COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

CURRICULAR PLANS FOR The Reading Workshop

GRADES K–8

K–8 Overviews and Sample Chapters

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COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

GRADES K–8

CURRICULAR PLANS FOR The Reading & Writing Workshop

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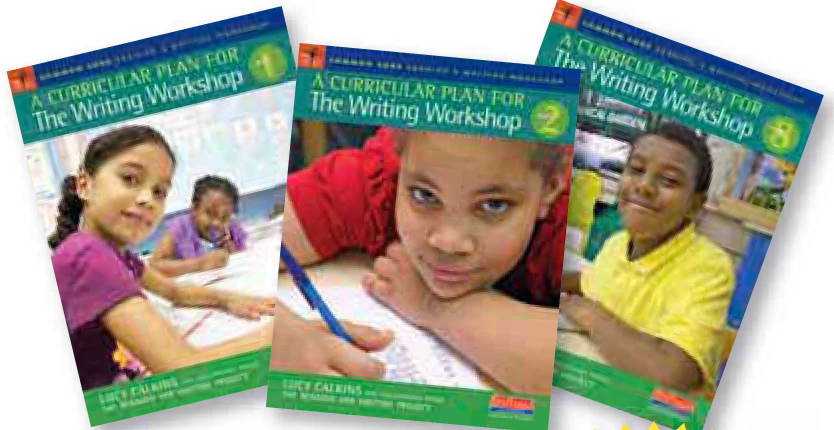

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COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Reading Workshop

LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT

An imprint of Heinemann
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801–3912
www.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

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ISBN-13: 978-0-325-04300-5
ISBN-10: 0-325-04300-0

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Overview of the Year for Kindergarten Readers

SEPTEMBER	UNIT 1: We Are Readers Exploring the Exciting World of Books
OCTOBER	UNIT 2: Readers Read, Think, and Talk about Emergent Story Books
NOVEMBER	UNIT 3: Readers Use All Our Powers to Actually Read
DECEMBER	UNIT 4: Readers Study Patterns in Big Books and Little Books to Help Us Read and Talk about Books
JANUARY	UNIT 5: We Can Be Reading Teachers: *Teach Yourself and Your Partners to Use All You Know to Read*
FEBRUARY/MARCH	UNIT 6: Learning about Ourselves and Our World: *Reading for Information*
MARCH/APRIL	UNIT 7: Readers Are Brave and Resourceful When We Encounter Hard Words and Tricky Parts in Our Books
APRIL/MAY	UNIT 8: Readers Get to Know Characters by Pretending and by Performing Our Books
MAY/JUNE	UNIT 9: Giving the Gift of Reading: *Reading across Genres*

We are very pleased to share with you the 2011–2012 Curricular Calendar. Those of you who receive new calendars every year may glance at this quickly and notice that in many ways it is similar to last year's calendar. It is true that we've tried to maintain most of the same units as last year, but this does not mean there are not crucially important changes woven throughout.

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This curriculum calendar has been designed for kindergarten teachers and is aligned with the new Common Core State Standards. We have also taken into account benchmark reading levels for kindergarten. You can find the TCRWP's Benchmarks for Independent Reading Levels chart on our website: www.readingandwritingproject.com. This chart has been developed based on data that we have collected over the years. To determine these levels, we queried New York City schools, researched what other states were doing, learned the levels of passages used in New York State's ELA exams, distributed tentative recommendations, received feedback, and finally settled upon some expectations. We acknowledge from the start, however, that these are open to debate. Therefore, we are not necessarily advocating that a district adopt levels we propose.

You'll notice that this year we include the reading benchmarks at the top of each unit. These include ones for months when you may be formally assessing your students (September, November, March, and June), as well as approximate levels for interim months. The purpose of this is to give you a sense of how children will ideally progress across the entire year so that you can help pace your students. Please note that this is just a suggested path; it will not hold true for all children. You may find it helps to refer to these month-by-month benchmarks as you create your own big goals for each unit.

We've written this curricular plan imagining that your classroom contains a wide array of readers, as kindergarten classrooms generally do. We also assume your children will enter at various stages of reading. Some of your students may know how to read leveled books while others will know many letter names and sounds. There will still be some who only know a few letter names. The calendar is designed with an eye toward helping your readers progress in a way that, by the end of the year, they'll be in the proximity of Levels D, E, or higher. If the majority of your readers enter kindergarten reading books like *Father Bear Goes Fishing* (D) you'll probably want to look at the first-grade curricular calendar for the way each of the units described here looks when it supports readers who are working at those levels.

Reading instruction happens moment-to-moment in the classroom as teachers establish the conditions in which children learn to read and to write, assess what children can do, and then teach children to take one step and then subsequent steps forward as readers. Starting in kindergarten and continuing through higher education, teaching is always responsive; it is always assessment based. But this doesn't mean that teachers cannot imagine, beforehand, how the classroom work will probably evolve across the year.

As readers grow, their needs change fairly dramatically—and our kids don't all grow in sync! It's almost as if one teacher needs to simultaneously support a kindergarten, first-, and sometimes even a second-grade curriculum. Then too, readers always need to integrate sources of meaning, so when a teacher teaches a unit of study that focuses on one aspect of reading, the teacher always needs to say to children, "Don't forget the topic we're NOT focusing on right now—you need to be thinking about your characters, too!" You will see that in this curricular calendar, we discuss ways in which a teacher can use components of balanced literacy to be sure that children progress in all aspects of reading. That is, if the unit of study is on comprehension, for example, you may use shared reading or interactive writing to remind children to use their word attack skills and strategies.

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This curricular calendar was written with input from teachers, literacy coaches, staff developers, and reading experts. We are excited to offer this as one informed pathway for your upcoming year, and we offer it in hopes that as a learning community we can be on congruent work as the upcoming year unfolds. However, we are under no illusions, and we know that there are hundreds of ways a teacher could plan a curriculum calendar for the upcoming year. We expect that all of you, as kindergarten teachers, will work with grade level colleagues to determine your school's own curricular calendar for kindergarten. What you decide may differ somewhat from this one as you consider your own areas of expertise, children's needs and interests, the standards and assessments to which you and your children are held accountable, the span of reading levels in your classroom, and your school's larger curricular plans. We hope that you can, actually, produce a written document representing your own curricular calendar—that you write some of your own descriptions of units or bring some units from last year's calendar into this one. Above all, we strongly recommend that you and your colleagues agree upon a shared journey, one in which you will be able to support each other.

New Work for the Coming Year

You will see that we have made some substantial revisions to units we've carried over from last year and have added in some new ones, too. Another important change to note is that we decided to reduce the number of units from ten to nine. Our rationale for this was that in the past, teachers have felt rushed. Having one fewer unit will allow you to spend more time on units you feel will especially benefit your children. In our overview we suggest a possible progression through the units, with the last four units spanning longer than a month. You may decide to structure your units otherwise. Always, our intent is that teachers will adapt this curriculum in ways that benefit their particular classroom of children.

The Common Core State Standards emphasize that children should read both fiction and nonfiction throughout the year. This year, we added a new unit in February, "Learning about Ourselves and Our World: Reading for Information." You will see that many of the kindergarten units of study position students to read across genres, for example, "Readers Study Patterns in Big Books" and "Little Books to Help Them Read and Talk about Books" and "Giving the Gift of Reading: Reading across Genres." Notice, too, that we added a new unit in January, "We Can Be Reading Teachers: Teach Yourself and Your Partners to Use All You Know to Read," to account for the fact that, by then, many of your students will already be reading in conventional ways. Finally, we revised each unit with an eye toward helping you pace and bring students up the ladder of text difficulty, so that all kids will meet or surpass the end-of-the-year benchmark Levels D/E.

This calendar aims to give children a well-balanced reading curriculum in kindergarten and prepare them for the work ahead in first grade.

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Workshop Structures

The structure that your reading workshop will follow from day to day will stay the same, even when the unit changes from month to month, and grade to grade. For example, every day in your reading workshop, you'll provide direct and explicit instruction through a brief minilesson; you'll provide children with long stretches of time to read emergent storybooks, shared reading texts, interactive and shared writing texts, and just-right books; and you'll provide individuals with assessment-based conferences and coaching. Most of your children will enter the year reading out of book bins of familiar stories, texts, and concept books, then meeting with a partner, perhaps in the middle of reading workshop, to read and talk about their books. Each day your kindergarten children will have time to sit hip-to-hip, one copy of a book between them, reading aloud or approximating their reading, in unison or taking turns. You'll also convene in small groups within the reading workshop. Some schools provide additional time for small groups outside the workshop—this is most apt to be the case for strugglers.

Minilessons generally start the day's reading workshop, providing you an important way to rally and instruct your children toward an essential skill pertaining to your entire community of learners. For example, you might teach your children that it is important to try their best to figure out what the words in their books are saying. You'll want to teach your learners ways to problem solve when they come to tricky words, and to use the beginning letter sound/s and think about what would make sense based on what is happening in the story. You'll want to teach your kids all about ways of working with partners, how to tackle tricky words, monitoring for sense, using fix-up strategies when sense falls apart, marking places to share with partners, and so forth. Minilessons revolve around a clear teaching point that crystallizes the message of a lesson.

Each minilesson is designed to teach readers a skill that they can draw upon that day and any day—not to assign children a particular bit of work one day, and another bit of work another day. It is a misunderstanding of workshop teaching when a teaching point is worded, "Today we *will* . . ." or "Today *you should* . . . ." Because the goal is for readers to accrue a repertoire of strategies they will draw upon over and over, it helps to create and post a chart of abbreviated teaching points so that readers can review what they have learned from prior minilessons. You can then bring these anchor charts from one unit of study into subsequent ones. Always, it is essential that you make these charts fresh each year within the presence of new learners.

The most important part of a reading workshop is the actual reading time. Children disperse from the minilesson, book bins or baggies in hand, and either go to their tables or find a special spot in the room to read. At the start of the year, children will not necessarily know how to read with a partner (or alone), so some teachers suggest that children first read alone for ten minutes, then with a partner for as long as it works (fifteen minutes at the start of the year is a victory). As September evolves, the time frames for reading will increase, and many teachers begin to suggest that children read first with a partner (sitting hip-to-hip, sharing a book, taking turns or reading in unison), and then after fifteen to twenty minutes read independently for similar lengths of time.

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Independent reading time will grow as children's skills grow (and eventually it will come first). Keep in mind that whenever kids are reading new texts, social support should come first so that later, as kids move up levels, they may read new and hard books with a partner initially, and then practice those on their own. By February, reading workshops are approaching forty-five to fifty minutes, with at least thirty minutes of this time reserved for readers to work alone or with partners on their reading.

In any case, children will read by themselves, and during this time they can Post-it places they are dying to talk about: funny parts, important pages, places where they grew a big idea or learned something surprising. They'll later share those places with partners. Across the year, you will want to vary their configurations so children are sometimes meeting with just one partner, and sometimes meeting in clubs consisting of foursomes.

