use relevant prior knowledge before, during and after reading to enhance their understanding of what they're reading.
3. ***Ask questions***: Good readers generate questions before, during, and after reading to clarify meaning, make predictions, and focus their attention on what's important.
4. ***Make inferences***: Good readers use their prior knowledge and information from what they read to make predictions, seek answers to questions, draw conclusions, and create interpretations that deepen their understanding of the text.
5. ***Determine what's important in text***: Good readers identify key ideas or themes as they read. They can distinguish between important and unimportant information.
6. ***Synthesize information***: Good readers track their thinking as it evolves during reading, to get the overall meaning.
7. ***Use "fix-up" strategies***: Good readers are aware of when they understand and when they don't. If they have

trouble understanding specific words, phrases, or longer passages, they use a wide range of problem-solving strategies. These include: skipping ahead, rereading, asking questions, summarizing, visualizing, predicting, building background knowledge and using a dictionary.

Hutchins and Zimmermann, 2003

How can we best teach reading comprehension?

Teaching students to read strategically means we show them how to construct meaning when they read. Comprehension strategy instruction is most effective when teachers:

- Model their own use of the strategy repeatedly over time
- Explain their thinking to students when reading, and articulate how that thinking helps them better understand what they read
- Discuss how the strategy helps readers construct meaning
- Make connections between the new strategy and what the reader already knows
- Respond in writing by coding the text according to a particular strategy
- Gradually release responsibility for the use of the strategy to the students
- Build in large amounts of time for actual text reading by the students
- Provide opportunities for guided practice in strategy application
- Show students how the strategy applies to other texts, genres, formats, disciplines, and contexts
- Help students notice how these strategies intersect and work in conjunction with one another
- Take time to observe and confer directly with students about their strategy learning, and keep records of those observations and conferences
- Remind students that the purpose for using the strategy is to better comprehend text

Harvey and Goudvis, 2000

Comprehension strategies are explicitly taught during mini-units that highlight one strategy at a time. These units may last from a week to several weeks depending on the needs of your students. The order in which the strategies are presented is determined by the teacher and may vary from classroom to classroom depending upon observed student needs and previous exposure.

How will I get to know my students as readers?

Initial Reading Conferences – During the first few weeks of school, the teacher should use a variety of approaches to access information about each student's interests, experience with books, attitudes toward reading, letter and sight word knowledge, and general reading ability. The intention of these conferences is to gather information about the child as a reader. Information from initial reading conferences can be combined with the information gathered from previous assignments to provide a broader picture of the child as a reader and to prepare for more standardized reading assessment.

Surveys are often a useful way to gain insight into reading preferences and habits. Samples are provided in the appendix.

A **Primary (K-1) Reading Survey** might include:

- Tell me about one of your favorite books.
- Would you rather read alone, with a buddy, with a group? Why?
- Who reads to you?
- What are your favorite things to do or collect?
- What do you like to learn about?

A **Gr. 2-5 Student Reading Survey** might include:

- How did you learn to read?
- Why do people read?
- What is the name of your favorite book? Why do you like it?
- What book are you reading at home now? Why did you choose it?
- How do you choose a book?

- How do you feel about reading aloud? Why?
- What do you do if you don't know a word?
- Do you like reading a book in groups or do you prefer to read alone?
- What would you like to learn about this year?
- Is there anything you would like me to know about you as a reader?

A **Parent Reading Survey** might include:

- Describe your child as a reader/writer
- What would you like your child to do as a reader/writer that he or she isn't doing now?
- Does your child read and write at home? Explain.
- What do you think your child's attitude is toward reading/writing?
- What do you think has contributed to create this attitude?
- What questions do you have about your role in helping your child become a better reader/writer?
- Is there anything that might affect your child's ability to read or write fluently?

How does it begin in Kindergarten?

Prior to entering kindergarten, students are given the Phelps Kindergarten Readiness Scale-Second Edition (PKRS-II), designed to evaluate three areas or domains predictive of later school achievement: Verbal Processing, Perceptual Processing and Auditory Processing.

The first four weeks: The first four weeks of Kindergarten provide an opportunity for the teacher to observe the children at work and play both within the classroom and during recess. Building community, socialization and comfort in their new environment is emphasized. The teachers should use the afternoons to interview and assess each student individually and possibly to interview the parents.

Initial Reading Conference: The teacher has a conversation with each child to discover his/her interests, attitudes, strengths and needs

both as a student and as a reader. The teacher may ask the student to distinguish pictured rhyming words, to distinguish initial sounds of pictured words, isolate the initial sound of the word, to recognize capital letters and to recognize lowercase letters. If appropriate, the teacher may ask the student to read aloud and/or retell stories through pictures, depending on the child's perceived ability. These conferences provide the information about the child's interests, experience with rhyming, letters, sounds and experience with books. The focus of the conference is to gather information about each child on a one-to-one basis.

Is it different for K-2?

For Grades K-2 the reading workshop structure is very similar. Creating a print-rich environment for the room is important, as is the provision of many opportunities to practice reading and engage in meaningful reading tasks. Emphasis is placed on using the Read Aloud to model reading strategies in the very beginning, followed by both Shared Reading and Guided Reading. The final goal is getting students to be independent readers.

How will I get to know my students as writers?

Good writing teachers are constantly learning about their students as writers. They assess their students every day. Carl Anderson (2005) equates assessment with gathering information about students as writers. Anderson suggests that in order to gather this information we must read student writing, observe students at work, and talk with them about their writing in conferences. Anderson promotes the writing workshop as the way for teachers to gather information about the students in all of these ways.

A **Primary (K-1) Writing Survey** might include:

- What do you like to write about?
- Where do you get your ideas?
- Why do people write?
- What would you like to learn to do as a writer?

A **Gr. 2-5 Student Reading Survey** might include:

- How did you learn to write?
- Why do people write?
- What do you think a good writer needs to do in order to write well?
- What kinds of writing do you like to do?
- How do you decide what to write?
- How do you revise your writing? (What do you do?)
- What do you do when you edit a piece of writing?
- Do you ever write at home just because you want to?
- How do you feel about yourself as a writer?

A **Parent Writing Survey** might include:

- Describe your child as a reader/writer
- What would you like your child to do as a reader/writer that he or she isn't doing now?
- Does your child read and write at home? Explain
- What do you think your child's attitude is toward reading/writing?
- What do you think has contributed to create this attitude?
- What questions do you have about helping your child become a better reader/writer?
- Is there anything that might affect your child's ability to read or write fluently?

What kinds of mini-lessons can I teach in writing in the first few weeks?

- Management
  - ◊ Introducing writing folders or notebooks
  - ◊ How to get paper
  - ◊ How to use writing tools and where to get them
  - ◊ Where to sit
  - ◊ Putting your name and the date on the work
  - ◊ What to do when you think you're done
  - ◊ How to get help
  - ◊ How to peer conference
  - ◊ Where to store writing folders

- ◊ Putting materials back
- ◊ Sharing writing with others

• Writing Strategies
- ◊ How to choose a topic
- ◊ Adding more words
- ◊ Adding to the picture
- ◊ Starting a new piece
- ◊ Imagining the story before writing
- ◊ Using details
- ◊ Spelling difficult words
- ◊ Using the word wall
- ◊ Spelling/drawing the best you can and moving on
- ◊ Connecting words and text
- ◊ Labeling
- ◊ Revising

ASSESSMENT

Assessment tells us about the specific strengths and needs of students. Understanding of our students helps ensure that teachers can plan classroom activities to give our students the knowledge they need to develop as readers and writers. Refer to the planning chart (page 15) which outlines the process of assessment, analysis, planning instruction and practice. As reading becomes more complex, we need to ensure that our students are prepared to deal with and to gain meaning from more complex language. By becoming familiar with the word knowledge and decoding skills that students have and with what they need to develop as readers and writers, teachers can support their students' learning.

Since our students learn about letters, sounds and words in the context of reading and writing, that is the context in which we should gather assessment information about our students' skills and needs and the success of our instruction.

Emergent readers and writers tell us about their letter, sound and

word knowledge in many different ways when they read; when they play alphabet, word and listening games; sing rhymes and songs; participate in Interactive and Shared Writing. Students who are more fluent in their reading and writing give us that information when they read and write for us. We also gather information from running records, student reading logs, standardized testing, reading response journals, anecdotal records, observational checklists and story retells.

How can I assess my students?

Assessment of students takes place throughout the year and informs instructional decisions. Individual assessments are valuable for gaining insights into the abilities, strategies and skills students utilize as readers and writers. These assessments may include:

- Running Records: These are a graphic account of a child's oral reading. They provide a flexible tool for assessment which can be used with any text a child is reading. Using this tool, teachers can decide if the book a child is reading is matched to his/her stage of reading. Running Records also analyze a child's miscues to see which strategies he/she uses and the ones he/she might learn to use more effectively. Most importantly, they track a child's reading progress over time.

- Student Reading Logs: Students keep track of the books they are reading so the teacher can monitor when children need to experience new genres, appropriateness of the book level, and the number of books being read over time.

- Standardized Testing: Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2) provides teachers with a systematic way to assess reading performance. This assessment tool is used at least twice a year to monitor and document students' progress over time.

- Reading Response Journals: These can be used by students to relate the books they are reading to their lives and to write about what they are learning or feeling as they read independently. Students as early as kindergarten can use journals that have blank pages for their pictorial expressions and responses. Using their 'sound spelling' or temporary spelling they can encode the language that their pictures illustrate.

- Anecdotal Records: These can be taken by making note of reading behaviors teachers observe as well as strategies that the student uses as the teacher listens to them read. These recordings can be done on labels, index cards, sticky notes or individual record sheets and they should be kept in a binder with a page for each student.

- Observational Checklists: These provide a quick and easy way to record the reading attributes of each child as you observe or listen during small group or individual conferences. The reading behaviors you observe can be analyzed to help target future instruction.

- Story Retells: These provide information on a student's level of comprehension. This involves the student giving an oral retelling of a short text during a reading conference.

- Writing Samples: These provide information on a student's ability to communicate. By reading student writing, teachers decide on a focus of instruction for individual, small group and whole class lessons.

How should I get to know my students before school begins or early in the year?

Review the DRA2 Student Assessment Folder to start to get a picture of what type of reader the child may be prior to your own assessments. As you begin to know each child through informal means, your perceptions of their current level will change or be confirmed.

What is the purpose of the DRA2?

Using leveled benchmark books, provided in the assessment kit, the teacher observes, records and analyzes student's reading behaviors and responses. Based on the information collected teachers plan for whole class, small group and individualized reading instruction. The developmental continuum of the DRA2 provides teachers with information on the range of reading stages of the children in their classrooms. Planning instruction based on assessment information is a necessary first step. The construction of reading concepts and strategies ought to follow logically on this foundation.

What role does Assessment play during the year?

Continued assessments of children throughout the year inform our reading and writing instruction. These individual assessments are valuable for gaining insights into the abilities, strategies and skills your students utilize as readers. The continued assessment of students throughout the year also helps inform what strategies to use to help your students progress as readers and writers. The assessments may be formal and informal.

What will I do at the end of the school year?

The information gathered by administering the DRA2 in the fall and early spring will enable teachers to share information about students as readers and writers throughout the year.

The following documentation will be forwarded to the student's next teacher:

DRA2 Folders:

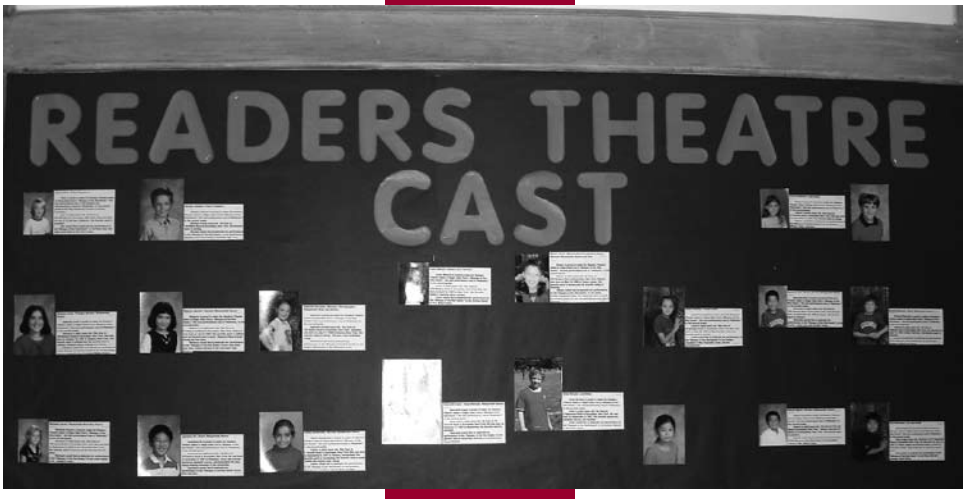
- Teacher's Observation Guide
- Student Reading Survey
- Student Booklet
- DRA2 Continuum
- Reading Log: 5 books from the fall and 5 books from the spring, which indicate the student's interest and independent ability level.

Blue Writing Folder

- Two pieces of writing; one from the fall and one from the spring.
- All writing should include a draft.

Primary student's first drafts may be used as the final piece.


MAXIMUM
OCCUPANCY
PERSONS


READERS THEATRE
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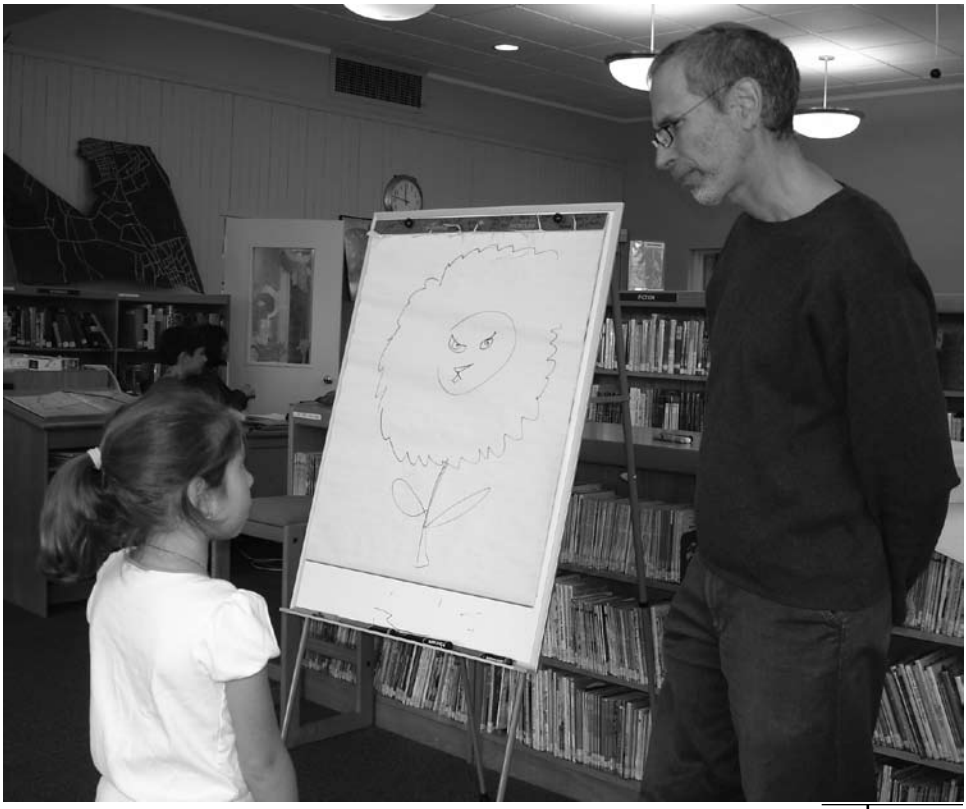
Elements Of Reading Instruction




Book of the Month

Children learn to read by seeing others read, having others read aloud to them, reading to others, and reading by themselves and to others. Thus, a regular part of the daily classroom experience should include reading to children, reading with children, and reading by children.

Reutzel

Readers' Workshop

Why do we use Readers' Workshop?

Readers' Workshop is a way of structuring the balanced literacy program. It helps the teacher address the needs of the students by organizing them in flexible groups. Readers' Workshop also helps build a community of readers through teacher support, collaboration with peers and opportunities for independent reading. Readers' Workshop provides students with good literacy habits by engaging them in meaningful literacy activities that help to develop their reading skills and comprehension.

What are the possible structures for the Readers' Workshop?

There are many components and variations to the Readers' Workshop depending on the needs of the students and the teacher's instructional goals. The basic components are:

Mini-lesson
Independent and Group Practice
Share Time

Here is an example of how a Readers' Workshop might be structured:

Mini-lesson (10-15 min.)	Teacher teaches mini-lesson to whole group
Independent and Group Practice (35-45 min.)	• Conferencing • Guided reading groups • Independent reading • Partner reading • Literature study
Share (5-10 min.)	Whole group comes together again to share

What are mini-lessons?

Mini-lessons are a powerful, efficient way to deliver information to students. By taking a closer look at how they work, we can make them exceptional. Generally, mini-lessons last from 10 -15 minutes. There is minimal interaction during this gathering time. The teacher delivers the information in a clear, logical manner and sends the readers off to get busy. Mini-lessons fall into 3 main categories: lessons on management of the workshop; lessons on literary analysis; and lessons on skills and strategies that readers use.

Management: Mini-lessons that help students manage independent reading and their responses to what they read are especially important at the beginning of the school year. Once students have established the classroom routines and procedures of using materials and working together, management mini-lessons should still be presented as needed. In general, these mini-lessons help students take responsibility for their own learning and help them respect the learning of others. Examples of management mini-lessons:

- Signing out books from the class library
- Returning books to the library
- Organizing the library

- Caring for books
- Filling out book recommendation cards
- Locating reading log forms
- Organizing reading log folders
- Finding a place to read during Readers' Workshop
- Filling out reading logs
- Using peers as a resource
- Keeping noise at an appropriate level
- What to do if you need help and the teacher is conferring
- Using the "How Readers Choose Books" list

Management techniques in any classroom are a personal thing. As the list indicates, many management mini-lessons depend on the tools you're using in your Readers' Workshop. Mini-lessons about management should be created as the need arises. At the beginning of the year most revolve around management: there is a great deal of setting up to do and rituals and routines to establish. Management will reflect your own priorities, your expectations of how the room should sound and feel at reading time, and the children in your classroom.

Literary analysis: Mini-lessons on literary analysis are designed to help students become familiar with the techniques and devices authors use to create works of literature. They help students understand different genres and the characteristics and values of each. Examples of literary analysis mini-lessons:

- Titles: Why did the author choose that one?
- Leads: How did the writer get the reader involved?
- Endings: How was the story resolved? Were you satisfied?
- Time: How much time goes by? Is this important?
- Setting: Where does the story take place?
- Character: Who is important in the story?
- Tone: What was the mood of the story?
- Theme: Did you learn anything about life through the story?
- Narration: Who is telling the story?

- Crossing genres: What did the writer need to do to make the story believable?
- Shape: What shape does the story have? Linear, triangular or circular in plot?
- Suspense: Did the author provide enough to keep you interested?
- Flashbacks and foreshadowing: Did the author move around in time?
- Personal connections: Were you reminded of anything in your own life?
- Imagery: Could you picture what was happening even when no illustration was provided? Are illustrations always necessary?
- Language: Was it at all surprising?

Skills and Strategies: Strategies are "in the head" processes that readers employ as they construct meaning from print. For example, as you read any text, you are constantly matching up text with what you already know about a topic, and you resolve the differences between them.

Fountas and Pinnell, 2001

Skills are the more mechanical aspects of reading: recognizing words, monitoring of accuracy, using punctuation and so on. Examples of skill and strategy mini-lessons:

- What do you do when you come to a word you don't know?
- Can you imagine or predict what might happen next?
- How do you select a book that might be "easy", "just right" or "challenging" – all three are important for readers to experience
- When and why should you abandon a book?
- Why you should look at "groups of words" rather than words in isolation.
- How to identify writers' clues about how the text should be read.

- Why you should avoid lip-reading. (It slows you down.)
- How do you use an index? A table of contents?
- What clues do chapter titles give you about what happens next?
- Why is it a good idea to reread parts of texts or entire texts?
- What patterns do you see in this text and others by the same writer?
- How do you get ready for a book talk?
- Why should you recommend a book to a friend?
- How do you skim a text?

Hindley, In the Company of Children, 1996

How does Readers' Workshop lend itself to the differentiated classroom?

The reading workshop provides the teacher with the structure to address a variety of needs and abilities in the classroom. Teachers can focus on an individual or a small group with similar needs. The flexibility in grouping can help the teacher address not only whole class needs but also individual or small group needs. The more individualized attention facilitates assessment of students' current reading needs so that teachers design instruction to help the students improve in their reading abilities.

Why is a classroom library important?

Classroom libraries are a key component in supporting reading achievement in children. Students improve their reading skills through access to quality books. Rich classroom libraries serve as a resource for independent reading where children self-select books that meet their reading interests and ability. A classroom library includes both fiction and non-fiction, and a wide range of genres, authors and topics, at different levels.

How do I choose books for my classroom library?

Books should be varied to accommodate a variety of needs and interests. Classroom libraries should be well-stocked and include books of all genres. There should be books at many reading levels and they should be easily accessible. Magazines, newspapers and journals

that are appropriate for the grade level should be considered as part of a well stocked classroom.

How do I organize my classroom library?

This may be done in a variety of ways. One-third of the library should be organized by topic, genre and author. Books may be alphabetized as well. Author baskets contain several books by the same author, topic baskets are organized by topic and genre baskets, by genre. Sets of leveled books used for Guided Reading should be kept separate from the classroom library so that only the teacher may access them in preparation for a Guided Reading lesson.

What possible topics or genres can I have in my classroom library?

Here is a list of possible topics, genres and authors that can be used in organizing a classroom library:

Concept books
- ABC – Alphabet books
- Color books
- Counting books
- Days of the week books

The Rhythm of Language
- Songs
- Rhymes
- Poetry
- Predictable pattern

Folk Tales and Fairy Tales

Theme Collections
- Butterflies
- Seasons
- Holidays
- Foods
- Friendship
- School
- New siblings
- Moving

Social Studies

- Family
- Communities
- Books about feelings
- Trips and journeys
- Bridges, maps
- Other cultures
- Habitats
- Transportation
- Sports

Science

- Growing things (seeds, plants and trees)
- Fruits and vegetables
- Animals
- Things that crawl
- Turtles, frogs and fish
- Mammals
- Reptiles
- Sharks, whales and dolphins

Author Studies:

Suggestions for Kindergarten:

- Byron Barton
- John Burmingham
- Alyssa Capucilli
- Alexandra Day
- Lois Ehlert
- Helen Oxenbury
- Rosemary Wells

Suggestions for Grades 1 and 2:

- Eric Carle
- Tomie DePaola
- Patricia Reilly Giff
- Kevin Henkes
- Johanna Hurwitz
- Ezra Jack Keats
- Arnold Lobel
- Bill Martin Jr.
- Patricia Pollaco
- Cynthia Rylant
- Don and Audrey Wood

Suggestions for Grades 3 and up:

- Judy Blume
- Eve Bunting
- Betsy Byars
- Mem Fox
- Jean Craighead George
- Karen Hesse
- Lois Lowry
- Patricia MacLachlan
- Katherine Paterson
- Gary Paulsen
- Cynthia Rylant
- Jerry Spinelli
- Chris Van Allsburg
- Judith Viorst
- Jacqueline Woodsen
- Jane Yolen
- Charlotte Zolotow

How do I level my books?