As you progress in and out of different units of study, you will channel kids' reading so that, for specific chunks of time, they are reading one kind of text. Before they are ready for conventional reading, kindergarten children read out of bins in the classroom and then begin to use book baggies or bins that hold their shared reading texts, emergent story books, and any other texts they are working on reading. In general, children should have about ten to twelve things to read in the bin, box, or baggie. When kids are ready to read conventionally, they'll always have books to read at the text level you've assessed as their just-right level and ones at levels that are easier than that level. Usually, children select about ten to twelve leveled texts, as well as possibly some texts that the child can read because he or she has experienced them through shared reading and/or shared writing. Children might spend some additional time with emergent storybooks. They read their collection of books over and over throughout the week.

Although some children will move almost seamlessly from one level to the next, the majority of your students will move up the trajectory of levels more gradually. During the transition from one level to the next, they will begin to read books at the higher level, probably with some scaffolding, but will still feel mostly at ease in their current level. You'll give your students what we call "transitional book baggies," that is, baggies that include mostly titles at the child's just-right level as well as a handful of books at the next one. The latter can come from books you've shared with the child through a book introduction, or during guided reading, or it might include titles that the child has read with his or her partner. The idea is to scaffold readers as they move into a new level.

As children read, you'll be conferring with individual students in addition to leading small groups. You'll also sometimes just give book introductions—especially to help children who are relatively new to a level. Your conferences in reading may follow the research-compliment-teach structure of many writing conferences. Otherwise, they'll consist of you coaching into children's reading. Reading recovery teachers are expert at the latter, so learn from them! Some small groups will need help with integrating sources of information, so you may decide to do a bit of small-group shared reading. Some small groups will need help retelling what their books are about. This may mean that you do a strategy lesson with them. Some small groups may need support moving to the next level with book introductions, and you may do guided reading with them. Your small groups need to be flexible, need-based, and quick, lasting no more than approximately ten minutes a group.

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Alongside the Reading Workshop Be Sure You Also Teach Reading through the Components of Balanced Literacy

A full balanced reading program includes not only a reading workshop, but also a variety of other structures. Some of the most important for early elementary school-aged children are reading aloud, shared reading, interactive writing, phonics (also referred to as word study), and writing workshop.

Once children are in kindergarten, the reading workshop lasts about forty-five to fifty minutes every day. In addition, you'll want to read aloud every day. At least a few times a week, you'll support conversations about the read-aloud book. You will also need to lead a writing workshop, and this, like the reading workshop, will last approximately an hour a day. Kindergarten children still have a lot to learn about spelling and phonics, and so it will be important for you to lead word study time every day. In addition, you'll draw on the other components of balanced literacy. Sometimes, these other components will be woven into your social studies, science work, or morning meetings, and they will include additional small-group work, shared reading, and interactive writing.

Reading Aloud

One cannot stress enough the importance of reading aloud. You will want to read aloud to teach children discipline-based concepts that are integral to social studies and science. You'll also read aloud to create a sense of community and to show children why people love to read. And you'll read aloud to teach children vocabulary and higher-level comprehension skills. As you conduct a read-aloud session be sure that it includes opportunities for accountable talk.

To do this, plan the read-aloud to demonstrate a skill or a collection of skills. For example, you may decide to support your students' effort to understand a story by teaching them to approach the text thinking, "How is this character behaving?" After reading just a bit, pause and think out loud some of your thoughts. Then read on, revising what you think based on what you see the character doing. To use the read-aloud text as a forum for teaching reading skills, plan for the read-aloud by placing Post-its in the text ahead of time, marking places where you'll either think aloud to model a reading strategy or where you'll ask students to do similar work together by turning to talk to a partner about their ideas. Your prompts for getting children to turn and talk could be something like, "Look at what that character just did! Turn and tell your partner what you think will happen next," or "Let's think about what's going on here. Turn and tell your neighbor what you see happening." After a one- or two-minute interlude for partners to externalize their thoughts (that is, to talk), you'll read on, not wanting to lose the thread of the text.

After pausing several times to either demonstrate or to provide children with guided practice doing what you have demonstrated, and after reading the chapter or the section of the book, you'll probably want to engage in a whole-class conversation.

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These longer conversations will probably happen at least twice a week. During these conversations, it is important for children to direct their comments to each other and to carry on a talk in which one child responds to what another has said. That is, these conversations are not occasions for you to pepper the class with questions, calling on one child and then another. Instead, the class might for a time entertain a general question—say, talking back and forth about whether Poppleton is really a good friend—with one child saying, "I want to add on to what you said . . ." or "I know another part like that! Remember when . . ." or "I don't understand what you mean . . . ."

You may wonder about the read-aloud partnerships, asking, "Do the same partnerships support both independent reading partnerships [these are ability matched as partners read the same books] and reading aloud?" This is a question you will need to answer. It is organizationally easier for children to maintain the same partnerships across both independent reading and read-aloud, but it is educationally preferable for read-aloud partnerships to be different, so these relationships need not be ability based. In fact, some teachers call one partner "Partner A" (or Partner One) and one "Partner B" (or Partner Two) and quietly group students so that the A partners are the stronger readers and talkers. Then, when you set children up to do challenging work, you can say, "Partner A, will you tell Partner B . . . ," and if the task is one that you believe is perfect for Partner B, you can channel the work that way.

Your read-aloud work will sometimes foreshadow work that the whole class will be on soon. That is, if your class will soon begin a unit on nonfiction reading, you may want to get a head start on this by reading nonfiction aloud during the last week of the previous study. By the time your children embark on their own independent work, you will have already provided them with a common resource to draw upon.

Shared Reading

Shared reading is that time in the day when teachers and children have eyes on one text, reading in sync with one other. Usually shared reading revolves around big books, songs, or enlarged texts written on chart paper, with the teacher pointing under words as the class reads in sync. Usually a classroom community spends some time rereading familiar texts and some time, usually less, working together with a new text.

In many classrooms, with a large number of students learning their concepts about print, many teachers begin the year with daily shared reading time (sometimes twice a day) for about ten to fifteen minutes. They use shared reading to work on concepts about print, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and to practice the print strategies that they've determined many of their students still need to internalize and to use on the run as they read. Additionally, the act of gathering all students around a text in the beginning of the year helps build community and inspires enthusiasm for reading.

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Word Study

A school needs to decide upon an approach to phonics. The TCRWP does not try to make this decision for a school. Most schools that we work with draw upon a combination of *Words Their Way*, *Phonics Lessons*, the *Firsthand* series written by Fountas and Pinnell, and Pat Cunningham's work.

Assess your students' knowledge to determine what features you will focus on. Most kindergarten teachers use the Letter Identification Task, Concepts about Print and student writing to find out their students' stages of spelling development. Once you have assessed your students, you will want to organize your teaching into whole-class instruction or small-group instruction. Most kindergarten teachers begin with whole-class instruction for the first few months of school as they are teaching their students routines and concepts all children need to learn. Plan to focus on what most students are ready to learn next. Choose features to work on that most students find confusing. For example, if you notice that many students are confusing ending sounds, you'll want to make that your focus. Once you differentiate your class into three groups for word study, you'll want to begin by teaching students the routines to several word study activities so that kids can work in partnerships as you are working with one group.

Once you have assessed your students and decided how to organize your instruction, we suggest following Donald Bear's *Words Their Way* and/or Fountas and Pinnell *Phonics Lesson*s as a phonics curriculum. Be sure you spend enough time on studying each feature (for example, beginning sounds, spelling patterns) in a variety of ways. You will want to make sure that you are supporting students' ability to read and write these features both in isolation and in context. You'll want to make sure that you are doing plenty of shared reading and interactive writing to help students understand how letters and words work within the context of reading and writing. Always make sure to provide explicit teaching of phonics as part of your day. In some units you will notice that there is an emphasis on word solving. During these units you will want to support children's transfer of their word knowledge into their reading.

Small-Group Instruction

Much of your instruction is based on ongoing assessment of your class. Kindergarten literacy work rests on keeping up-to-the-minute with how your children are progressing. Of all grades, the different levels of your children in kindergarten are most varied, and the changes, or sometimes the plateaus, are especially intriguing. Therefore, you'll spend the year looking for key indicators that will guide you as you make crucial decisions for your class. Throughout the year, make it a habit to use the writing of your children so you know when to gently nudge each child to the next level of word work.

It is critically important that you lead small-group instruction as often as you can. When you think about small-group work, start with the idea that any teaching you do as a whole class can also be done in a small group. So you can do small-group shared

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reading, small-group interactive writing, small-group phonics, small-group read-aloud and accountable talk, and so forth. Your small-group work can be used to reteach, or enrich, and can also be used to preteach.

Your small-group work will be shaped especially by your assessments. For example, if you have some children whose writing is not readable, who do not yet represent every sound they hear in a word with a letter (correctly or incorrectly), then you know you will want to begin with extra assessments. Do they know their letters of the alphabet? Their sound-letter connections? How many sight words do they know? Once you've determined the level of work at which these children can be successful, you can essentially look back in these calendars to be reminded of the sort of instruction they will need. You may decide to do some book introductions to level A, B, or C books. You might want to pull a small group and work on one-to-one matching or even a bring a group together to practice retelling with a partner.

Assessment

You will see in Unit One that we suggest using the TCRWP Assessment Tools as soon as possible in September to help you learn about the strengths and needs of the readers and writers in your classroom. You may want to administer the Letter and Sound Identification Assessment individually during your word study time and to give the spelling inventory to the whole class or in small groups at another time during the day. (You can consult Donald Bear's book *Words Their Way: Word Study for Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction* for more information on how to analyze this inventory.) You could administer the concepts of print assessment during reading workshop.

The data you collect from these three assessments will help you plan your minilessons in upcoming units of study. For example, if most of your children don't know the difference between a letter and a word, as indicated on the Concepts of Print Assessment, include instructions on this concept in your plans for shared reading, reading workshop, and interactive writing. It's also important to plan for how you'll continue to assess your children throughout the year. Many teachers institute a system for keeping track of children's reading levels and growth (both by individual and by class) and for moving readers along to more challenging texts when they are ready.

Take note of the sight words that your children can read with automaticity. If your children are progressing well, they will be learning words throughout the year. By March, many students reading C or above will have somewhere around twenty or more high-frequency words that they can read. To help your students learn and use these words throughout the year, you may decide to give each child a key-chain full of word cards representing the sight words that the child knows or almost knows, and the child may take time during every reading workshop to flip through these cards, reading each aloud to herself. Children may play "I spy a word that . . ." games with partners involving word wall words, and certainly you may ask each child to take time each day to use the pointer and read aloud all the words on the word wall. (Some teachers try to jazz

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this up by asking the child to pull directions from a can. One day the directions will say, "Read the sight words in a witch's voice," and another day, "Read the sight words like you are a cat—meow each word." Do whatever you need to do to lure kids to develop automaticity in reading an increasing bank of sight words, and of course help children use these words as they read.)