Books can be organized by level of difficulty so that students can access "just right" books easily. There are many published guides that list books and their reading levels. Some things to consider when leveling books are length, size and layout of print, vocabulary and concepts, language structure, text structure and genre, predictability and pattern of language and illustration support.

Read Aloud

The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.
Anderson, Becoming a Nation of Readers, 1985

What texts should we choose for Read Aloud?

Teachers should select text that they love. The type of literature should be varied. Selections can come from picture books, stories, charts, poems, songs, informational text and books written by students. Materials chosen should be ones that students can clearly identify with and relate to. These materials should allow teachers and children to make connections with other books they have read, with events in their lives or with real world issues. Some material may deal with an issue that is arising in the classroom. Teachers may select materials based on an area of the curriculum being studied, or a teacher may specifically choose material to read aloud because it might be too difficult for the children to read independently.

Children should be led to comparisons in terms of characters, settings, plot development and theme. Non-fiction materials should stimulate curiosity and lead to further inquiry and exploration. Pictures can be an important part of the charm of a Read Aloud experience and can be as evocative as the text. A good book as well as other material can provide the opportunity to highlight the qualities of good writing and the book can be used for getting students to write in response to literature.

What are some components of a Read Aloud?

- Share the title, author, and illustrator
- Encourage prediction – "What do you think this story will be about?" Take a "picture walk" to stimulate further questions and predictions in the younger grades
- A Read Aloud provides a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate specific reading strategies:
  - how to choose a book
  - how to read with voice
  - what to do when you come to a challenging word
  - how to anticipate what will happen next
  - how to utilize individual comprehension strategies
  - how to analyze the writer's craft

What are some things a teacher might say during Read Aloud?

Use a Read Aloud as a model for what can happen when small groups get together for a book talk. Help students make connections to their own lives, to other books and to real-world issues. It is crucial to allow students opportunities to respond to what is being read.

During a Read Aloud, a teacher might say things like:

This reminds me of…
I wonder why…?
Why are people like that?
Listen to this gorgeous line…
_____ always does this in her books…
I wonder what he (the author or character) means by that?
Wait, let me re-read that part and see if I have it right…
The first time that word was used I wasn't sure what it meant, but now I think I have it…
Hmm…I wonder if I would have done the same thing in that situation?
I think this part is important for me to remember because…
This book leaves me thinking about…
This doesn't make sense; I'd better go back and reread it.

Hindley, 2005

How do I use accountable talk during Read Aloud?

During Read Aloud we often stop at the end of a chapter or at some other natural stopping point and give students time to reflect and jot down their thinking. At other times, we ask students to chat with the classmates next to them before they write. Students are usually free to respond in a way that makes sense for them; however, we may ask them to respond to questions and thoughts such as:

- What new information did you learn about the character in that scene?
- Did you change your thinking at all during this chapter?
- Where do you think the author is going with this story?
- What questions do you have?
- What did the author do in his, or her, writing to make us feel like this?
- What would you have done if you were the character in this scene?

Instruction during Read Aloud time is really focused chat. We choose books to read aloud that inspire children to think deeply and to respond orally during reading.

Richard Allington (2002) has noted that classroom talk is critical to reading instruction: "The classroom talk we observed was more often conversational than interrogational. Teachers and students discussed ideas, concepts, hypotheses, strategies, and responses with one another."

Hindley, 2005

What are some Read Aloud questions to ask to initiate conversation?

- *Visualizing:* What are you picturing in your mind as you read?
- *Making connections*: What does this remind you of from your own life? How might that help you understand the book better?
- *Making literature connections:* Does this remind you of

anything else you've read? How might that help you when you are reading this book?

- *Recognizing character development:* What did you learn about the character during this reading? How do you know? How is the character changing?
- *Noticing literary elements:* What do you notice about the way the author wrote the book? What makes it effective?
- *Recognizing powerful language:* What are the powerful words or phrases that the author used? What makes them powerful?

How do I use rereading with Read Aloud?

Sometimes we read text to our class that many of the students have previously read. We use this as an opportunity to teach strategies in rereading. In one class, several of the students had already read a book before we read it to them. We asked these readers to think about how they would read or listen differently based on questions they had after they had read it on their own. We charted their responses to remind them of what they could do while experiencing the book for a second time:

- Pay attention to details
- Try to answer questions that weren't answered
- Try to understand parts we didn't get
- Listen for things we missed the first time
- Listen to the end – there was so much information in it
- Listen for any clues we missed leading to the surprise at the end

Sysmusiak and Sibberson , Still Learning to Read

Shared Reading

The shared text experience attempts to replicate, in a school setting, bedtime story reading. Shared reading is a relaxed and social event – one way of immersing students in rich, literary-level language without worrying about grade level or reading performance.

Routman

How do I select a book for Shared Reading?

Texts selected for Shared Reading should always be worth reading and rereading. Emergent readers need stories with strong story lines, rich language, and bright, energetic pictures. They need rhymes, stories with predictable patterns, or poems and songs with humor and warmth. Older readers may read poems or an excerpt of persuasive writing on an overhead projector.

Teachers choose texts that:

- Have print large enough for all children to see
- Are either new or familiar
- Can be read in about ten minutes or less

District 2, Manhattan, Balanced Literacy Program, 1999

What are the goals for Shared Reading?

The student should be able to:

- Act as a reader and interpret familiar letters and conventions.
- Make connections between background knowledge and new information.
- Demonstrate awareness and use symbols and conventions as he or she constructs meaning from text read or viewed.
- Recognize and use prediction strategies to develop meaning in text.

Adapted from Montgomery County Public Schools Early Literacy Guide

How is a shared reading session conducted?

A shared reading lesson may be conducted in many ways depending on the purpose set by the teacher and also the reading levels of the students. Generally, in a first shared reading, the teacher introduces the story, talking about the title, cover and title page. Just as any book might be introduced, the teacher leads a picture walk through the book. The story is then read aloud for enjoyment as the teacher

points to each word as it is read. Students follow along "with their eyes." The teacher may pause occasionally to ask students to predict a word or a phrase or to make predictions about what is happening. The teacher and students take turns reading the story and a choral reading may take place. Open-ended questions are asked. Connections to the students' backgrounds, experiences, and other literature are encouraged.

Shared Reading provides an excellent opportunity for teachers to model the integrated use of the cueing systems and strategies for reading that can be applied to unfamiliar reading. New concepts and strategies of any type are best introduced in this format before guided practice is given in the small group setting of Guided Reading. As a means of addressing specific skills, masking techniques are used to cover up words or parts of words that the teacher wishes the students to predict. This technique allows for a general instructional focus and also offers a means to address individual needs for those children whose assessments indicated the need for more practice.

What is the procedure for Shared Reading?

1. Select a text that has a teaching focus which meets the needs of specific students. Make sure that all students can see the enlarged text.
2. State the purpose of the lesson and why the book was selected.
3. Discuss the topic with the students to tap their prior knowledge about this topic.
4. Invite students to predict the text from the cover, title, and illustrations.
5. Give a short stimulating introduction. When reading to emergent readers, do a picture walk through the book during the introduction.
6. Read the text as naturally as possible with few stops. Focus on meaning. Encourage students to predict as they read, drawing on their understanding of the text and their knowledge of the structure of language.

7. Introduce the use of prompts to help the students predict the text and confirm their predictions.
   Meaning: Does it make sense?
   Language Structure: Does it sound right?
   Visual Information: Does it look right?

Example: "Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?"
"I see a red bird looking at me."
Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?, Bill Martin

The students should be led back to the text to find the meaning of unknown words. Clear and consistent prompting helps the students to be able to transfer strategies from one text to another. As the students gain crosschecking skills, more than one prompt can be linked together to assist the reader.

Meaning Prompts	**Structure Prompts**	**Visual Prompts**
• What do you see in the picture to help you? • What is happening in the story/text?	• What would sound right here? • Do we say it that way? • Let's try again and think what would come next?	• What does it start with? • Reread and look at the first letter of the word. • Do you know another word that looks like that?

8. Encourage students to talk about the text. Help them notice text features.
9. Reread the text several times in the younger grades. With each rereading, students will be able to join in, as the text becomes more familiar. Sometimes these additional readings can include clapping, singing, chanting, and dramatic role-playing.

Multiple shared readings will reinforce concepts and provide for closer examination of characters, setting and global understanding.

Teachers focus on different skills that encourage children to become independent readers, such as predicting a suitable word, using context and understanding author's meaning. Mini-lessons, including story structure and character development, may be included.

Teachers may also wish to use Shared Reading as a time to teach letter-sound relationships and key vocabulary. Mini-lessons, such as locating and identifying initial letters, punctuation, and commonly used words, can be taught during a Shared Reading experience.

What should be done after a Shared Reading session?

Ideally, teachers should create some method of displaying titles of the Shared Reading books they have used in their classroom. A "Books We Have Read Together" chart, bookworm, book train or other motivating classroom display can be expanded as the year progresses. Children enjoy adding to the list and can refer to the list when they wish to select a familiar book to read. Small copies of the big books should be available to the children for independent or partner reading.

The class might also make "book reproductions" or innovations using the same theme or sentence/language pattern of the shared book. These class books provide additional independent reading material for children in the classroom. Using a taped version of the story along with copies of the book provide good reading practice at the Read-Along center.

Guided Reading

To help young readers build an effective network of reading strategies, teachers must select texts that allow individuals to read for meaning, draw on the skills they already control, and expand their current processing strategies. In other words, the text used for learning how to read must have the right mixture of support and challenge.

Fountas and Pinnell

How are Guided Reading groups formed?

These groups are formed after careful teacher assessment of the individual student needs. The teacher must be aware of each reader's progress as determined by the DRA, informed running records and retellings. These indicators, in addition to teacher observation during the reading /writing time, provide the information.

Teachers organize Guided Reading groups according to specific needs of students and specific levels of text. The students grow and change over the course of instructional time, and so should Guided Reading groups change. They need to be flexible and based upon current assessment data.

- The teacher works with a small group of children who are at similar stages in their development .
- Children in the group exhibit similar reading behaviors and can read, with high accuracy and good problem-solving, texts that are about the same level.
- Teachers introduce the books to the children and then observe and guide them while they read; teachers also provide some additional teaching after the reading if needed.
- Each child reads the whole text or a unified part of it rather than just a page or sentence.
- Children are grouped together because they are similar, but as they learn and change, they are regrouped in a dynamic process that involves systematic, ongoing assessment.
- The emphasis in Guided Reading is on reading many books along a gradient of increasing complexity and challenge.
- The goal of Guided Reading is for children to read independently and silently.

Fountas and Pinnell, Matching Books To Readers

How do I incorporate flexible grouping?

When teaching specific skills, it makes sense to assemble only those students who are in need of extra practice with the particular skill. Spending time re-teaching students skills that they already understand does them a disservice. For this reason, it's a good idea to form flexible groups—small groups that meet as needed during quiet reading time. These are not necessarily ability level groups. It's quite possible, probable even, to form a group that includes a very high reader and a very low reader. The idea is to focus on one skill only and to invite everyone in the room who still needs extra practice with that skill. You might also form a flexible group aimed at enriching students who have all mastered a certain skill or strategy. At other times the teacher may form a group by reading level in order to help students progress to the next level. (See the list below for reasons to consider forming a flexible group.)

As you conference, continually think about the needs of each individual reader. If, while you are reading with a student, you notice a particular strength or weakness that could be addressed in a small group, take note of the skill or strategy and list the student's name on a Small Group Planning Page. Throughout the next couple of days, as you conference, note whether there are other readers who would benefit from the small group, or groups, you are planning. If so, list that child's name in the appropriate place. When you have a couple of names, plan the group and call students together during the next quiet reading time. In addition, provide guidance to make sure they are reading a variety of genres. You'll sometimes need to steer some students to nonfiction material while finding other genres for the student who only seems to read science fiction.

Hold a small flexible group when you note that extra work is needed in any of these areas:

- Fluency
- Word work

- Decoding multisyllabic words
- Decoding new words using chunks already familiar
- Using context clues to figure out new words
- Story sequencing
- Retelling the story using story elements
- Forming opinions about the reading
- Stronger journal responses
- When to abandon a book
- Reading chapters in their entirety
- Using all reading time wisely
- Selecting a new book based on personal interest
- Any topic that has been presented to the whole class as a mini-lesson
- Attending to punctuation to improve fluency and comprehension

Revisiting the Reading Workshop: Management, Mini-Lessons, and Strategies, Scholastic Professional Books

How do I conduct a Guided Reading group?

- Limit the number of students to not more than six. This enables the teacher to closely monitor individual reading in a group situation.
- Once you've determined the goal you'll be working towards, be sure to select a text that supports that goal.
- Start the lesson by telling the students why they've been pulled together.
- State clearly what they will be doing in the group — the goal.
- Start together — move towards independence — try it on your own.
- End the session by reminding the children what they will be trying in their independent reading when they leave you.

Hindley, 2005

Independent Reading/Conferring

"What better time than during one on one reading conferences to help students to use strategies and skills that will make them better readers? What better time to see how well they understand what they've read? And what better time to match them with books that are just right for their independent reading? Reading conferences are at the center of teaching. They provide information and inspiration for my work and allow me to keep my finger on the pulse of each child's reading."

Taberski, 2000

What is a Reading Conference?

A Reading Conference is a one on one meeting between teacher and student. It provides teachers with the opportunity to learn about students as readers, to assess their progress, to provide guidance and instruction as needed and to inform the teaching. In conferring with students, the use of a four-part process can be helpful in remembering that the goal is to teach the readers something that will make a global difference in their continued reading, not just in a particular text.

- Research what the child can do as a reader.
- Decide what needs to be taught.
- Teach in a way that will influence what the child will do independently.
- Record student strengths and areas of need using formal and informal assessments.

Orehovec and Alley, 2003

When are conferences scheduled?

"Allowing time for teacher-student conferences is critical in helping children to progress in their reading. Teachers often confer with individuals during reading workshop, independent reading time, between guided reading groups, or at the beginning of a group while the other children are "warming up" by reading familiar books."

Montgomery County Public Schools Early Literacy Guide

Conferences should begin as soon as is feasible and continue throughout the year. When beginning to learn about students as readers, teachers need time to gather information on each child. The number of days set aside for individual conferences each week will decrease as you become more familiar with students' needs. You will address those needs within smaller groups. Keep in mind that the reading stage of your students will dictate how many students you will confer with each day.

How does a conference inform instruction?

After conferring or observing students' reading behaviors and skills, create a master list of students and their needs for reading instruction and use it to form flexible small groups as well as whole class mini lessons and individual instruction. Listed below are some of the ways you can group students for instruction:

- help students choose "just right" books
- introduce a new genre/author
- enhance comprehension strategies (questioning, visualizing, inferring, synthesizing, predicting, connecting)
- teach a word study or vocabulary skill
- teach a specific skill or text element (dialogue, nonfiction, captions)
- share strategies
- help sustain comprehension over time
- expand written responses to reading

Szymusiak and Sibberson, 2001

How might conferences be different for the emergent vs. the fluent reader?

As emergent readers begin to make sense of print, they need regular and direct instruction to understand meaning, structure and use graphophonic cues. During conference time they need help making connections between words and spelling patterns they know and others that they are trying to learn. Monitoring their ability to self-

correct their reading is an important part of helping them become more fluent readers. These readers need more regularly scheduled conference time each week.

Transitional and fluent readers need ways to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words in context and to comprehend longer stories and new genres. Conference goals should be designed around helping these readers integrate the different story elements and organizing their thinking around the whole theme or big ideas. Providing guidance with student's written responses to books so that they think more deeply, will enable students to share in higher-level conversations about the books they read.

Can reading be a social experience?

Reading is a social experience. You can provide for social reading by encouraging communication between readers during Read Aloud and Independent Reading time. Students may also participate in Guided Reading or flexible skill groups, partner reading, or in a small literature response group or "story chat." In short, you need to be sure that your students have authentic reading experiences and opportunities to talk about their books and their thinking.

What is Partner Reading?

Often students have similar interests and want to read a book together. Sometimes each student has his or her own copy, but typically they share a book. These students are usually at the same reading level and enjoy the same types of books. They decide how to share the reading, maybe by alternating pages. By listening in on how the students assist one another, you can assess the strategies they feel comfortable using. For example, one partner may offer the other help, saying, "That word starts like your name, Frank" or "Do you see the 'ing' chunk?

By listening in on how the students assist one another, you can assess the strategies they feel comfortable using.

At the upper grades, students still participate in partner reading, but it may look different, especially if the readers are proficient. Students at these levels may read silently next to each other and stop occasionally to discuss what has happened.

What does a conference look and feel like?

Choose an appropriate location for your conference. It could be an area where you sit with each child privately or you could pull up a chair next to the child's desk. Come to the conference with materials to help you and the student gain information and set goals for reading: a notebook, clip board with note cards for anecdotal records, post-it notes and any record keeping forms you might use.

Encourage the reader to carry on with what he or she is doing. This provides some time for additional assessment. Through observations, or from your notes from a previous conference, ask yourself questions such as:

- Is the student appropriately engaged with the text or group reading?
- Is the text level appropriate?
- Is the student applying the strategies you last taught?
- Is the student distracted by others or by other activities in the room?
- Is the student relying on reading with someone else?
- Is the student using a finger or a bookmark to help keep his/her place during reading?

As you find a place to enter a child's reading, start off by saying something like, "How's it going?" Give the reader time to think about what he or she might want to talk about. As you begin your conference, aim for a positive opening by recognizing something the child is doing well. "I noticed you've started another book," or "I can tell you like books by Marc Brown."

Provide students with honest feedback. This means telling them if a book is too hard and helping them to make better choice. Point out what the child did during reading, such as self-correcting a word when it didn't make sense.

What you teach a child during the conference is based on your close observations of the reading work the child is doing. Listen as the child reads a passage and observe how he or she handles reading errors. Listen to the child's retelling of a story or interpretation of the book.

Orehovec and Alley, 2003

A key point to remember is to keep the conference short by focusing on only one strategy or skill that will help the student to improve as a reader.

What are some guiding questions to ask during a conference?

Through guiding questions such as those listed below, the teacher helps the student verbalize reading strategies being used:

- Why did you choose that book?
- What is your story about?
- What are you working on with your reading?
- How is it going?
- What do you want me to notice today?
- How can I help you with that?
- What are you learning about yourself as a reader?
- What are you going to work on next?

Montgomery County Public Schools Early Literacy Guide

In Revisiting The Reading Workshop pp. 111-112 you will find extensive guiding questions listed by category for all different types of conferences. (*Orehovec and Alley, 2003*)

What are the roles of the teacher during a conference?

- Learn about student's reading interests
- Determine appropriateness of text
- Observe strategies used while reading
- Take running records
- Ask questions about what was read
- Determine level of engagement
- Discuss book with student
- Listen to what student is saying
- Determine a teaching point
- Share assessment with child
- Keep a record of the conference
- Set a focus for the child's reading
- Write the goal with the child

What are the roles of the student during a conference?

- Inform teacher of interest
- Be prepared with materials
- Apply strategies to reading
- Read orally if asked
- Retell, respond, reflect
- Demonstrate understanding
- Provide evidence for support
- Explain any confusions
- Decide what to share from reading
- Participate in the instruction
- Listen to the assessment
- Ask how to improve
- Determine goals with teacher

What are the rest of the students doing while the teacher is conferring?

Before any effective conference can take place, students at all levels need to know how to work independently. They must understand that you and the student you are conferring with are not to be disturbed. Spending time at the beginning of the year setting rou-

tines and preparing students for independent reading time is key to maintaining successful conferences. As positive reading behaviors are discussed and modeled throughout the year, posting them on a chart keeps these expectations clearly stated and visible. Examples of reading experiences are:

- Reading books from their book bags
- Responding to books in journals
- Listening to books on tape
- Extension activities that grow out of guided reading groups
- Filling in reading logs for the day
- Reading big books or partner reading
- Working on strategy sheets

Taberski, 2000

Whether students are engaged in literacy centers, listening stations, partner reading or any independent practice during your conference time, all activities require that students understand directions as well as how to use their reading materials. Time taken to review routines done in small procedural mini-lessons will ensure a more respectful time without too many interruptions.

How do I model reading with a partner?

- Find a place to read: Decide together where the best place would be to read and go there quickly.
- Demonstrate quiet voices: Talk so only you and your partner can hear each other. Demonstrate both appropriate and inappropriate voices
- Demonstrate how to share one copy of a book: Decide how the book will be held and who will turn the pages. Model compromise of taking turns to turn pages.
- Model beginning predictions, how to talk about what we think the book might be about: Point out how good listeners act — eye contact, nods, quiet hands and feet. Model an example of poor listeners.

- Model plan making: "Let's read this book first and this one next. Let's stop to retell at the end of every other page. How about you read the left side and I'll read the right side."
- Model wait time: "If my partner gets stuck on a word, I should not blurt out the answer. I should ask questions about how we might solve the problem together." Model a good example and a poor example.
- Model the retelling: "Let's stop here since we planned on it. I just finished reading, so you retell what has happened while I was reading aloud. After you finish reading, we'll stop and it will be my turn to retell."

Book Clubs, Discussion Groups and Literature Circles

Conversations that are part of the classroom environment clarify children's thinking. As students sit side by side and talk about what they are reading, they learn about themselves and they learn from the thinking of other readers. An interactive classroom that promotes conversation can provide opportunities for our students to raise the level of their thinking, to dig deep into texts, and to grow as readers.

Sibberson and Szymusiak, 2003

What are book clubs, discussion groups, and literature circles?

Book clubs, discussion groups and literature circles are all forms of literature study. No matter the title, literature study is an instructional approach that involves students meeting in small groups to discuss, respond and reflect on a book. Several key elements exist:

- Reading and thinking about works of literature
- Collaborating with others to reflect on, analyze and criticize literature
- Developing and sharing aesthetic responses to literature
- Extending understanding through talk and or writing

Fountas and Pinnell, 2001

What is the purpose of literature study?

Literature study is an element of Readers' Workshop where small groups of students come together to discuss the same story, poem, article, or book. It is through conversations with others that students broaden and deepen their thinking. The discussions emerge from students' own personal responses to the text and may focus on aspects such as, characters, events, genre, author's writing style, and literary techniques. It is an opportunity for students to share their questions, insights and responses to a text.

Literature study brings students together for an in-depth discussion of a book and is designed to:

- Increase students' enjoyment of reading
- Make students aware of the value of their personal response to what they read
- Engage students in meaningful literary discussions
- Provide rich experiences with a range of genres representing many periods and cultures
- Expand students' literacy and background knowledge
- Build students' knowledge of authors and illustrators
- Deepen students' understanding of the qualities that make well-crafted literature
- Demonstrate new ways of interpreting and analyzing text
- Foster critical thinking

Fountas and Pinnell, 2001

How are groups formed?

It is important for all children to participate in literature study, regardless of their reading level. Groups are heterogeneous and based on the books students have selected. Generally, there are 4 to 6 children in a group. The teacher guides the selection of the books to provide each student with a text that is comfortable for them to read. Most often the group will read the same book, but they can also read different books by the same author or illustrator or read different

books on the same topic or theme. Early readers can discuss books they have heard during Shared Reading or Read Aloud.

How do I select texts for literature study?

Selecting a quality piece of literature for discussion is essential. The text must be developmentally appropriate for the readers and offer opportunities for rich discussion.
Texts for literature study should:

- Include layers of meaning
- Exemplify worthwhile issues
- Reflect a variety of perspectives
- Represent our diverse world
- Encompass a variety of authors/illustrators
- Encompass a variety of genres
- Encompass a variety of formats
- Encompass a range of levels
- Exemplify special features

Fountas and Pinnell, 2001

What are some things to consider in planning book clubs?