You'll need to attend to your readers' developing abilities to comprehend texts deeply. You'll learn this best by listening closely to book talks, by hearing what children say to partners, and by listening to children's retelling of their independent reading books. Although we do not have a scale with which to measure this, the truth is that there is little that is more important. You may want each child to keep a reading portfolio that includes artifacts that represent the child's growing abilities to comprehend. For example, you might read aloud a short story and, at preset places in the text, ask each child to either turn and talk (as you record their responses) or stop and jot in response to the prompt, "What do you think will happen next?" or "How does the character feel and why?" You could date the child's responses and keep them, plus the text, from September and from several subsequent months, perhaps also including a rubric that analyzes what that child does and does not do yet when asked to predict. Or you may ask students to stop and jot during a read-aloud and then collect and analyze these responses. Similar records could be kept for any other comprehension skill, and we strongly suggest you select a few skills and make a point of keeping this sort of record. There is a rule of thumb that says, "We inspect what we respect."

It's important also to plan for how you'll continue to assess your students throughout the year. Many teachers institute a system for keeping track of children's reading levels and growth (both individual and by class) and for moving readers along to more challenging texts when they are ready. That is, you may decide to devote the reading workshop on the 12th, 13th, and 14th of each month to a consideration of whether children are ready to progress to new levels. In general, your children need to make rapid progress this year, at least moving to a higher level of text every other month (if not more than that), so teachers need to vigilantly watch for and seize opportunities.

You will find that the TCRWP has assessment tools on our website: www.readingandwritingproject.com. There are two sets of leveled texts used for primary Levels A–I. One is a set of multicultural books from the BeBop Books series, and one is a set of books from Scholastic. On the website there is information telling you how to order whichever set you select. For readers beyond Level I, there are text passages that can be printed right from the website.

Choice Time

Kindergartners need the opportunity to have a regularly scheduled choice time as part of their curriculum. By choice time, we mean the time of the day when children play (yes, we said *play*) in centers of their choosing, such as blocks, art, or dramatic play, to name a few. These centers often highlight different modes or styles of learning, and

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many children gravitate to their area of strength. When children are given the time to play in these different choice time centers (especially those that reflect a child's area of strength), many important skills are developed. As children dramatize pretend stories—or the stories from their lives—they are developing an understanding of narrative structure. As children build pretend cities and rebuild these to make them look just right, they are working on the important skills of revision and problem solving. Above all, choice time is a vehicle for language development. As children engage in authentic conversations around their work, they are learning the language of negotiation and planning. Vocabulary development occurs naturally as children talk about the structures they are creating: "Hey, give me that triangle so I can put a roof on this firehouse!" a child might say. Lev Vygotsky, the famous Russian psychologist who studied child development, said that "[i]n play, a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior; in play, it is as though he were a head taller than himself." Choice time opens doors so that all students can innovate, approximate, build stamina, and work with zeal on collaborative projects. These are all qualities that are essential to early literacy development.

Choice time is also a perfect time to observe and to take notes on the work your class is doing. Listen for language, keep the bits of writing generated, step back, and observe how conversations start and how they are sustained. You will learn new things about your children, and these observations will influence your next steps in instruction.

Classroom Libraries

Once your students have each been assessed and you've matched them to just-right books, you will want to be sure that they know where to get their just-right books in your classroom library. If you have lots of children reading Levels B, C, D, for example, then you will need lots of books at those levels. If you have no children reading levels J and K, then there is not a lot of reason to have those books in your library at this time. That is, your library should reflect your readers. Students will need help, especially early in the year, as they learn to manage their independent book choices. You should establish a system for checking out and returning books that travel between home and school.

Finding Great Literature to Build and Refresh Our Libraries

One of the key factors in making any unit of study successful is having a collection of excellent books that can be used as emergent story books, shared reading texts, just-right books, and read-alouds. Through our work with students and educators across the country, we have begun developing lists of books to support particular units of study. On our website you will find many book lists that support our reading units. The book lists will include levels. We use Fountas and Pinnell's levels, if those exist, or Scholastic levels. If neither source exists we note the Lexile level, which you can use

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to create levels by converting this Lexile level to an approximation of Fountas and Pinnell levels (take those with a grain of salt). You may want to visit our website at www.readingandwritingproject.com throughout the year for updated information.

As you well know as kindergarten teachers, this is a transformative year for your children. They are ready to dive into the reading world, to think in more sophisticated ways, and to set bigger goals. It is a year of huge growth and a time for children to meet high expectations as they ready themselves for the demands of kindergarten. Enjoy the wonderful work with your energetic readers!

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UNIT SIX

Learning about Ourselves and Our World

Reading for Information

FEBRUARY/MARCH

(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: C)

When children enter kindergarten, they are just beginning to explore the wideness of the world, to see that there are wonders much bigger than their own inventions. It's thrilling to watch a five-year-old ask how a rainbow is made or where air comes from, and to then listen, rapt, to our answers. But with those questions comes a big responsibility. As teachers, it rests on our shoulders to continue to pique our little learners' curiosities, giving them experiences that will foster this beyond-the-horizon learning. When we take children to the zoo or the park, or when we give them a role in the weekly household laundry, we are not merely spending time with them or getting work done, we are also teaching them to read and think and learn about the world.

As teachers, we know that children come to kindergarten with a wide variety of backgrounds and because of this, we plan class trips, assemblies, and performances for our classes that we know will delight and engage them. We plan these events both to foster student learning and to create class bonds, but mostly we plan such events as a way of exposing our students to more and more about the world. This unit is designed to teach youngsters how to discover more about the world through information books. Nonfiction reading offers our beginning readers the chance to experience the world through "everyday" exposure to topics that are often farther flung in books than a field-trip perspective might offer. Books take us into the lair of a lion and to the bottom of the ocean—they take us to places we might otherwise never go!

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The Common Core State Standards state that kindergartners should be able to "describe familiar people, places, things, and events, and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail." By teaching our youngsters to think and speak in ways that help them make sense of their experiences, using particular words to talk about specific activities or places and modeling thinking as we look at monkeys or folded socks, we not only bolster kids' knowledge of the world, we also strengthen their technical vocabularies and arm them with the language to present knowledge and ideas. Through building on each others' ideas, articulating their own ideas, and confirming they have been understood, children are able to demonstrate command of standard English and use of wide-ranging vocabulary. This also helps ELLs develop their understanding of context and content. More broadly, children become self-directed learners.

Nonfiction books won't be new to your readers, of course. All this year, kids have been reading both fiction and nonfiction texts as they practiced emergent story-book reading, learned about concepts of print, and studied patterns of text in little and big books. However, whereas earlier children will have been mostly focusing on learning to read, now they will expand their focus to include reading to learn. You might issue the invitation in this way: "Readers, for the past five months you've been strengthening your reading muscles, getting better and better at learning how to read. And those muscles have gotten so strong that *now* I think you're ready to use them to read not just books, but the world! For the next few weeks we're going to be delving into things that we already know a little bit about—and we're going to learn much more!"

As children begin to read informational texts, you will want to be sure you are supporting readers at all different levels. Children reading Level A–D books will, in general, have some knowledge of what they are reading, since these books tend to focus on basic topics such as cleaning your room, different animals at the zoo, or kinds of transportation. As children move into Levels D and E and above, one of the most dramatic changes is that kids will encounter more topics that are outside of their personal backgrounds.

Setting Up the Nonfiction Library

To prepare for this unit, you'll want to spruce up your libraries and pull informational picture books from your baskets to use for read-alouds. Place the books you select in full view—perhaps with covers facing out on top of your shelves and around your library—to entice your students with the array of topics they'll explore. You'll also want to take out some informational big books and place them in a basket near the library. These will be great resources both for quick warm-ups before shared reading and for demonstrations during your minilessons.

During book shopping, you might want to begin building genre knowledge by teaching your students how to identify nonfiction books. One way to do this is by highlighting how information books often have photographs both on the cover and on the inside pages. You might also conduct a quick book walk of two books, one fiction and one nonfiction,

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to show kids how to spot the difference. You could even have kids sort books from a basket into two piles: stories and information texts. It's best to actively engage students so they learn how to make distinctions between these genres on their own.

While your students are still learning to differentiate between the genres, you may need to support their book shopping by informally grouping information books inside of the leveled baskets. To support students who are English language learners, you may want to go a step further and rubber-band together books on the same topic. For example, if you have a ton of books on farm animals, communities, and families in your Level D basket, you could band together farm animal books with other farm animal books, community books with other community books, and so forth. During book shopping, you might guide students to select a stack of banded-together books so that when they read, they see the same content words repeated across several books. In studies, this practice of reading across many books on the same topic has been shown to have a strong influence on vocabulary development.

When looking through your libraries in anticipation of this unit, you'll want to ask yourself, "What can my library teach my kids about the world?" This is an exciting question! So often we set up our libraries with levels at the forefront of our minds. Now we have the opportunity to set them up thinking about richness and teaching opportunities. Knowing your books and the kinds of topics that students are reading will be helpful as you begin to think about your minilessons and the topics you'll reference during your connections and shares. As you prepare for the unit, you might flip through your baskets, reading the titles and previewing the books.

Readers Work Hard to Learn Information

To launch this unit, your first step will be to rally children around the work they will be doing. You might do this by telling your children that each book is a trip. Who doesn't love a trip? You could remind them of school outings they have taken, and you could ask them about trips they have made with their families. Once they are listing the places they have gone and the things they have seen and learned there, you might say something like, "That's the thing about trips—because we go to new places we end up learning new things. That's what books can do for us too!"

You'll want to remind students of how they pay close attention and learn new things when they are on trips or vacations. You could remind them that when they go to a new place they probably don't just look straight ahead. Instead, they look all around them to see what's new about this place, peering at small things closely, squinting their eyes to see far off in the distance. They probably also touch objects, listen to sounds, and try out new activities. For instance, if a student went to the beach for the first time, she would look up and down the beach and then out to the ocean's horizon, trying to learn everything she could about the seaside. The child might touch shells and sand, listen to the waves crashing and birds flying overhead. She would probably jump waves again and again, trying each time to do it just right. Maybe she would build a castle, decorating it

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with shells and seaweed. Later, she might rebuild the castle, this time making a moat around it and filling the moat with water. She might dig a big hole, seeing how far she could get, or cover herself up with sand. She'd jump into this new adventure, experiencing and learning about all the things around her.

At the start of this unit, you'll teach readers that the same is true when we actively read and reread information books. We closely study the pictures and imagine the sounds we might hear if we could be inside the photographs. Just like an actual visit to a new place, we learn new words and facts on our reading trips. We wonder and notice and make sense of the world around us.

Once your students are excited about the prospect of "traveling" into books to read and learn, you will need to teach them strategies to facilitate and elevate this work. You might begin by reminding your students that they already know a lot about getting ready to read the information books in their book baggies—and they'll want to draw on that knowledge now. Demonstrate for your students how to use the title to figure out the main topic of a book. "The title of your book is like a sign that tells you where you are going on your trip," you might say. "Book titles help us ready ourselves for the noticing and naming we will need to do on our travels in this new place." Point out that the images on the front and back covers of a book can also give them clues about the book's main idea. As you teach this valuable thinking work, you'll also be reinforcing the Common Core State Standard of identifying the front cover, back cover, and title page of books.