In thinking about texts for your book clubs to select, consider the following:

- There is no such thing as a "grade level" book. Many titles are equally appealing and effective for readers at several grade levels. Even if a child has already read a book, he/she can still use the book again for literature circles in later grades. None of us can experience everything in a book on the first reading. We bring different perspectives to a book as we mature.
- Be sure your selected books would work well in book clubs. Many of your favorite books may not elicit extended discussions and a rich response. For example, a light and humorous chapter book or a pattern picture book may not be rich enough to sustain conversations.

- Keep reading. It's important to keep up with the newly published books as well as to keep reading ones you've missed. It's also important to rely on what you know about your students and their interests. You know far better than anyone else ever could which themes, topics, characters, and plots will capture your students' interests.
- Examine books for possible objections. Know your district's expectations and community standards. Selecting literature brings with it the possibility that someone may feel that a book you've selected is inappropriate for various reasons.

Campbell-Hill, Literature Circle and Response

What is the teacher's role in the conversations?

The teacher is there to support the group in a variety of ways depending upon the students' level of experience with literature study and their reading level. The teacher may facilitate or redirect the conversation for a specific purpose asking interpretive questions or follow-up questions to extend student responses. The teacher may also model routines for effective group work, such as taking turns and making sure everyone has had a chance to speak. At other times, the teacher may act as observer and listen in on the conversations of each group in order to collect assessment information.

How are students accountable for their talk?

The teacher can give daily deadlines and short-term goals as a means of keeping students accountable for their conversations. Students can prepare for their discussion using "Post-it" notes to mark passages to share with the group and develop questions for group discussion. The teacher can develop a menu of required work or sentence leads for reading response journals to be completed weekly. Self-evaluation and debriefing forms are helpful in keeping track of students' growth.

Word Study

Why should we teach Word Study?

"Becoming fully literate is absolutely dependent on fast, accurate recognition of words in texts, and fast, accurate production of words in writing so that readers and writers can focus their attention on making meaning. Letter-sound correspondences, phonics, spelling patterns, high frequency word recognition, decoding, word meanings, and other word attributes are the basis of written word knowledge. Designing a word study program that explicitly teaches students necessary skills and engages their interest and motivation to learn about how words work is a vital aspect of any literacy program."

Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, and Johnston, Words Their Way, 1996

What are the phases of phonetic learning?

Logographic Phase: In this phase, children recognize whole words such as their name, "McDonald's," and "Mommy." They cue into a word's size, color, and shape. Children exposed to print-rich environments recognize more and more words. Toward the end of this phase children begin to notice initial letters and the sounds they represent.

Analytic Phase: This phase is marked by the associations children make between spelling patterns in words they know and the new words they encounter. In this phase, children realize that if they can read "cat," they can also read "fat," "mat," and "sat." Children make similar associations in their writing, even though they may not yet be able to confidently and consistently apply what they know about spelling patterns.

Orthographic Phase: In this phase, children recognize words quickly and automatically and no longer need to work at making connections between them. They can rapidly identify an increasing large number of words because they know a lot about the structure of words and

how they are spelled. Children at this phase can monitor their reading more consistently and self-correct when there's a discrepancy between the text and how they've read it.

Taberski, On Solid Ground, 2000

How do I decide what to teach and when?

In general, a teacher should start with what children know and build toward the unknown. There are several references a teacher can use to help organize word study lessons in a systematic and sequential way.

- List of early high frequency words
- Pace and sequences of phonemes, clusters, and spelling patterns to introduce and can be found in Diana Hope's *The Complete Phonic Handbook*; Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, and Johnston's *Words Their Way;* and Fountas and Pinnell's *Word Matters*
- References containing sequential phonics lessons and activities, include Patricia Cunningham's *Systematic, Sequential Phonics* and *Month by Month Phonics* and Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, and Johnston's *Words Their Way*.
- New York State's Early Literacy Competencies from *Early Literacy Guidance.*

What is phonological awareness, and why is it important?

Phonological awareness refers to the ability to pay attention to, identify, and reflect on various sound segments of speech. For example, a child with good phonological awareness would be able to say that if you removed the /w/ from the word "wing," and put a /str/ in its place, you would get the word "string." Phonological awareness does not refer to the connection between written letters and their sounds, only the actual sounds of speech. "A certain amount of phonological awareness is critical to reading success, and participation in phonological awareness activities has a positive influence on beginning reading, especially when these activities coincide with word study instruction."

Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, and Johnston, Words Their Way, 1996

What about vowels?

It is unnecessary for students to master vowels before beginning to read. There is not a one-to-one correspondence between letters and the sounds they represent. For example, the letter "a" sounds differently in each of the following words: "apple," "bake," "air," "car," "bread," "said," "leaf," "machine," and "Christmas." Therefore, children must use what they know – their knowledge of the topic, the cues provided by the illustrations, and the structure of language itself, in addition to letter-sound relationships – to learn more. This does not mean vowels should not be taught, but the teacher should be wise about how and when the vowels are introduced.

Taberski, On Solid Ground, 2000

How do I assess phonics?

A teacher will want to assess different students in different ways depending on the student's reading stage and the need for phonics support. Students identified as needing a higher level of support and who are at a lower level should be assessed more frequently to determine how best to support them. Students with less of a need should be assessed less frequently, as less instruction will need to be given. In addition, the kinds of assessment done will naturally change as children advance more in their reading and phonic abilities. There are several tools a teacher can use to assess his or her students' phonics skills. These include the following:

- Letter/Sound Inventory – a record of the child's knowledge of letter names and letter/sound correspondence
- High Frequency Word Lists – show a child's sight vocabulary
- Word and Sentence Dictations – teacher dictates a word or sentence and students write it the best they can. See Marie Clay's An Observation Survey.
- Writing Samples – can be analyzed to assess students' phonetic abilities.
- DRA/Running Records – can be analyzed to determine students' phonic abilities and cueing strategies

How can I teach Word Study?

A teacher may want to teach a word study lesson to the entire class at the same time. Patricia Cunningham, in *Phonics They Use*, describes a structure for a half hour block of word study where the first 10 minutes is devoted to the word wall and the last 20 minutes is another word study activity. A teacher may also want to teach Word Study in small groups. A teacher can use flexible grouping, like in Guided Reading and Writing, to teach a specific group of children a specific skill or concept based on need.

What tools are used to teach Word Study?

- *Magnetic Letters or Letter Cards* – can be used for making words, rearranging letters, changing initial/final consonants, changing vowels, making and breaking words, building connections among words of similar spelling patterns, etc.
- *Word Wall* – an important feature of a balanced literacy classroom where high frequency words can be displayed. Students use the wall during reading and writing to make connections, check correct spellings and to make other words.
- *Whiteboards* – useful for writing, then erasing, words and parts of words to show the connections between spellings of similar words
- *Pocket Chart* – can be used for word sorts, "using the words you know," building lists of words with the same spelling pattern, etc.
- *Sentence Strips* – can be used in the "guess the covered word" activity, to cut words into different parts, rearranging letters/words, etc.
- *Charts* – can be used for student names, words with the same spelling pattern, words with the same initial or final letter(s), words with the same vowels, etc.
- *Big Books* – can be used for "guess the covered word" or to practice any phonics skill in context

What are some activities I can do during Word Study?

- *Noticing Names* – Working with children's names at the beginning of the year is a nice way for students to both get to know each other and begin to study phonics. Names can be noticed for length, consonants, vowels, similarity to each other, letter chunks, and can be sorted by first letter, length, etc.
- *Phonemic Awareness activities* – picture sorts by initial and final sounds, aurally replacing first and last consonants, alliterated tongue twisters, etc.
- *Phonological Awareness activities* – rhyming games, clapping syllables, Dr. Seuss books, blending and segmenting sounds, etc.
- *Making Words* – an activity where children manipulate a set of magnetic letters or letter cards to make words. For examples of making words activities, see Cunningham's Month-by-Month Phonics, Systematic Sequential Phonics, Phonics They Use, and Making Words.
- *Guess the Covered Word* – a sentence or paragraph is displayed with one word partially covered. Students must use meaning and structure cues, as well as visual cues from the visible letters, to guess the word partially covered.
- *Using the Words You Know* – students use spelling patterns from words they know to read and spell other words.
- *Word Sorts* – can sort words for length, common letters, common sounds, spelling patterns, etc.
- Splitting compound words
- Exploring common prefixes and suffixes

Why should Word Study be taught in the intermediate grades?

Research demonstrates the benefits of Word Study for vocabulary development, phonics, reading, writing, concept and vocabulary development. Students engaged in word study activities developed interest in word origins, spelling-meaning relationships, and gram-

matical connections. Furthermore, the students benefited from expanded vocabularies and effective strategies to make sense of how written language works. The engaging, hands-on activities helped the students go beyond memory to apply logic and critical thinking to spelling as well as to vocabulary and syntax.

Upper level Word Study focuses on the structure and meaning of words by examining spelling patterns and root words. It is important that Word Study at the upper elementary grades be presented in an engaging manner so students become excited about language and how it works.

Teachers have discovered that Word Study activities can effectively meet students' diverse instructional needs.

What are some Word Study activities for the intermediate grades?

Bloodgood and Pacific The Reading Teacher, Vol. 58, No. 3, Nov. 2004 suggest some activities:

- *Root of the Day* - Students benefit from creating a list of words derived from a specific Greek or Latin root (e.g., bios, photo). The root word can be placed on the board at the beginning of the day and students can add words to the list. Later the students can discuss their hypotheses about the root's meaning based on the words they have listed and their commonalities. This activity helps extend vocabularies and develop strategies for discovering word meanings from known roots. Furthermore, prefixes and suffixes along with meanings can be discussed.
- *Word Sorting* - Students categorize a selected group of words by specific features to highlight a contrast. The sorting can be designed to help students discover why spellings work as they do. For example, sorting a group of short and long i words (e.g. time, stick, flight, miss, wild, try, guide, find, knight, fly) by sound reveals that short i words contain one vowel and have a cvc syllable

structure. Sorting again by letter pattern unveils four long-vowel patterns for i: vowel-consonant-silent e, igh, i consonant-consonant, and y.

- As students generalize these patterns and apply them to other words, they begin to grasp the logic and regularity of English orthography. Students can do word hunts where they look for words with the patterns or features under study.
- *Gathering Homophones* - Homophones are words with the same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings. Students record homophones they find problematic. Once there are enough words, the teacher types the words on a sheet of paper and distributes it to the children. The children then cut the words and sort by homophones or spelling patterns. Students should provide the meaning of each word as it is sorted.
- *Homophone Dictionary* - Students can create a class homophone dictionary. Pages in a blank book can be marked with individual alphabet letters and students can be assigned to add homophones to the appropriate pages. When homophones begin with different letters, select the most common word to place the homophones in the dictionary and include a reference to their location on the other page(s). Definitions, synonyms, and defining sentences help make spelling-meaning connections.

What is the purpose and role of a word wall?

A word wall is a bulletin board or wall where words are displayed. Usually, these are high frequency words that the children are studying. The word wall is a tool to introduce and work with words during word study. Students also refer to the word wall during reading and writing to make connections, check correct spelling, use word wall words to make other words, etc.

How is the word wall used?

The word wall should be an integrated part of Word Study instruction in a balanced literacy classroom. Words of increasing difficulty

should be added to the word wall gradually over the course of the year, so students are able to assimilate new words as they come. A teacher may want to add, for example, about five new words to the word wall every week. This will give students a chance to practice both the new words for the week and words added in previous weeks.

Word wall practice should occur frequently. As part of a word study lesson, students can chant the spelling of word wall words, write word wall words in a notebook or on a whiteboard, and check the spelling of each word by underlining the letters. A variety of review activities should be done so that words are read and spelled instantly and automatically. Children should refer to the word wall during reading and writing, and should be held accountable for spelling word wall words correctly. For more on ways to use and practice a word wall, see Cunningham *Phonics They Use*.

Writing in Response to Reading

What role does writing in response to reading play and why should we make time for it?

There are many reasons to make time for students to record their thinking about their reading. Some include:

- To hold onto a reader's thinking about literature
- To slow the reader down and provide an opportunity to reflect on reading a specific text
- To have a visible way of assessing the different ways to think about student reading
- To prepare an individual reader for a group literature discussion
- To express a reader's thoughts for students who may not be particularly verbal in sharing their thinking
- To serve as an assessment tool for the teacher and for students as they reflect on their thinking
- To hold the reader accountable for independent reading work

What are some of the types of writing in response to reading that may be incorporated into the Reading Workshop?

There are many types of writing in response to reading that may be incorporated into the Reading Workshop. Three important ones are: 1) Occasional/jotting type writing; 2) Regular/on-going writing and 3) Formal genres of writing about reading.

When is occasional/jotting type writing used?

Many times we ask students to jot down their thinking about a book that is being shared with the whole class, or for their independent reading. This writing is informal and generally for the purposes of reminding the reader what they were thinking in the process of reading. Readers might use these jottings to help them get ready for a book talk or as the beginning of longer pieces of writing about their reading. Writing in this way might happen during Read Aloud time or in connection with Independent Reading.

What might it look like?

This type of writing might be recorded on a post-it note, on a graphic organizer, or with short texts, in the margins of a copy.

When is regular/on-going writing used?

Because writing about reading can be such an important way of understanding a reader's process and thinking, many teachers build in opportunities to do it on a regular, ongoing basis. Time is build into the Reading Workshop for these responses and occurs a minimum of a few times a week. Some teachers also use the tool for such writing in homework assignments, during Independent Reading time and during whole class Read Alouds.

What might it look like?

Regular/ongoing writing may vary considerably. Most teachers use one of the following:

A reader's notebook: This may be an actual notebook divided into sections used for different purposes, among them recording reflections about their independent reading. The sections might include: a place for recording thoughts and comments on books being read independently; a place to list books read; a section for listing books the reader wishes to read in the future; a place to take notes on whole class reading instruction. Additional information on this format can be found in Sibberson and Szymusiak's Still Learning to Read, 2003.

A reading log folder: It may include information such as the title and author of books read independently, pages read and a place for recording a comment about the reader's thinking throughout the text. Refer to Hindley's In the Company of Children, 1996.

A Dialogue Journal: Through letters, the reader corresponds at first with the teacher and later with a reading partner about the independent reading they are doing. Refer to Atwell's In the Middle for additional information.

When are formal genres of writing about reading used and where can I find descriptions of what they might look like?

The teacher may choose to address one or two formal genres of writing about reading over the course of the year. Genre studies, literary essays or book reviews are structured and organized as described in the Elements of Writing section of this Guide.

How do I prepare my students to write in powerful ways about their reading?

"From the very first day of school, teachers can be laying the groundwork for students' thinking and talking about books that will set the stage for later writing about reading."

Angelillo, 2003

Preparing students early in the year might involve these steps:

- Assess students and fit them with books they can read
- Begin reading aloud regularly
- Use the Read Aloud books to spark discussions
- Carefully scaffold students toward accountable talk, i.e. including everyone in the conversation, staying on topic, keeping within the text, etc.
- Give students chances to talk in small groups about the Read Aloud text
- Occasionally model jotting down some of the points made in conversations, on chart paper
- Ask students what they would write down from classroom conversations if they were keeping notes; write these on a chart for later reference and to show how notes look

The best curriculum informants are our students. Once they are writing about their reading on an ongoing basis, ideas for what to teach the class will emerge by looking closely at this documentation. What type of comments are different readers recording? How might you name them and use specific student examples to teach the entire class about each of the categories?

It is suggested that teachers develop such lists of possible types of comments on an ongoing basis with their own students. Each type of response should be highlighted once you see examples of them appearing in individual reader's comments. These comments can then be used as examples for the whole class and puts each in a context that can be more easily understood by the students.

How can teachers best respond to texts to both encourage and model for students?

- Retell or summarize what has been read
- "See ahead" in the text and make predictions about what will happen next
- Compare yourself or someone you know to a character

- Comment on the author's craft
- Compare the book you're reading to another one you've read
- Ask questions about the text
- Comment on the "tone" of the story
- Empathize with a character and imagine what you would do in the same situation
- Comment on what the reader identifies as the theme.

Encouraging students to keep reading tools as mentioned above is only as powerful as the reflections teachers and students make on them. It is imperative that teachers not only make time to view the students' reflections for assessment purposes, but that students are periodically given opportunities to reflect on and learn about themselves as readers by looking closely at their recordings.

Elements Of Writing Instruction

Elements Of Writing Instruction

Writers' Workshop

Teaching kids how to write is hard. That's because writing is not so much one skill as a bundle of skills that includes sequencing, spelling, rereading, and supporting big ideas with examples. But these skills are teachable. And we believe that a writing workshop creates an environment where students can acquire these skills, along with fluency, confidence, and a desire to see themselves as writers.

Fletcher and Portalupi

What is a Writers' Workshop?

The Writers' Workshop can be defined as an interrelated combination of writing experiences that occur during the writing block of the Balanced Literacy framework. It encompasses focused writing - both assigned and self-selected - in a variety of genres and content areas. The purpose of the Writers' Workshop is to give students opportunities to write within the school day and to provide appropriate, intensive, targeted instruction to the whole group, small group and individual.

Fountas and Pinnell, 2001

What are the components of a Writers' Workshop?

Mini-lesson (10-15 min.)	Teacher teaches mini-lesson to whole group
Independent and Group Practice (35-45 min.)	• Conferring • Guided Writing • Independent Writing
Share (5-10 min.)	Whole group comes together again to share their writing

Mini-lessons

Mini-lessons are brief and focused. The teacher makes the decision to teach the mini-lesson based upon the needs of students in the classroom. Mini-lessons fall into several categories:

- Writer's process: strategies writers use to help them choose, explore or organize a topic and cut-and-paste techniques for revising a piece, etc.
- Qualities of good writing: information to deepen students' understandings of literary techniques. For example, creating a scene, deciding on a point of view, using powerful language, leads and endings.
- Editing skills: information to develop the writers' understanding of spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

A mini-lesson does not always direct the course of action for the entire class. This is a time to introduce an important skill; for example, how strong verbs improve writing. Teachers use the mini-lesson to introduce one idea/skill/strategy that seems relevant and timely for a particular group of writers. Teachers might direct students to practice the skill *during* the mini-lesson with the following instructions: "Choose a page in your writer's notebook and circle the verbs. Can you think of a stronger verb that might replace the ones that you are using?" When the mini-lesson ends, students return to their ongoing writing projects, with the focus once again on the goals and intentions they've set with teachers.

Independent and Group Practice

Teachers devote most of the workshop time to actual writing. The room hums with the productive sound of writers at work. During this time students work on their writing projects. They are writing new entries, composing rough drafts, planning, rereading, proofreading or conferring with other students. Most teachers use this time to circulate and confer with students. This is the heart of the workshop.

Share Time

Response occurs throughout the workshop in the form of teacher-student and student-student conferences, but daily time is also scheduled for students to share their writing with the whole class. In these share sessions teachers coach students on how to respond to each other's writing. Some teachers designate a special Author's Chair for this purpose.

In the intermediate grades children respond in a variety of ways. The teacher may also establish small response groups in which children read and discuss their writers' notebooks with their peers.

What resources are available for mini-lessons?

Many professional resources about the writing workshop will contain information that you might include in mini-lessons. A list of possible texts is available in the Resource List. The best way to utilize any of these types of resources is as a guide. The resources will provide you with possibilities of all that you might teach your students about the process of writing. You know your students best and will ultimately be the one who decides when to teach what.

Fine literature works in various ways. It reminds us of our own lives or the lives of those we know well, serving as a resource for writing topics. Authors can serve as mentors and their texts as models of what we might be attempting to craft in our own writing projects. When using a piece of literature in a mini-lesson it should be a revisit of the text. The goal is to highlight something specific, usually regarding craft that the author has accomplished in their text. Reading an entire text for the first time during a mini-lesson, allowing time for response and then pointing out something about craft will easily turn your mini-lesson into a maxi-lesson. If, however, the literature is a piece that the students have heard at another time in its entirety, the mini-lesson will remain short and explicit. Using literature in mini-lessons and as a support for individual student conferences will make learning about craft much more manageable.

The best mini-lessons are those that reflect what good researchers we are. By looking at individual student work, we can make plans for whole class mini-lessons. Some questions to guide your thinking when looking at pieces of writing are: (1) What are some of my students doing successfully that I want to address with the entire class? (2) Whose writing might I use as an example in a mini-lesson to make my point? (3) What "red flags" do I see in individual pieces? Determining this will aid you in prioritizing what issues should be addressed and in what order.

Drawing on your own writing experiences, sharing what it is like to go through some of the same struggles and successes the students are experiencing is crucial for establishing the tone for a successful writing workshop. Students learn to write from someone who writes. Explain how you come up with ideas for writing, what qualities of good writing you are experimenting with and how, and demonstrate how you revise your own work in front of them.

How does Writers' Workshop lend itself to the differentiated classroom?

Since students are self-selecting writing topics and being encouraged and instructed through individual conferences about how to become more competent writers, teachers are continually differentiating instruction based on the strengths and needs of each of the writers in the classroom.

How do I organize my classroom for a Writers' Workshop?

Meeting Place

You will need a gathering space large enough for your entire class to meet. You will gather here for mini-lessons and whole-class response sessions. This might be the spot where you read aloud. It may be a large corner that is set up as a quiet place for students to stretch out on the floor to work. It will provide a place where you could work with students individually or in a group to do a mini-lesson.

A Place for Materials and Tools

Writers, like all craftspeople, need access to their tools. A writer's tools may include:

- Paper, pencils, notebooks, and computers for drafting
- Folders for keeping work organized
- Scissors, tape, stapler for revising
- Dictionaries, thesauri, word lists, checklists, colored pens for editing
- Trade books for inspiration and technique

Where will these tools be stored? Some teachers establish a Writing Center, where supplies are available to students. This sounds fancy, though it doesn't have to be more than a small table in the corner of the room or a cart that can be wheeled to the center of the room during workshop. There will be a steady stream of students using this center so think carefully about where you locate it. Other teachers bring the materials to their students by placing caddies with frequently-used items at the center of student tables.

Desks or Tables

There are a number of factors to consider here. First is comfort. People need to be comfortable to do their best work. This means that young writers should have access to spaces in the room other than their own desks. Some students like to write on a clipboard as they stretch out on the floor. Others prefer working at a desk that is pushed off into a quiet corner. Ask your students to think with you about how the space should be used during writing time.

Consider your one-to-one conferences. Where will you meet to discuss an individual's writing? While some teachers assign a spot where students come to them, we strongly encourage teachers to go to the students for conferences. A lot of good teaching takes place in teacher-student conferences. While conferences are designed for a particular student, you will find that nearby students will eavesdrop and also benefit. Cluster desks into groups of four or six so

your teaching can spill outside the parameters of a single conference. Clusters of desks also make it easier for students to ask for and receive help from each other.

Fletcher and Protalupi, 2001

Inspiration

How can we help students get ideas for writing?

There are a number of ways that we can help students come to realize that they have stories to tell and important ideas to write about. Students will find some of their best ideas from a variety of sources. We can help them by offering a number of strategies for facing "the blank page."

As you expose students to different strategies, it is important to take the time to model how you generate new ideas by sharing your own work. At the beginning of the year, you may select entries from your own writer's notebook or other sources to have students achieve that specific strategy. As the year progresses and different ideas are introduced, they can draw upon a number of strategies while working independently.