Another way of doing this work is to teach readers to use what they already know about a topic to help them get ready to read. Teach students that as they look at a book's cover, they can say things like, "This reminds me of . . ." or "This is just like . . ." or "I've seen this before . . ." Then, as students read their books, they can use the thoughts they've had about the title, cover, and what they already know about the topic to help them read each page. This strategy is especially useful when kids run into tricky words. Tell readers, "When we get to a word that we don't know, we can look to the picture on the page, but if that doesn't help us we can also think about the title and what we know about the topic of the book to help us figure out the tricky word." You might even model for readers that they can confirm some of their initial thinking about a topic or book as they move from page to page. For instance, if the book a student is reading is titled *The Zoo*, a student might read the title and say, "This reminds me of my trip to the Bronx Zoo! I saw a cobra, monkeys, a camel, and giraffes!" Then as she reads each page, she could use that information to confirm what she reads. She might say, "This page is all about giraffes! I *thought* there would be a page on giraffes!"

You'll want to coach into children's thinking about their books, asking them questions to assess whether they are grasping not only the main idea of a book, but also important details. According to the Common Core State Standards, children at this stage of the year should, with prompting and support, be able to identify the main topic and retell key details of a text. You'll need to scaffold this work a bit. You might, for example, prompt the child who guessed there would be a page about giraffes to share what she notices about the information the author gives us about giraffes, both in the text and in the picture.

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Now is a good time to revisit all the work that you and your children did during the pattern book unit. Remind kids that anticipating the next pages in your book helps readers to not only read the words on the next page but to also think about what is the same between one page and another, and about what this particular book is teaching. Some kids can do this work on the first read, but many will do it on a second or third read. You may want to use shared reading to support students who continue to struggle to identify the pattern and to comprehend that all information books teach us something. Model how the pattern often holds the meaning of the book, as it conveys a single idea over and over, and how you think about the idea within the pattern as a way to guess what words may change when the pattern breaks. You can also teach children that if they know the pattern of most pages, they will be able to read that part smoothly. However, be sure to teach them, too, that wise nonfiction readers know to check to see that what they are reading makes sense, sounds right, and looks right, especially when the pattern changes.

If students are having difficulty drawing on prior knowledge as they read, you may need to explicitly teach them ways to detect whether they have familiarity with a topic. Chances are that most of your children will know something about the topics of some of the books you put out—ones that focus on cats and dogs, sports, parks, the weather. But some of your books will be on topics that children know little or nothing about, and you'll want your students to not only spot that difference, but also feel comfortable acknowledging it. Stephanie Jones's work has shown that sometimes children feel like they have to act as if they know something about a certain topic or have prior experiences with things even if this isn't the case. Many of us can recall a time when a student said something like, "I've seen a monkey before. My mom gave me one as a pet for my birthday when I was little." Jones demonstrates the power of teachers modeling disconnections in front of students to show them it's okay to admit when you have not had experiences with something before. You might demonstrate for readers how you can study the cover of a book and say, "This is different than books I've read before," or "I haven't seen this before," or "I really don't know much about . . . but hope to learn . . ." When students don't have a direct personal link to a text, we can teach them that just like in the previous unit, they can be their own teachers. They can learn about new topics all on their own by carefully studying the pages of their books. Essentially, we want students to know that when readers work hard to gather new words and facts from the pages of our books, we can learn about things we never knew existed.

As part of this work, you might teach students to closely study a book's illustrations to learn about the topic. Show students how to put their fingers on the photographs of each page and point to the important action or object that dominates the picture. When you model this, do a think-aloud, saying something like, "What's going on here?"

You will learn a lot by studying the mistakes children make as they read. For instance, if a child says that one part of the book is about *bee* mouths, but the word on the page is *butterfly*, you can guess that the child is struggling because she is only looking at the first letter of the word. You will want to make sure that your readers are cross-checking

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meaning—that they are using the picture and what they know about the rest of the text along with visual information, like the first and last letter of a word, to help them read with accuracy.

Once a reader gets to the end of a book, you may want to teach that child to reread the title and say back across his fingers some of the new facts he learned. As you near the end of this part, we suggest you set kids up to share their new learning and thinking with their reading partners. By this point, they will have learned a lot and will feel good about showing off their new knowledge. Teach partnerships to share their learning by opening to specific pages, pointing to photographs and teaching newly acquired facts or words. Just as children share all about what they saw on a trip to the zoo or the park, you'll teach your students to share the highlights of their reading journeys with their partners.

This partnership work supports the speaking and listening sections of the Common Core State Standards, which suggest that at this stage of their learning, children should be able to "participate in collaborative conversations about kindergarten topics and texts, with peers and adults in small and larger groups." You will need to check in with partnerships, making sure that they "follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others and taking turns speaking about the topics and texts under discussion)." Meanwhile, children should be able to carry on and "continue a conversation through multiple exchanges." If you see conversations petering out, you may need to teach children some prompts for keeping talk going (such as "I can add on to that . . ." or "Why do you think that?" or "How does that work?").

You can use read-aloud time to teach kids ways to talk with one another about what they are learning. It would be wise to also use this time to teach students ways to question one another as a way of getting children to say more about their thinking and learning. After one partner has already shared a fact or two, you might teach students to ask, "What else did you learn about . . . ?" or "What's the most important thing to know about . . . ?" Such inquiries will help children extend and build onto their thinking, as well as supporting the Common Core State Standard of asking and answering questions about key details in a text.

Nonfiction Readers See More than the Text on the Page

As you move into this next part of the unit, your students will continue to build upon both the monitoring-for-meaning strategies you've taught them and the main idea work they began in the first part of this unit. In this next portion of teaching (and learning), you'll show students not only how to collect new vocabulary and facts as they read page after page, but also how to synthesize the various pieces of their learning in such a way that they begin to develop big ideas around topics. If you think this is too sophisticated for kindergarten, bear in mind that your teaching throughout the whole year has prepared them for this. It isn't that children will necessarily wow you with their insights—that's not the point. What matters is that they begin to formulate ideas—and to understand that having thoughts about books is work that readers do again and again.

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Before you move into teaching your students how readers synthesize words and pictures when reading informational texts, you may want to revisit all of the word-solving strategies that you have been teaching throughout the year. You will want to do this in a way that prepares them for the domain-specific language that they are likely to encounter. You might say, "Readers, when you are reading for information, you may come across words that you have never seen before or even heard. For example if you are reading a book about flowers, there might be special words about flower parts, or if you are reading about the ocean, you may find words that scientists who study the ocean use." Then you will need to teach your students specific strategies to help them solve these words. You might teach them to stop at such words to ask, "What might this word mean? Are there any clues in the picture? In the other words on the page?" You will then need to show them how to find the answers to these questions. This work will help your readers to better understand the content they read, and it aligns to the Common Core State Standard that requires kindergarten readers to "ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text."

One word-solving strategy you can teach your readers is to look closely at the visuals in a book to take a guess at what an unknown word means. For example, if a sentence says, "Frost is water," and there is a picture of a flower with ice crystals on it, you could demonstrate how to say some words to talk about and describe what you see in the picture: "Oh, I see like a little bit of snow on the flower. It is stuck to the parts of the flower, but it is not snowing around the flower." Then you could use this description to say, "Hey, maybe this word here means something like snow stuck to a flower when it is not snowing." Another word-solving strategy is to teach readers to search a picture and find which parts of it teach the words and which parts of it teach other things.

As you move beyond vocabulary to teach students to engage in the big work of this part, it will be important to emphasize how partnerships can work together to study the pictures in their books. They may do this by pointing and labeling parts, commenting on what they see, and saying how parts in the picture go together. This heightens students' awareness of the big idea we hope to convey in this part—that readers see more than text on the page. You might also teach students to take turns describing the pictures in their books to their partner or friends. Nudge them to think, "What part of the picture would I describe first? What seems to be the most important part? What do I want to say about this?"

As you get kids to think about the pages in their books, prompt them to look between the pictures and the words. The Common Core State Standards suggest that kindergartners should be able to not only read the images but also read between the text and the picture on the page. Nudge kids to "bring the picture to life" both by observing the action in the image and by taking note of what is happening in the text. You may wish to suggest that students start by reading the words and then using the pictures to add on to their understanding. For example, after reading a page that says, "Birds live in trees. They make nests," a student can look to the picture and ask, "What do I see happening here? How are they doing that?" This will help the child to not only process

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what the text of this particular page conveys, but also infer additional information about what goes into nest making. According to the Common Core State Standards, kindergartners should be able to ask and answer questions both in partnerships and as they read, so you will want to nudge your young readers to continually pose and address questions such as "How does this work?" and "Why does this happen?"

You might ramp up this work for partnerships by teaching them more advanced ways of inspecting photographs together. One way to do this is to demonstrate how you can read a page and then talk about how the picture on the page helped you to add on to the information you gathered from the text on the page. For instance, if the text says, "Monkeys climb trees" and the photograph paired with that text depicts a monkey hanging from a tree limb with just one hand, you could share that even though the words just teach the reader that monkeys climb trees, the *picture* teaches the reader that monkeys have strong arms that help them as they climb and hang from trees. Teach students to respond to the text by saying things like, "The words say ______. I also see ______ in the picture and it makes me think ______."

It is important to model this kind of extension work inside your read-aloud. Demonstrate by thinking aloud about how you connected your thinking from facts gathered from the text with information you gleaned from text features such as photographs or diagrams to grow your ideas about your topic. Then ask students to do the same kind of work when they turn and talk with their partner. These opportunities will scaffold students' independence so that they can do this higher-level thinking work inside of their own books.

Highlighting rereading at this point in the unit will be important for your young readers. While students already know that rereading books makes their reading smoother and stronger, you'll now want to emphasize the power of rereading new words and sentences as a way of actively learning about a topic. Readers can work with their partners to do some of this rereading work together, showing one another parts that confused them and how they reread to work through those spots.

Nonfiction Readers Can Read More than One Book about a Topic to Compare and Contrast

In this final part of the unit, you will want to teach children two big things: how to combine their learning from more than one book and how to compare and contrast books. Looking across books like this opens up multiple perspectives to our students, allowing them to look for commonalities and differences across the information they are gaining as they read.

You might want to teach partnerships to play the "Same and Different" game. To do this, one partner selects a book from her book baggie and then asks the other partner to dig into his baggie and find a book on a similar topic. You can teach kids to say something like, "I have a book that's about ______. Do you have a book that is the same?" Once partners have found similar books, they can look through them,

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flipping page by page, and search for facts and images that are the same and things that are different across both books. As they notice similarities and differences, they might say things like, "Look at this page. This page is just like your page on ______." Or, "Our books are both on ______ but the pages are different. My pages go like ______ and yours go like ______." To get even more reading mileage out of this partner game, you can teach students to reread lines and even whole parts to each other as they talk about the information they have learned. Kids might take turns reading lines or parts together.