These strategies might include:

- Drawing stories from a variety of literature such as picture books, poems, short texts, other students' writing, articles, etc. to stir up memories or ideas to write about
- Modeling with literature used during Read Alouds to help students spark memories or inspire them to write about an idea or compose within a specific genre
- Asking them to relive family or personal memories
- Rereading old entries from their writer's notebooks to get new ideas
- Rereading old entries to extend or "stretch out" parts
- Following up on a Show and Tell experience

- Recording observations of everyday occurrences, objects, or texts
- Paying attention to an object or event using the five senses
- Utilizing photographs, art work, or images to help students stir up memories or ideas to write about
- Creating a list of all things that they are "experts" on (a list of things they know a lot about and can easily write about) and have them choose one to develop

Hindley, 1996; Davis and Hill, 2003

Teach students to use a variety of tools to record or save ideas throughout the day. These tools may include charts posted around the room, lists in a notebook, quick observations or ideas on Post-it notes. The students can refer to these tools and expand their ideas during writing time.

"Students can also learn from one another and can help each other generate ideas for their writing. You can begin this process through partnerships as well as using students as models by asking them simple questions such as:

- How did you get your idea for this piece?
- How do you decide what's important about your topic?
- What do you do when you don't have an idea to write about?
- What suggestions could you give another about writing?

Davis and Hill, 2003

Shared Writing

What is Shared Writing?

Shared Writing is the composition of text with the teacher and students working together. You might recount a class trip, expand on a text you read together or write your own story or poem. The students tell you what to write and the teacher scribes it on chart paper, and together you work out the conventions of print, spelling, and grammar.

When does Shared Writing take place?

Some teachers conduct Shared Writing first thing in the morning as part of the class news. Others do it following a class trip or when something new and eventful happens in the class or building. Regardless of when it is conducted, Shared Writing does not need to occur on a daily basis. With primary age children, two or three times a week may be optimal and with older students, perhaps less.

What should be done after a Shared Writing experience?

As the teacher accumulates Shared Writing in a chart tablet, it is recommended that the accumulated texts are saved for future shared reading experiences.

Does Shared Writing look the same in an upper elementary classroom?

It may, though not necessarily. What is key about Shared Writing is that the teacher is modeling or demonstrating what a proficient writer does when composing text. Often with older children, this might happen when the teacher puts his/her own writing on an overhead projector and reviews the process of composing, revision and editing. Rather than learning "rules" about writing, the students view a writer at work and can learn rules of composition, revision or editing within the context of a complete body of work.

Interactive Writing

What is Interactive Writing?

Interactive Writing helps children attend to print while using their knowledge of oral language. It also models strategies for problem solving as an independent writer. As the children share the pen with the teacher, they have an opportunity to practice writing the letters and words they know and to do some problem solving on words they partially know or words the teacher wants them to know fluently (high-frequency words). This activity also supports important

concepts of directionality, the one-to-one match between the spoken and written word and conventions of print like capitalization, punctuation, spacing, etc. By sharing the task with the children, the teacher can model the thought processes of developing a list, letter, poem, shared class experience or project, or any other written text. During the ten to twenty minute Interactive Writing period, the teacher and the class or small group work together to create written text. The group agrees on what to write through discussion and negotiation. What distinguishes Shared Writing from Interactive Writing is that in Interactive Writing, both teacher and student "share the pen," both literally and figuratively.

Why use Interactive Writing?

Interactive Writing allows children to use literacy and language. "Children develop their competency with oral language, reading and writing as they participate in interesting experiences, express their ideas, and build a shared set of understandings. The process is carefully guided by a teacher who is aware that students are learning in many ways at the same time."

McCarrier, Pinnell, Fountas

Children continue to develop an understanding of all aspects of literacy, including letters and their phonetic makeup. Interactive writing encourages children to reach beyond their present skill level so that they can move ahead and construct text using words and ideas they could not have reached if they were working alone. In a supported way, they learn about the process of creating language for real purposes. They feel a sense of belonging to a peer group and can claim ownership of the product since they are an integral part of this interactive process. What develops is a shared experience that brings the children and teacher together in the creative process. Specific skills such as editing, sequencing and making meaning from shared experiences are noted and saved for future reference. This constructivist learning involves the children sharing the creation with the teacher.

Supported by an adult, the children are able to do more than they could do alone. The adult's support allows the children to work at

the outer limits of their own abilities, so that new learning takes place during the performance of new actions. The children and teacher enter into discussions to reach consensus on the text to be written. Through constructing text, the children learn about the characteristics of text and how it relates to ideas. Teacher and children together explore and extend the creation of literature and expository text.

How can the classroom best be organized?

The organization of the classroom is an important factor in implementing the interactive experience. There must be enough space for all to have a clear view of the easel. Accessibility is also important so that children can move to and from the easel. The area should allow for the display of the writing and there should be places within the class library for a permanent collection of the completed interactive writing pieces.

Placement of materials and tools within the area allow for efficiency of use. Included are an easel, markers, a variety of paper and cards. For younger children: a name chart, an alphabet linking chart, poems or stories for Shared Reading, word walls or word charts, upper and lower case magnetic letters stored alphabetically (on a metal cookie sheet), and a pointer should be added to these supplies.

What should be done after an Interactive Writing experience?

Interactive Writing is used for creating stories, retelling favorite literature, writing poems, recipes, directions and lists. The pieces created by the class become part of the classroom environment and are reread often. The class may use the pieces for Shared Reading or may enjoy reading some independently. Teachers can find a way to make this writing a permanent resource in the classroom by creating it on chart paper that can be mounted on classroom bulletin boards or bound in a class book.

What is the link between assessment and instruction?

Linking assessment with instruction is critical. Interactive Writing is not a static tool. As children grow in their ability to write, teachers

should make instructional decisions to match their children's needs. Observations of children produce evidence of their progress which affect the instructional decisions made. The teacher can encourage experimenting with new genres and ways of organizing texts. Guided by children's conversation and their participation in composition, the teacher can alter the flow of the writing. Teacher records could include headings such as: "Knows How," "Needs to Know How" and "Planning for Teaching." The planning column could then form the basis for the mini-lessons that would be a focus of the interactive writing activity. Small group instruction and subgroups could be formed with children who have similar needs.

Guided Writing

What is Guided Writing?

Guided Writing is a process whereby the teacher forms a group of students to address a specific need and then provides instruction and practice to address that need. Needs can vary. Sometimes children have trouble finding a topic to write about. Sometimes they're having trouble correctly using periods or quotation marks. Sometimes they want to try a new genre, but don't know where to start. Whatever the issue, these small groups help children acquire strategies and skills to address them.

Taberski, 2000

How are Guided Writing groups formed?

Selecting students to pull together for Guided Writing groups is dependent on careful reflection and on conference notes and observations previously taken on individual writers. As you analyze these notes, patterns of need will emerge. Groups are formed to address such needs and then they disband when students have learned what they needed.

How do I incorporate these flexible groups?

During any given writing workshop, the teacher may decide to conduct a few individual conferences and then one Guided Writing

group or may choose to have only Guided Writing groups to allow time to reach more than one group.

Independent Writing

What is Independent Writing?

Students learn to write by writing. The most powerful thing we can do for our student writers is to give them opportunities — long uninterrupted blocks of time — to *write*. Independent Writing allows for this opportunity. While whole and small group instruction on craft lessons, skills, and strategies are important, real growth occurs only when children have ample time to put pencils to paper. The most crucial component of the writing workshop is when students are working independently on their writing. The teacher uses this time to confer individually with student writers – to note individual strengths and needs for each of the writers in the classroom.

Conferring

What is a writing conference?

A writing conference is the teacher's opportunity to pull up alongside a student and have a conversation about what is happening with that student as a writer. The conversation may be about the writer's process, the actual content of the piece being worked on, or a check of how previously set goals are being met.

Conferences, like many conversations, have the following characteristics:

- Conferences focus on helping students become better writers
- Conferences have a predictable structure: understanding intentions, building on strengths, and helping set goals
- Conferences help students pursue lines of thinking by focusing them on a particular strategy or skill, e.g. leads, organization, editing

- Conferences provide conversational roles for teachers and students.
  First the student is in the lead role: The student sets the agenda for the conference by describing the writing work. The teacher listens carefully to what the student says, asks questions to clarify and deepen understanding of the work.
  Then the teacher is in the lead role: The teacher pursues a line of thinking about the student's writing work by asking questions and reading the student's writing. The student responds to the teacher's questions.
  The teacher shares the assessment of the student's writing. The student listens carefully to the assessment and asks questions to clarify and deepen an understanding of it. The teacher's focus is to help the student improve. The students' focus is to figure out how to make their own work better.
- Conferences show students that we value them as writers.
  We ask questions that encourage their thinking and show interest in them as individuals and writers.
  How we listen is key; it helps them talk about what they are trying to do. Look for opportunities to point out what they have learned to do that will help them in their future writing.

How does a conference inform instruction?

Conferences are short, focused sessions that are comprised of four components:

- *Research* first to find out how the student's writing is going.
- *Diagnose and decide* what would make sense to teach the student at this point in his/her writing.
- *Teach* the student in an individualized, on the spot focused session.

- *Record* the essential content of the conference with notes on new goals and accomplishments.

Wood Ray, 2001

When are conferences scheduled?

Ideally, during a 30-40 minute block of independent writing time, the teacher aims to meet with at least 5 writers. Naturally, if a guided writing group takes place (pulling together children with similar needs), the number of students that you touch base with will increase.

How do I keep track of student conferences?

Recording the information gathered during a conference is critical. It will help you keep track of the frequency of meetings with each student and the goals set for the individual writer. With closer analysis, decisions can be made about direction for whole class instruction.

Options for containing these notes include a binder with a section for each student, a clipboard and record form, a recipe file box with index cards or a teacher's plan book grid. It's important to find one that you feel is manageable and that matches your own individual teaching style.

Assessment

Why is assessment important?

Assessing writing is about gathering information to plan instruction for the whole class, small groups, and individual student needs. By holding writing conferences and by examining student writing, teachers can begin to construct a plan for learning. Examining student writing through the lens of assessor enables us to:

- Know student strengths and needs as writers
- Tailor our teaching to individual needs in writing conferences

- Design units of study that focus on the collective needs of the students in our classrooms

What should I consider when examining students' writing?

Assessing Growth in Primary Writers

1. What does the writing reveal about the writer's knowledge of language?
   - Make a list of all the writer knows
2. What risks does this child take as a writer?
   - Does the writer take risks with spelling or is writing limited to words the student can spell correctly?
   - Does the student manipulate the paper by adding or taking away pages to fit the needs of the story or does the paper determine the length?
3. What patterns emerge as you read through the writer's work?
   - Is there sameness to topics/purposes?
   - Does the student use paper in similar ways?
   - Is there a formula applied over and over again?
   - Is there a recurring theme in the texts or drawings?
4. What changes have occurred over time? When arranged chronologically, is there growth in:
   - the spelling?
   - the quality or length of each text?
   - the drawing or use of paper?
   - the relationship between the drawing and the text?
5. Does the student have a clear strength as a writer?
   - Knowledge of conventions
   - Quality of composition
   - Process employed
6. Based on your observations, what is this writer ready to learn next? What instruction might the writer benefit from today? What experiences or situations might be fruitful for future growth?

1. Ask these questions as you reflect on the student's process:
   - How does the student use his/her writing time? How does the student access help from others, both peers and teacher?
   - How would you describe this writer's process? What works particularly well for the writer; is there anything that hinders his/her process?
   - What risks do you see this student taking as a writer?
2. Examine several pieces of the student's writing. In reviewing it, consider:
   - The types of writing the student has attempted
   - The quality of revisions present
   - The quality of the finished product, both in terms of craft and conventions
3. List the student's strengths and needs:
   - as a composer
   - as a reviser
   - as a conference partner
   - as a speller
4. Involve the student in self-assessment and goal setting. Sit together and ask the student to talk about how he or she has grown as a writer this year. Try any or all of the following strategies: Ask the student to compare an early piece with one written more recently. Ask the student to select and talk about what makes this his or her "best" work. Ask the student to talk about a piece of writing that failed and what lessons the experience taught. Finally, encourage the student to set one or two future goals.
5. Spend time gathering your thoughts from all the above. Think about the goals you would set for this writer and what you might do to encourage growth in that direction.