Once kids are able to talk with a lens toward similarities and differences across books, you may want to push them to dig deeper into compare-and-contrast work. You might teach your most sophisticated readers to think about what the author of each book is trying to teach. You could demonstrate how the teaching that is done through the pictures and the teaching that is done through the words may be the same or it may be different. Using a page or two from a nonfiction shared reading experience, you might show students how to say, "The picture teaches me ______, but/and the words on this page say ______."

Next, you might teach partners to use the patterns in their books to look for similar information and ideas that are in their books. For instance, partners might notice that they both have books on the zoo. One book might say something like, "Giraffes are tall animals. They have long necks. Birds are short animals. They have small beaks." The book about zoo animals may have a pattern like, "This is a giraffe. It uses its neck to eat. This is a bird. It uses its beak to eat." Show partners how to talk about these pages by asking, "What did the authors want us to learn about the zoo animals? Let's look at what is the same and different about the information on the pages." This way you set up the partners to look across the texts and begin to notice things that will help them as they carry on in their own books. Your students will be inferring and synthesizing information as they engage with comparing and contrasting across their books.

In all of this work, your students will have been looking at what different books and authors can teach about the same topics. Depending on your library, those topics might be broader or more focused. If the books for this unit come only from your library, you may find that your topics are broad ones such as animals, places, and family. If, however, you can combine libraries with your colleagues, you might have more focused topics such as insects and mammals, cities and countries, or siblings and parents. Teach your readers to lay books side by side and then ask themselves, "What did I learn about the topic from this one and what did I learn about the topic from this other one?" Essentially, you'll be teaching kids that when it comes to learning it is important to listen to many voices. When you listen to many voices you are layering multiple thoughts and perspectives to say more about a topic. After reading several books on a single topic, your kindergarten students can meet with their partners to share all that they are learning. They can move from book to book, saying a sentence or two about the learning they did in each one.

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Word Study/Phonics, Interactive Writing, and Shared Reading

At this time in the year in word study, you'll want to begin to introduce some simple spelling patterns (*-at*, *-an*, *-in*, *-it*, *-op*, *-ot*) to support students who are reading or getting ready to read levels C/D/E. Students at these levels will need to be able to combine the meaning of the story with their knowledge of simple spelling patterns to problem-solve words. You might begin this work by doing some phonemic awareness activities. According to the Common Core State Standards, students should be able to blend and segment onsets and rimes of single-syllable words. Show students a picture of a simple word like *cap* and have students break up the word into onset and rime: /c/ and /ap/. The ability to hear the rime in the word will support the work they do with spelling patterns.

Your teaching might then move toward sorting words that have the same spelling patterns. Help students notice that all of the words in one column have the same part. You will also want to show students how knowing these patterns can help them know lots of other words. According to Marie Clay's research, it is not necessary for students to learn every word on a list of spelling patterns. Instead, they should know many different spelling patterns so they can use these to get to lots of new words. Teach students how to manipulate letters in words to make new words. For example, you might give out magnetic letters needed to make all the *-at* words or do this work as a whole class at the easel. Point out that by changing the first letter in the word and keeping the last part, children can make many new words. It is helpful to use phrases like, "If you can write the word 'sat,' you can also write the word 'mat.'" As you teach spelling patterns, you will also want to make sure children remember to transfer their knowledge of these spelling patterns into their own reading and writing. At the same time, you will probably want to continue adding one high-frequency word a week to the word wall and providing children with time to practice with partners or in small groups, so children are working on words they still need to learn. All children can practice words in the same way, but the words may be different, based on what your assessments show each child needs.

You may find it helpful to support your teaching about information books with interactive writing. When you are writing together, sharing the pen with students in small groups, you may want to write the kinds of texts that students are encountering in their reading. This means that you will write books with students that have the text characteristics of Level C or D information books (lower or higher if need be). One sort of typical text that children in your class are reading may go like this: "Dogs have fur. Dogs have four legs. Dogs have ears." Another may read, "On rainy days, we like to jump in puddles. On rainy days, we like to carry umbrellas. On rainy days, we like to drink the rain," and so on. These texts will have a language pattern that repeats, known high-frequency words, pictures that match the text, simple sentences, and familiar concepts. Considering the text elements as they create texts will make students more tuned in to them when they read. If you opt to write texts like these during interactive writing, plan to complete them not in one day, but across several days.

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If you decide to teach . . .	Suggested Lessons in *Words Their Way, 4th Edition*	Suggested Lessons in *Phonics Lessons K*—Pinnell & Fountas
Phonological Awareness: Blending Syllables Hearing Beginning, Middle, and Ending Sounds	Adapt 4-27 to 4-30 (pp. 123–124) 4-14 (p. 116) 4-18, 4-20 (pp. 118–120)	Blending Syllables PA 16 (p. 165) Hearing Beginning, Middle, and Ending Sounds PA 17 and PA 18 (pp. 169–176)
Letter Knowledge: Letter Formation	Adapt 4-28 to 4-31 (pp. 123–125) 5-6 to 5-8 (pp. 157–158)	LK16 (p. 271) and LK19 (p. 283)
Letter/Sound Relationships: Beginning Sounds and Ending Sounds	5-10 (p. 159)	LS2–LS5 (pp. 313–328)
Simple CVC patterns (-*an* and -*ay*)	5-12 to 5-14 (pp. 160–162)	SP3 and SP4 (pp. 351–358)
High-Frequency Words	pp. 182–183	HF3 and HF4 (pp. 381–388)

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An imprint of Heinemann
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801–3912
www.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

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"Dedicated to Teachers" is a trademark of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

ISBN-13: 978-0-325-04302-9
ISBN-10: 0-325-04302-7

EDITORS:
Kate Montgomery and Teva Blair

PRODUCTION:
Patty Adams

TYPESETTER:
Valerie Levy, Drawing Board Studios

COVER AND INTERIOR DESIGNS:
Jenny Jensen Greenleaf

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY:
Peter Cunningham, www.petercunninghamphotography.com

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Overview of the Year for First-Grade Readers

SEPTEMBER/ OCTOBER	UNIT ONE: Readers Build Good Habits
OCTOBER/ NOVEMBER	UNIT TWO: Tackling Trouble: *When Readers Come to Hard Words and Tricky Parts of Books*, *We Try Harder and Harder* (Assessment-Based Small-Group Work)
NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER	UNIT 3: Readers Meet the Characters in Our Books
JANUARY	UNIT 4: Nonfiction Readers Learn about the World
FEBRUARY	UNIT 5: We Can Be Our Own Teachers When We Work Hard to Figure Out Words
MARCH	UNIT 6: Reading across Genres to Learn about a Topic: *Informational Books*, *Stories, and Poems*
APRIL/MAY	UNIT 7: Dramatizing Characters and Deepening Our Comprehension in Reading Clubs
MAY/JUNE	UNIT 8: Readers Can Read about Science Topics to Become Experts

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How happy we are to share with you the 2011–2012 Curricular Calendar. Those of you who receive new calendars every year may glance at this quickly and notice that in many ways it is similar to last year's calendar. It is true that we've tried to maintain most of the same units as last year, but this does not mean there are not crucially important changes woven throughout.

This curriculum calendar has been designed for first-grade teachers and is aligned with the new Common Core State Standards. We have also taken into account benchmark reading levels for first grade. You can find the TCRWP's Benchmarks for Independent Reading Levels chart on our website: www.readingandwritingproject.com. This chart has been developed based on data that we have collected over the years. To determine these levels, we queried New York City schools, researched what other states were doing, learned the levels of passages used in New York State's ELA exams, distributed tentative recommendations, received feedback, and finally settled upon some expectations. We acknowledge from the start, however, that these are open to debate. Therefore, we are not necessarily advocating that a district adopt levels we propose.

You'll notice that this year, we include the reading benchmarks at the top of each unit. These include ones for months when you may be formally assessing your students (September, November, March, and June), as well as approximate levels for interim months. The purpose of this is to give you a sense of how children will ideally progress across the entire year so that you can help pace your students. Please note that this is just a suggested path; it will not hold true for all children. You may find it helps to refer to these month-by-month benchmarks as you create your own big goals for each unit.

We've written this curricular plan, imagining that your classroom contains a wide array of readers, as first-grade classrooms generally do. We also assume that many of your children will enter your class reading books that are somewhere around levels D/E or higher. The calendar is designed with an eye toward helping your readers progress in a way that, by the end of the year, they'll be in the proximity of levels I/J/K or higher. If the majority of your readers enter first grade reading closer to levels A–C, it will be especially important for you to draw upon this curricular calendar, as well as the winter and spring units of the kindergarten reading calendar. Then again, if many of your readers enter first grade reading books like *Henry and Mudge* (J), you'll probably want to look at the second-grade curricular calendar for the way each of the units described here looks when it supports readers who are working at those levels.

Reading instruction happens moment-to-moment in the classroom as teachers establish the conditions in which children learn to read and to write, assess what children can do, and then teach children to take one step and then subsequent steps forward as readers. Starting in kindergarten and continuing through higher education, teaching is always responsive; it is always assessment-based. But this doesn't mean that teachers cannot imagine, beforehand, how the classroom work will probably evolve across the year.

As readers grow, their needs change fairly dramatically—and our kids don't all grow in sync! It is almost as if one teacher needs to simultaneously support a kindergarten,

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first-, and sometimes even a second-grade curriculum. Then too, readers always need to integrate sources of meaning, so when a teacher teaches a unit of study that focuses on one aspect of reading, the teacher always needs to say to children, "Don't forget the topic we're *not* focusing on right now—you need to be thinking about your characters, too!" You will see that in this curricular calendar, we discuss ways in which a teacher can use components of balanced literacy to be sure that children progress in all aspects of reading. That is, if the unit of study is on comprehension, for example, you may use shared reading or interactive writing to remind children to use their word attack.

This curricular calendar was written with input from teachers, literacy coaches, staff developers, and reading experts. We are excited to offer this as one informed pathway for your upcoming year, and we offer it in hopes that as a learning community we can be on congruent work as the upcoming year unfolds. However, we are under no illusions, and we know that there are hundreds of ways a teacher could plan a curriculum calendar for the upcoming year. We expect that all of you, as first-grade teachers, will work with grade-level colleagues to determine your school's own curricular calendar for first grade. What you decide may differ somewhat from this one as you consider your own areas of expertise, children's needs and interests, the standards and assessments to which you and your children are held accountable, the span of reading levels in your classroom, and your school's larger curricular plans. We hope that you can, actually, produce a written document representing your own curricular calendar—that you write some of your own descriptions of units or bring some units from last year's calendar into this one. Above all, we strongly recommend that you and your colleagues agree upon a shared journey, one in which you will be able to support each other.

New Work for the Coming Year

You will see that we have made some substantial revisions to units we've carried over from last year. Another important change to note is that we decided to reduce the number of units from ten to eight. Our rationale for this was that in the past, teachers have felt rushed. Having two fewer units will allow you to spend more time on units you feel will especially benefit your children. In our overview we suggest a possible progression through the units, with the first three and final two units spanning longer than a month. You may decide to structure your units otherwise. Always, our intent is that teachers will adapt this curriculum in ways that benefit their particular classroom of children.