Fletcher and Portalupi, 2001

Word Study

Where does spelling fit in the balanced literacy program?

Spelling strategies should not be developed in isolation. Just as competent readers use many different strategies to read, competent spellers use many strategies to try spelling unfamiliar words. It is important that the emphasis be on children learning strategies rather than being given a list of words to be learned by rote. Through reading and writing children discover spelling strategies for themselves. Children will become more powerful spellers if they learn that knowing how to spell one word will enable them to spell many other words.

Teachers need to plan how and what they want children to learn about spelling. Teachers' observations should lead to a thoughtful and deliberate plan of instruction that focuses on particular aspects of spelling. Furthermore, children need to be involved in word choice. For example, a shared reading experience provides an excellent opportunity to search for spelling words, and interactive writing is one of the best times to demonstrate what has been learned.

By starting with a text the children know, and then focusing on a spelling pattern contained in the text, children understand how what they're doing in the word study groups fits into the whole of learning to read.

Taberski, 2000

How do word walls support children's knowledge of spelling?

Both primary and intermediate teachers use word walls in a variety of ways to facilitate the teaching of spelling.

Spelling Pattern Word Wall – spelling patterns that usually represent only one sound are highlighted. Teachers use familiar text to highlight a predetermined spelling pattern. Words from the text are written on a chart and new words are elicited from the children and added.

Misspelled Words Word Wall – words commonly misspelled by children. Teachers look for words that are commonly misspelled in children's writing and add them to the word wall. A picture or phrase clue can accompany the word.

Word Searches Using the Word Wall – Focus on high frequency words through activities such as: find three words that begin with th, find a word with a magic e rule, find a word with the same spelling pattern as pay.

Writing Cycle

What is a Writing Cycle and how do I plan for one?

A Writing Cycle is the process through which a writer works to produce a finished piece of writing. It includes drafting, revising, editing, and publishing a piece of writing.

Many teachers organize their writing curriculum around a series of cycles. A cycle is a period in the writing workshop, typically four to five weeks, that fulfills specific teaching intentions. Mini-lessons are designed specifically toward these intentions. The cycle begins with a period of time spent gathering entries in the notebooks and ends with a published piece.

Some tips on structuring a typical writing cycle:

- It generally takes 4 to 5 weeks to complete a cycle.
- Children write every day in school and every night at home for the purpose of filling the notebook so they will have a variety of options to choose from when they decide to publish.
- Several pieces of literature are read out loud and a few are selected as mentors because they most closely match the focus of the cycle.
- When texts are longer and more difficult, you might introduce them in the reading workshop.

- Use a variety of your own writings as well as student writings to help accomplish the work of your mini-lessons.
- Daily writing, share sessions, and homework are in support of the work of the day's mini-lesson.
- Students choose a notebook entry or entries that contain an idea they would like to work on toward publication. Their focus now shifts from collecting a variety of entries to developing ideas around their chosen topic and making decisions about genre.
- Students draft, revise, and edit this piece toward final publication.
- Mentor pieces are revisited and studied to help students revise their writing.

Davis and Hill, 2003

Not every Writing Cycle will require the same amount of time. A teacher may decide to do a "mini" unit on a particular quality of good writing which will improve many student texts. For example, a two week unit might be designed to emphasize "powerful leads." All mini-lessons during the unit will highlight and focus on this crafting technique and different resources will be utilized to teach it on subsequent days. The expectation during such a unit is that all children will experiment with this technique in their individual writing pieces.

During the first cycles of the year, most work centers on launching the workshop, helping students generate topics for their writing, and improving the quality of the writing. Later, lengthier units would include those that focus on a particular genre of writing. These cycles may last, as suggested above by *Davis and Hill, 2003*, for up to 6 weeks with an expectation that every student will publish in that genre by the completion of the study.

Genre Study

What is a genre study and how do I plan for one in the writing workshop?

Whole class genre studies focus our thinking on one specific type of writing. We explore literature together, discover authors who are particularly good at this type of writing, and attempt to use what we have learned in our own projects. By studying something together, students are more likely to be successful when they attempt this genre on their own. They will have a better sense of how a poem or a memoir or expository text works having studied each of them up close. This study involves identifying features of each by looking at mentor texts. Once the features are identified and named, students can use that information to craft their own piece in that particular genre.

In planning a 4-6 week genre study it is helpful to consider the following:

- **Rituals**: How will I make time for the study? Will my usual management routines need to change in order to accommodate the study? Will my Read Aloud choices be geared toward the particular genre we're studying in the writing workshop? Will students be encouraged to read that genre in the reading workshop in addition to studying it during the writing workshop? Will homework be affected?
- **Tools**: Are there any special materials I'll need? Literature? Paper? Writing or illustrating tools for publication?
- **Mentors**: Which authors will we look to in learning about this genre? Will we study one author in depth or several different authors? Which particular pieces of writing within this genre will we study up close in order to identify the features of the genre?

An intensive study of one genre shows students the importance of having mentors and models for their own writing. Identifying the features of a particular genre and writing in that genre during a whole class study, paves the road for what students might do later, independently.

Writer's Notebook

What is a Writer's Notebook and how does it differ from a journal or diary?

Once students reach the intermediate grades, the tool they use for writing on a daily basis will change. The Writer's Notebook is used in place of writing folders that are commonly found in primary grade classrooms.

The Writer's Notebook can be ...a place to experiment

The Writer's Notebook can be many things: a place to experiment, to record overheard conversations or family stories, to remember an inspiring quotation, to freely associate, to ask questions, to record beautiful or unusual language, to jot down the seeds of unborn stories, record memories, and observations, to describe a picture or a person or an image that you can't get out of your head. It gives the writer a place to write down what makes them angry or sad or amazed, to write down what they notice and don't want to forget.

Before students begin writing in their notebook, it's important to give them an image of how this type of writing is different from writing "stories" with a beginning, middle, and end. While some of the ideas captured in their notebook may eventually be worked into lengthy, revised and edited pieces, the notebook is a container for their thinking in raw form. We refer to the writing in the notebook as "entries" rather than "stories". One way to model this is to introduce students to literature that sounds "notebook like".

How do students select something to publish from their notebook?

Unless a class of writers is working on a particular genre together, students will be publishing in genres of their choice based on what they've selected to work on from their notebook. A writing project might begin in different ways:

- A topic I've written so much about…(it must be important to me).
- An entry that already sounds like a particular genre and only requires some shaping (eg. a beautiful image in a notebook might be published as a poem, a child who often writes about sports may decide to write a "how-to" piece on playing sports.)
- An entry I would like to expand because it is a big issue for me.
- A question I've written in my notebook that I would like to try to answer.

Once a topic has been chosen, what are the steps involved in moving from notebook entry(ies) to published piece?

There are certain steps to consider as students move from notebooks to projects:

- Looking for something: what stands out? Of all my entries, what can I imagine spending a good deal of time on? What deserves my attention?
- Planning: does the subject/topic I've decided on need gentle shaping or does it require collecting and gathering more thoughts and information on the topic?
- Options: what might you do with it? Can you imagine this writing as a picture book? A poem? A letter? A persuasive essay? Students have a better understanding of the options if they have been exposed to many types of writing and the purposes they serve. With this in mind, be careful to vary the literature you share for your read-aloud choices. Expose students to non-fiction, poetry,

letters, picture books, memoirs. Even though some of these genres will be studied in a class-wide writing cycle, even casual exposure to them during Read Aloud will aid students in imagining possibilities for their own writing work. Students need to be reminded of all the purposes writing serves. Once a writer has decided on the purpose of a project, she can more easily imagine the possible forms it might take. For example, if her purpose is to inform or advise an audience, her writing may take the form of a poster, a letter, an advertisement, an invitation, a brochure, or an essay. If it is to amuse or entertain the reader, she might write a story, a joke book, a script, or a play. Letters to the editor, advertisements, and cartoons are often intended to persuade an audience.

- Study Stack: what examples might the student look to as models for the type of writing he is attempting in a project?
  - The topic: the writer wishes to see how other authors have handled this same topic or issue.
  - The style of writing: The writer admires the way a certain author uses a particular writing technique and wants to study that technique for his/her own writing.
  - The shape: The writer needs to learn about form. He might choose to look at poetry to learn about line breaks and white space or at picture books to see how an author divides up the text. What are the options in non-fiction writing? What can I learn about travel writing from looking at brochures?
- Drafting and revising: Students generally work outside of the notebook for this stage of the process and keep copies of notebook entries and drafts in a folder.
- Editing and publishing: Careful editing for all aspects of spelling, grammar and usage must be done before the piece is published.

Revision

"By the time I am nearing the end of a story, the first part will have been reread and altered and corrected at least one hundred and fifty times. I am suspicious of both facility and speed. Good writing is essentially rewriting. I am positive of this."

Dahl

What is revision?

Revision involves changing the meaning, content, structure, or style of a piece of writing rather than the more surface changes that editing demands. Students also need to understand that revision doesn't necessarily take place after they've finished a piece of writing, but instead revision will most likely occur throughout the writing process. In teaching revision it is important that students understand that revision is a natural, ongoing, and integral part of the writing process. It is not punitive and it is not editing.

Heard, The Revision Toolbox, 2002

What can teachers do to promote revision in their classrooms?

- Discuss with the students their feelings about revision. Create a climate where revision is valued. Give the writers a Revision Survey (see appendix Revision Survey) *Heard, 2002*
- Provide students with specific revision strategies. This can be accomplished by modeling professional writers' writing as well as your own. Model how a particular revision of yours improved your writing. Put a series of drafts on the overhead to demonstrate your own revision process.
- When you employ professional writers' work, link the revision to the craft you are teaching. For example, if you use a picture book to model a satisfying ending, encourage the students to revisit their writing and see if they can improve their ending.
- Teach mini-lessons that include specific revision strategies. (see appendix: Revision Strategies at- a-Glance) *Heard, 2002*

What are some examples of mini lessons that help students revise?

- Demonstrate the use of asterisks or numbers to identify places in the draft where revision may take place. Model writing these revisions on a separate sheet of paper. These revisions will then be inserted into the draft.
- Encourage the students to tell you what they know about making writing better. Compile a list and ask them to try these strategies when they write.
- Select a draft and demonstrate how to go through it to make it better. List the ways suggested. Ask the students to go back to their drafts and find a part they would like to make better.
- Use picture books (mentor texts) to help students make their writing better. For example, refer to picture books that have an especially good beginning or ending and discuss what the writers have done to make them effective.
- Use mentor texts to teach writers to expand on simple statements that simply tell. Change lines that simply tell into lines that show. For example, "We had fun" simply tells. Writing can be improved by showing how they had fun.
- Ask the writer to chose a part that needs to be revised and draw what the words say. Add details to the drawing as a way to inform the writing.

Davis and Hill,2003

How do primary writers revise?

The revision of most emergent writers is additive. Writers in the beginning stages can revise orally. When emergent writers share their pictures with you or when you take dictation, encourage the writers to tell more about their drawings.

Writers in later stages may add elements to their drawing, another label to their pictures, another letter to their letter strings, or another

word or sentence to their pieces.

Young writers should be shown how to add details to both their drawing and writing.

How can teachers help young writers revise?

Show your writers how to use a caret, in order to add words to their writing.

Establish the technique of skipping lines so they have room to add to their story.

Give young writers the time and opportunity to return to their first drafts.

Teach your young writers to read their work for target-skill use. Demonstrate how to combine sentences.

Freeman, Teaching the Youngest Writers, 2003

Notes and checklist

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