The Common Core State Standards emphasize that children should spend large portions of time reading and writing nonfiction. The first-grade curriculum includes two nonfiction units. This year, we revised these two units to feature new parts and angles. During these units, students will use their growing repertoire of reading skills to read just-right nonfiction texts. The second nonfiction unit—"Readers Can Read about Science Topics to Become Experts"—spotlights reading about physical science (in first grade, this is solids, liquids, and gases). Of course, in addition to this particular focus of nonfiction reading, you will expect that throughout the year children read just-right books of increasing difficulty on a variety of science and social stud-

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ies themes. We want to encourage our students to be researchers of the world and to know that reading can be a source of information to grow knowledge both about subjects they are experts in and ones that are newer to them.

Finally, we have combined dramatization with character reading clubs this year to highlight the natural partnership between the two. While many units focus on a particular genre of reading—fiction, science, and so on—some are designed to allow children to read more broadly, across genres (Units One, Two, Five, and Six). This calendar aims to give children a well-balanced reading curriculum in first grade and to prepare them for the work ahead in second grade.

Workshop Structures

The structure that your reading workshop will follow, day to day, will stay the same, even when the unit changes from month to month and grade to grade. For example, every day in your reading workshop, you'll provide direct and explicit instruction through a brief minilesson, you'll provide children with long stretches of time to read just-right books (and to sometimes read books that are a tiny bit challenging), and you'll provide individuals with assessment-based conferences and coaching. Most of your children will enter the year reading level D books, so they should be reading, then meeting with a partner perhaps in the middle of reading workshop to read and talk about their books. Each day your first graders will have time to sit hip to hip, one copy of a book between them, reading aloud in unison or taking turns. You'll also convene in small groups within the reading workshop. Some schools provide additional time for small groups outside the workshop—this is most apt to be the case for strugglers.

Minilessons generally start the day's reading workshop, providing you an important way to rally and instruct your children toward an essential skill pertaining to your entire community of learners. For example, you might teach all your children that it is important to test out whether a book feels "just right." You'll want to teach your learners ways to get themselves ready to read their books and to generate predictions for the kind of text it is and how it is apt to go. You'll want to teach your kids all about ways of working with partners, tackling tricky words, monitoring for sense, using fix-up strategies when sense falls apart, marking places to share with partners, and so forth. Minilessons revolve around a clear teaching point that crystallizes the message of a lesson. For example, a teaching point might go like this: "Today I want to teach you that readers don't just open a book and start reading! Instead, readers take time to preview our books and to think, 'So what is this book going to be about?' Then readers often begin to look through the pages at the pictures, doing a 'picture walk.' When we have an idea about what the book is about, we read and confirm or revise our ideas."

Each minilesson is designed to teach readers a skill that they can draw upon that day and any day—not to assign children a particular bit of work one day and another bit of work another day. It is a misunderstanding of workshop teaching when a teaching point is worded, "Today we *will*. . ." or "Today *you should*. . . ." Because the goal is for readers to accrue a repertoire of strategies they will draw upon over and over,

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it helps to create and post a chart of abbreviated teaching points so that readers can review what they have learned from prior minilessons. You can then bring these anchor charts from one unit of study into subsequent ones. Always, it is essential that you make these charts fresh each year within the presence of new learners.

The most important part of a reading workshop is the actual reading time. Children disperse from the minilesson, book bins or baggies in hand, and find a spot to read. At the start of the year, you may need to remind children of routines and expectations for independent reading time versus whole-class or partner reading. Then, too, children's stamina for maintaining reading may be a bit low early on in the year. Many teachers find it helpful to chart their students' stamina across the first month of the year, evaluating their progress. The length of independent reading time will grow as children's skills grow. It may be that because children's stamina is not strong at the start of the year, you'll suggest that all children read alone for fifteen minutes, then sit hip to hip and read aloud together in partnerships for fifteen more minutes. If you have students who read level J books or above, they should read for longer periods independently (twenty to twenty-five minutes) and then talk but not read with partners at the end of the workshop (five to ten minutes). By February, the goal is for first-grade readers to be able to sustain reading for at least forty-five minutes in a close to sixty-minutes-long reading workshop.

In any case, children will read by themselves, and during this time, they can Post-it places they are dying to talk about: funny parts, important pages, places where they grew a big idea or learned something surprising. They'll later share those places with partners. Across the year, you will want to vary their configurations so children are sometimes meeting with just one partner, and sometimes meeting in clubs consisting of foursomes.

As you progress in and out of different units of study, you will channel kids' reading so that, for specific chunks of time, they are reading one kind of text. They'll always read books at the text level you've assessed as their just-right level and ones at levels that are easier than that level. Usually, children select about ten to twelve books a week to store in their book bin, reading those books multiple times across the week. They swap bins mid-week with a same-level partner, doubling the number of books they read in the week.

Although some children will move almost seamlessly from one level to the next, the majority of your students will move up the trajectory of levels more gradually. During the transition from one level to the next, they will begin to read books at the higher level, probably with some scaffolding, but will still feel mostly at ease in their current level. You'll give your students what we call "transitional book baggies," that is, baggies that include mostly titles at the child's just-right level as well as a handful of books at the next one. The latter can come from books you've shared with the child through a book introduction, or during guided reading, or it might include titles that the child has read with his or her partner. The idea is to scaffold readers as they move into a new level.

As children read, you'll be conferring with individual students in addition to leading small groups. You'll also sometimes just give book introductions—especially to help

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children who are relatively new to a level. Your conferences in reading may follow the research-compliment-teach structure of many writing conferences. Otherwise, they'll consist of you coaching into children's reading. Reading recovery teachers are expert at the latter, so learn from them! Some small groups will need help with fluency and integrating sources of information, so you may decide to do a bit of small-group shared reading. Some small groups will need help holding tight to meaning while also considering multisyllabic words. This may mean you may do a strategy lesson with them. Some small groups may need support moving to the next level with book introductions, and you may do guided reading with them. Your small groups need to be flexible, need-based, and quick, lasting no more than approximately ten to twelve minutes a group.

Alongside the Reading Workshop (within Units of Study) Be Sure You Also Teach Reading through the Components of Balanced Literacy

A full balanced reading program includes not only a reading workshop but also a variety of other structures. Some of the most important for early elementary school-aged children are reading aloud, shared reading, phonics (also referred to as word study), and writing workshop.

Once children are in first grade, the reading workshop lasts almost an hour every day. In addition, you'll want to read aloud every day. At least a few times a week, you'll support conversations about the read-aloud book. You will also need to lead a writing workshop, and this, like the reading workshop, will last approximately an hour a day. First graders still have a lot to learn about spelling and phonics, and so it will be important for you to lead word study time every day. In addition, you'll draw on the other components of balanced literacy. Sometimes, these other components will be woven into your social studies, science work, or morning meetings, and they will include additional small-group work, shared reading, and interactive writing.

Reading Aloud

One cannot stress enough the importance of reading aloud. You will want to read aloud to teach children discipline-based concepts that are integral to social studies and science. You'll also read aloud to create a sense of community and to show children why people love to read. And you'll read aloud to teach children vocabulary and higher-level comprehension skills. As you conduct a read-aloud session be sure that it includes opportunities for accountable talk.

To do this, plan the read-aloud to demonstrate a skill or a collection of skills. For example, you may decide to support your students' effort to understand expository nonfiction text by teaching them to approach the text thinking, "What is this mostly about?" After reading just a bit, pause and in your mind create a subtitle for the text you've read so far. Then read on, revising that initial subtitle (and with it, your sense of what the text is mostly about). To use the read-aloud text as a forum for teaching

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reading skills, plan for the read-aloud by placing Post-its in the text ahead of time, marking places where you'll either think aloud to model a reading strategy or where you'll ask students to do similar work together by jotting down their thoughts or turning to talk to a partner about their ideas. Your prompts for getting children to turn and talk could be something like, "Turn and tell your partner what you think will happen next" or "Let's think about what's going on here. Turn and tell your neighbor what you think is happening in this part." After a one- or two-minute interlude for partners to externalize their thoughts (that is, to talk), you'll read on, not wanting to lose the thread of the text.

After pausing several times to either demonstrate or to provide children with guided practice doing what you have demonstrated, and after reading the chapter or the section of the text, you'll probably want to engage in a whole-class conversation. These longer conversations will probably happen at least twice a week. During these conversations, it is important for children to direct their comments to each other and to carry on a talk in which one child responds to what another has said. That is, these conversations are not occasions for you to pepper the class with questions, calling on one child and then another. Instead, the class might for a time entertain a general question—say, talking back and forth about whether Poppleton is really a good friend—with one child saying, "I want to add on to what you said. . ." or "Another example of that is. . ." or "But I'm not sure you're right because. . . ."

You may wonder about the read-aloud partnerships, asking, "Do the same partnerships support both independent reading partnerships (these are ability-matched as partners read the same books) and reading aloud?" This is a question you will need to answer. It is organizationally easier for children to maintain the same partnerships across both independent reading and read-aloud, but it is educationally preferable for read-aloud partnerships to be different so that these relationships need not be ability-based. In fact, some teachers call one partner "Partner A" (or Partner One) and one "Partner B" (or Partner Two) and quietly group students so that the A partners are the stronger readers and talkers. Then, when you set children up to do challenging work, you can say, "Partner A, please tell Partner B. . . ," and if the task is one that you believe is perfect for Partner B, you can channel the work that way.

As mentioned earlier, you need not rely only on the prompt for partners to "turn and talk" during a read-aloud. You may intersperse directions also for children to stop and jot (or to stop and sketch). If children are jotting or sketching, stop reading and provide them with a few moments to record their ideas because if you continue to read, many first graders are apt to miss large chunks of the story.

Your read-aloud work will sometimes foreshadow work that the whole class will be on soon. That is, if your class will soon begin a unit on nonfiction reading, you may want to get a head start on this by reading nonfiction aloud during the last week of the previous study. By the time your children embark on their own independent work, you will have already provided them with a common resource to draw upon.

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Shared Reading

Shared reading is that time in the day when teachers and children have eyes on one text, reading in sync with one other. Usually shared reading revolves around big books, songs, or enlarged texts written on chart paper, with the teacher pointing under words as the class reads in sync. Usually a classroom community spends some time rereading familiar texts and some time, usually less, working together with a new text.

In many classrooms, with a large number of students reading around levels D/E, many teachers begin the year with daily shared reading time (often ten to fifteen minutes), and they use shared reading to work on phonics and fluency and to practice the print strategies that they've determined many of their students still need to internalize and to use on the run as they read. Additionally, the act of gathering all students around a text in the beginning of the year helps build community and inspires enthusiasm for reading.

As your readers progress, you may focus more on fluency, phrasing, and prosody, as well as dealing with difficult vocabulary. You may also use whole-class shared reading to provide comprehension instruction, coaching readers to envision, infer, and synthesize.

Word Study

A school needs to decide upon an approach to phonics. The TCRWP does not try to make this decision for a school. Most schools that we work with draw upon a combination of *Words Their Way*, *Phonics Lessons,* the Firsthand series written by Fountas and Pinnell, and Pat Cunningham's work.

These reading units of study should not replace the work you will do to grow students' knowledge of phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonics. The purpose of word study is to build up students' knowledge of features of words and high-frequency words to help children become efficient problem-solvers of words in reading and writing. You will want to devote fifteen to twenty minutes each day to explicit, direct phonics instruction. Assess your students' knowledge to determine what features you will focus on. Most teachers use the *Words Their Way* Spelling Inventory along with the Word Identification Task to determine their students' stages of spelling development. Once you have assessed your students, you will want to organize your teaching. You may want to spend the first few weeks on whole-group instruction. Plan to focus on what most students are ready to learn next. Choose features to work on that most students are confusing. For example, if you notice that many students are spelling *sh* words with *ch* you'll want to work on digraphs. Once you differentiate your class into three groups for word study, you'll want to begin by teaching students the routines to several word study activities so that students can work in partnerships as you are working with one group. Be sure you spend enough time studying each feature (e.g., blends, spelling patterns) in a variety of ways. You will want to make sure that you are supporting students' ability to read and write these features both in isolation and in context. Always, make sure to provide explicit teaching of phonics as part of

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your day. In some units, you will notice that there is an emphasis on word solving. You will want to support children's transfer of their word knowledge to their reading.

Small-Group Instruction

It is critically important that you lead small-group instruction as often as you can. When you think about small-group work, start with the idea that any teaching that you do in a whole group can also be done in a small group. So you can do small-group shared reading, small-group interactive writing, small-group phonics, small-group read-aloud and accountable talk, and so forth. Your small-group work can be used to reteach or enrich, and can also be used to preteach. That is, if you are reading aloud a chapter book and you notice that five or six children often do not join into the accountable talk, you may want to gather them together, read the upcoming section, engage them in a very active book talk, and in this way set them up so that the next day, when they and the rest of the class hear that same section of the read-aloud text, these children will talk about ideas that you have already sanctioned. You then will be able to draw them into more active roles in the whole-class book talk.

Your small-group work will be shaped especially by your assessments. For example, if you have some children whose writing is not readable, who do not yet represent every sound they hear in a word with a letter (correctly or incorrectly), then you know those children will need extra help. This extra help needs to begin with extra assessments. Do they know their letters of the alphabet? Their sound-letter connections? How many sight words do they know? Once you've determined the level of work at which these children can be successful, you can essentially look back in these calendars to be reminded of the sort of instruction they will need. That instruction will need to be given intensely over the first six weeks of the year, and you will need to see if these children are making rapid progress. Those who are not will need to work not only with you but also with a specialist. That is, those children who enter first grade as early emergent readers and who do not progress very rapidly when given high-quality classroom instruction will need specialized supports.

The instruction that this group receives will be multifaceted. They'll need, first and foremost, to read books they can read with 96% accuracy. Book introductions will help them with those books. They will need phonics support that is tailored to their level, which could mean work with the alphabet, but will probably mean work with beginning and ending sounds and, soon to follow, short vowels (like the short *a*) and with simple CVC words such as *rat* and *sat*. In small groups, these children can do the kind of picture-sorts and word-hunts that are recommended in *Words Their Way*, for example. These readers will also need intensive emphasis on their own writing, on hearing more sounds in words as they write, rereading their writing, and writing more. And you will want to move these children up from one level of text to another as soon as you can, relying on guided reading as a way to help children be ready for the characteristics of that harder level of text. That is, in guided reading, much of your teaching will involve setting children up for the features of the new level, especially those that you believe will be challenging to these youngsters. For example, in a guided reading

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group for children who are moving into level B and C texts, you may set children up for text that wraps around.

Any children who come into your classroom reading level C or below may also need to receive special attention. If possible, meet more frequently with these readers, making sure they really can read their books with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Book introductions can always help. Keep an eye on their volume of reading and their levels of engagement.

Throughout the year, you will pull children together for small-group instruction whenever you find several children who share the same needs as readers. For example, based on your assessments, you might decide that you have six children who need help orchestrating the sources of information and drawing on multiple strategies to deal with harder words and longer texts. In a small-group strategy lesson, you can build their "tool box" of print strategies.

Assessment

The first assessment you will want to give your children at the start of first grade is the writing assessment, described in the writing curricular calendar. The TCRWP also recommends that every teacher give the spelling inventory that has been designed by Donald Bear and is foundational to his *Words Their Way* program. This can be given as a whole-class spelling test so it is the quickest assessment you can deliver. You can consult Bear's book, *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction*, for more information on how to analyze this inventory. You'll need to follow directions to count features correct for each child (this will take longer than giving the test but still requires just minutes per child). Your calculations will quickly tell you whether a particular child is an early beginning reader (in which case the child will probably be reading level C/D books and will need you to help him learn "letter name-alphabetic" spelling features and patterns, such as those involving short vowels, digraphs, and blends), or an emergent reader (who would be reading level A books, would need help with "emergent" spelling features, and would benefit from support with initial and final sounds).

That is, the spelling inventory can proxy for the informal reading inventory. It can, for a few days, take the place of each child reading aloud a leveled text while you take running records to quickly determine the level of books that the child is able to read with ease. You will still want to conduct running records soon, but before doing so, use the spelling inventory to learn about the range of readers in your class, to identify those needing immediate extra supports starting Day One, to match readers to books they are apt to handle with ease, and to begin tailoring your whole-class instruction—your shared reading, read-aloud, minilessons, and so forth—to the readers in your care. You will also want to begin phonics instruction soon, and your spelling inventory (plus a copy of *Words Their Way* or another book on assessment based phonics) can get you started.

Of course, you can also use children's last year's book levels, and in fact, last year's favorite books, as a place to start. If teachers across the school are willing, it is ideal

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for each grade level to begin the year by borrowing a huge armload of familiar texts from the previous year—poems, big books, read-aloud picture books, and independent books. This is helpful because one of the most urgent things you can do is to try to make up for summer reading loss. If children have the chance to reread books they knew really well at the end of last year, at least those books come with a book introduction included, so perhaps children will be able to regain lost ground by reading them. Don't fool yourself for a minute into thinking it will do children good to start this new year reading books that they cannot read with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. That is, make sure they can read the books with 95% accuracy and can answer a couple of literal questions about them, as well as an inferential question.

A word about fluency: It is really important that children read books "like they're talking," and this involves reading with speed as well as with expression and phrasing. It is crucial for first-grade teachers (or teachers of transitional readers of any age) to know that children who are "transitional readers" (levels H–M) especially need to accelerate their fluency. Hasbrook and Tindle did a study of children at different grade levels and their fluency development. For more information about this study you can read the second-grade reading calendar's overview section. Essentially, we want teachers to be aware of and to watch over how their students progress and develop fluency across the year as they move ahead as readers.

General Range of Adequate Reading Rates by Grade Level

Grade	WPM	Grade	WPM
1	60–90	6	195–220
2	85–120	7	215–245
3	115–140	8	235–270
4	140–170	9	250–270
5	170–195	12	250–300

Harris and Sipay (1990)

Take note of the sight words that your children can read with automaticity. If your children are progressing well, they may enter first grade with a sight word vocabulary of approximately thirty to forty known words. If your children's sight word vocabulary is in this vicinity, you will know that your kids are on track. Remember, by the end of first grade you want them to have somewhere around 150 words. Support your students in this area. As students progress up levels of books and read with increasing fluency, their sight vocabulary will tend to grow. But if a child does not have a sight vocabulary of roughly thirty words at this point, then you'll want to pay close attention to that child's progress and asses and teach into this dimension of reading growth more often. Give each child a key chain full of word cards representing the sight words that that child knows or almost knows, and the child may take time during every reading workshop to flip through these cards, reading each aloud to herself/himself.

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Children may play "I spy a word that. . ." games with partners involving word wall words, and certainly you may ask each child to take time each day to use the pointer and read aloud all the words on the word wall. (Some teachers try to jazz this up by asking the child to pull directions from a can. One day the directions will say, "Read the sight words in a witch's voice" and another day, "Read the sight words like you are a cat—meow each word." Do whatever you need to do to lure kids to develop automaticity in reading an increasing bank of sight words, and of course help children use these words as they read.)

You'll need to attend to your readers' developing abilities to comprehend texts deeply. You'll learn this best by listening closely to book talks, by hearing what children say to partners, and by listening to children's retelling of their independent reading books. Although we do not have a scale with which to measure this, the truth is that there is little that is more important. You may want each child to keep a reading portfolio that includes artifacts that represent the child's growing abilities to comprehend. For example, you might read aloud a short story and, at preset places in the text, ask each child to stop and jot in response to the prompt "What do you think will happen next?" You could date the child's responses and keep them, plus the text, from September and from several subsequent months, perhaps also including a rubric that analyzes what that child does and does not do yet when asked to predict. Similar records could be kept for any other comprehension skill, and we strongly suggest you select a few skills and make a point of keeping this sort of record. There is a rule of thumb that says, "We inspect what we respect."

It's important also to plan for how you'll continue to assess your students throughout the year. Many teachers institute a system for keeping track of children's reading levels and growth (both individual and by class) and for moving readers along to more challenging texts when they are ready. That is, you may decide to devote the reading workshop on the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth of each month to a consideration of whether children are ready to progress to new levels. In general, your children need to make rapid progress this year, so teachers need to vigilantly watch for and seize opportunities.

You will find that the TCRWP has assessment tools on our website: www.readingandwritingproject.com. There are two sets of leveled texts used for primary levels A–I. One is a set of multicultural books from the BeBop Books series, and one is a set of books from Scholastic. On the website there is information telling you how to order whichever set you select. For readers beyond the level I, there are text passages that can be printed right from the website.

Classroom Libraries

Once your students have each been assessed and you've matched them to just-right books, you will want to be sure that they know where to get their just-right books in your classroom library. If you have lots of children reading levels C, D, and E, for example, then you will need lots of books at those levels. If you have no children reading levels J

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and K, then there is not a lot of reason to have those books in your library at this time. That is, your library should reflect your readers. Students will need help, especially early in the year, as they learn to manage their independent book choices. You will establish a system for checking out and returning books that travel between home and school.

Finding Great Literature to Build and Refresh Our Libraries

One of the key factors in making any unit of study successful is having a collection of excellent books that can be used as just-right books and as read-alouds. Through our work with students and educators across the country, we have begun developing lists of books to support particular units of study. On our website you will find many book lists that support our reading units. The book lists will include levels. We use Fountas and Pinnell's levels, if those exist, or Scholastic levels. If neither source exists, we note the Lexile level that you can use to create levels by converting this Lexile level to an approximation of Fountas and Pinnell levels (take those with a grain of salt). You may want to visit our website at www.readingandwritingproject.com throughout the year for updated information.

As you well know as first-grade teachers, this is a transformative year for your children. They are ready to dive into the reading world, to think in more sophisticated ways, and to set bigger goals. It is a year of huge growth and a time for children to meet high expectations as they ready themselves for the demands of first grade. Enjoy the wonderful work with your energetic readers!

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UNIT SIX

Reading across Genres to Learn about a Topic

Informational Books, Stories, and Poems

MARCH

(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: H/I/J)

The Common Core State Standards place a spotlight on students learning academic content from reading—that is, learning about farms and steam engines and medieval castles and baking soda and the antennae of a cricket—by reading. We agree that this is important. The amount of information that exists in the world is growing exponentially; the amount of total knowledge developed between 1997 and 2003 is equal to the amount of knowledge developed over the entire history of the world. The amount of technological information in the world is doubling every seventy-two hours. So there is no question that we need to bring up a new generation of young people who take in ideas and information from everywhere, linking all that they learn with all that they already know, whose knowledge base, like that of the world, grows exponentially.

First graders need not only to "learn to read" but also to "read to learn." "Readers the world over," you'll tell them, "take classes from books, and we learn not just from nonfiction books but also from fiction, stories, and poems, from the backs of cereal boxes, from signs, directions—the works." The concept that readers learn from many sources will be especially pertinent as children tackle more complex books. By the time they are in the upper grades, reading historical fiction texts, set in different eras and places, they will need to accumulate information about the setting (time and place) even as they are engrossed in a fast-paced drama. This unit aims to give readers an early start viewing the world—and all the many types of books—through the lens of a learner. For example, a child who has read a story about a soccer team that finally wins a game may recognize that this is a story about how working hard can pay off, but she may not realize that it also teaches readers about soccer as a topic; soccer players must kick a ball, not dribble it, they have to work together as a team, with each person

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in a particular position, to make goals. There is soccer vocabulary to be learned (and taught), too: *mouth guard*, *shin guard*, *goalie*.

As you think about the game plan for this unit, pay attention to your children's interests and their curiosities; now is the time to encourage that budding gemologist, veterinarian, ballerina, or chef. Of course, you may not have enough books on especially precise interests; you may need to improvise a bit, supplying books on topics that approximate your children's interests. The child who loves dump trucks may decide to read not only a couple of nonfiction informational list books about trucks in general but also some fiction and poetry: Jon Scieszka's new Trucktown series, Donald Crews' book *Truck,* Mark Todd's rhythmic poem "Monster Trucks," or the poem "Dig Dig Digging" by Margaret Mayo. You might find it helpful to consider the topics found in many of your fiction books—birthdays, grandparents, new siblings, moving, and school are just a few common topics found in many fiction books. There are certain topics that spring up again and again in your children's just-right books. Once you start looking you'll be surprised at the topics you can pull together from your fiction library.

As with any other unit, you'll spotlight a few strategies, perhaps teaching these in isolation and then as a repertoire to draw upon. Because most of your readers are becoming transitional readers (moving into levels H, I, and J), you will want not only to continue teaching them to word solve and monitor for meaning on their *first* reads but also to encourage them to *reread* to acquire more information. Rereading will play an important role in this unit, both as a support of fluency and comprehension and as a means to build knowledge of a topic.

If you find that you have a group of readers at level G or below, you will want to do some close-in diagnostic work. Make sure that you understand what exactly is the difficulty that students are having in texts that they read at 90–95% accuracy—perhaps they have difficulty with phonics, multisyllabic word solving, cross-checking, self-correcting, or fluency. Some students may not have progressed because they are having difficulty with literal or inferential comprehension. These are all important pieces of information to consider when planning. You will want to set goals with the reader and decide when you will reassess to see if the reader is ready to move. You want kids to feel the success of moving up levels, and some kids will be able to move a level in a unit with some direct and specific instruction. To help those who are on the cusp of entering a new level, you will want to be sure that they are in a transitional book baggie that has some texts at the next level up that they will be able to read with some support.

This unit of study is designed to support many requirements that the Common Core State Standards outline for first-grade readers. Students will not only be reading a wide variety of text structures and distinguishing between stories, poems, and informational books but will also be working on connecting information and ideas across two or more texts on the same topic. As students read and reread prose and poetry across a range of text complexity, they will also encounter and learn new vocabulary and work together to clarify the meaning of phrases.

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Organizing for the Unit

You have choices with this unit as with any other unit. You may want to put together book baskets of texts that go together. This means fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and any other genre that are all on like topics. You might prefer to have children construct text sets for themselves with your help. If you do not have enough texts to set up baskets of books, a second option is to organize text sets into baggies (or place rubber bands around a text set) and have kids choose a few baggies or rubber banded sets to share. That would mean that in a week kids might be reading about two or three different topics. The decision you make depends on the materials you have in your classroom.

Above all, you'll want to be sure that children pick books at their just-right reading levels. Whatever you decide, you'll want to have some sense of possible topics in your library. Do you have a lot of books about baseball? About gardening? About dogs? It is essential, in any event, that your first graders are reading many books, keeping the volume high and the stamina strong. We recommend organizing at least some of your leveled books by topic, so that kids can "shop for books" based on interests. That means you could take *all* the leveled books you have about sharks, or flowers, or families, and so on, regardless of genre, and group these into a single text set. Keep in mind that these text sets could include topics from your science or social studies curriculum but could absolutely extend beyond those topics to include ones that are high interest and make the best use of the materials you have available. Mostly, you'll want to make sure that each set of books is in fact related by topic and vocabulary—this way, children will encounter similar words and language across all the books they read. According to the Common Core State Standards, students should have an adequate number of titles on a single topic that would allow children to study that topic for a sustained period of time.

Of course, as you make these decisions about how to structure the work of the unit, aside from considering the availability of materials, you will also want to factor in the energy in your room. Will kids flourish in groups, or will they do better reading on their own? Remember, too, that children will have just finished the dramatization unit and will be moving into character clubs next. They may therefore be on a roll with this sort of collaborative learning.

To build excitement for the unit and to encourage active, engaged reading, you may also want to provide special materials in the writing center for children to use. Children might create a word bank to put in the topic basket for the next person to use. You could also put out special markers and paper for children to make bookmarks that hold new vocabulary or word banks.

Then, too, you might tell children that this unit has important implications for their *writing* as well as their reading, and suggest that they reread the writing they have done all year and think about whether they are writing in ways that teach their readers information. A child who wrote about making cookies with Mom could consider whether he included a tip about how the two of them add just a bit of flour, then stir it in, before adding more, and stirring again, and that his Mom reminds him, "Add flour slowly, stirring all the while." The child who wrote about ballet might reread her

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writing to be sure it includes words like *plie* or *tendu* to teach a reader who has never taken a dance class some ballet vocabulary. If children illustrated their texts, did they label important little details that readers probably wouldn't have otherwise known? By encouraging children to notice that writers deliberately construct learning opportunities for their reader as they *author* texts, you will increase children's deliberateness, too, as they *read* texts, encouraging them to seek out similar learning opportunities that other authors have created.

Now might be a good time to nudge children to tackle not only topics that interest them but ones they've avoided in the past, as suggested in the Common Core State Standards. Tell them that one way to become smarter is to reflect on the learning lives we lead around topics we're always "on about" and then think, "How can I do this sort of learning on more topics?" Many of us have closed down the possibility of learning about a whole host of topics. One way to become a better learner is to nudge ourselves to learn about some of those topics we've declared "not for me." Partners can support each other in this work, and children can also interview expert readers—parents, older book buddies—who could function as mentors on this sort of reading to learn.

Part One: Readers Read to Learn—We Work with Partners to Read about Topics across Fiction and Nonfiction

On the first day, you will announce that today, everyone in the class is going to "shop" for books about something that fascinates them. This might be a hobby or interest that is already a part of kids' lives, or it could be a topic they researched during one of the nonfiction units of study. It might be a topic that a partner loves, or one that is entirely new to them. Whether you have already organized some baskets in the library by topic or are asking your kids to search the shelves on their own, teach children to look for books that fit together. Remind them that this can be books from any genre—fiction, nonfiction, poems, the works! This is a great opportunity to get to know your kids, to identify "experts" in your class, and to support kids' individual interests and identities. Who is the butterfly expert? Who is the go-to kid for questions about dinosaurs? Who loves all things motorized and mechanical?

You will probably find that now that children are shopping for mixed genres, getting to read will take on a new level of importance. Draw your kids close and confide, "The first thing I always do when I begin a new book is to look through the pictures to figure out what kind of text it is. Is it a poem? Is it fiction? Is it nonfiction? I can tell that it's fiction if something appears to be happening to a bunch of characters. I can tell that it's nonfiction if it seems to be teaching me all about a topic. I can tell that it's a poem if it is on the short side and has just a few words on a line." You could also say to your kids, perhaps during a mid-workshop teaching point, "Just like we did when we read nonfiction, it makes sense to look through our books now to decide which ones will be easiest and which will be hardest. Try reading a page or two to decide. During reading workshop, read the easiest books first." It's important to use language that lets kids know that they've done this previewing work before. A reminder of strategies from

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previous units should be enough to get kids on the right track. Also, since you've been reading aloud a mix of fiction and nonfiction all year long, kids should be able to spot the difference. You can address any confusion regarding genre through conferring or small groups. The Common Core State Standards talk about distinguishing between genres by using the text structures to help guide you.

Once kids have a mix of fiction and nonfiction in hand, you will want to teach them how to find the facts and information in a fictional story. "Even though some of your books are fiction, there is still a lot of factual information to learn." You may want to teach a few lessons that help children clarify the difference between fact and fiction and that set children up to be on the lookout for true information, even in fictional books. You could introduce this concept using a familiar read-aloud or even a short three- to four-minute clip from a familiar movie. Use realistic fiction texts like *Henry and Mudge* or *Poppleton* that lend themselves well to finding the true information in a fictional story or a clip from a movie like *Babe* or *Charlotte's Web,* which feature live animals in a realistic setting but are clearly fictional stories. You might play a clip or read aloud a page or two of a book asking children to think carefully about how to tell if something is fact or fiction. After watching the clip or reading and thinking carefully, you could ask kids to contribute to a list of how to tell if something is fact or fiction, recording their ideas on a chart. For example, children might notice that the animals in the video clip are real, not cartoon drawings—often photographs contain factual information. They might notice that there are some pieces of information that are familiar from other sources, for example that spiders spin webs and barns have hay on the floor—if we can confirm something in multiple sources, then it might be true. You'll want to restate children's contributions so that they are transferable to any book, rather than recording comments on the specific text you used to demonstrate. It will be important to emphasize to children that readers always keep an open mind—something *might* be true or untrue (especially in today's age of online information, computer-generated graphics, and realistic animation). We can never really be 100% certain—we can only confirm or disprove using multiple sources. You might teach your students to think, "If I have only seen this once, then I should probably check other sources before I consider it to be a fact." It won't hurt to highlight that some sources are more reliable than others, too—a great topic of discussion for your read-alouds.

You can teach children that if you read a nonfiction book first, then you can read your fiction book, thinking, "Hmm. . . what in this book connects to the nonfiction book I just read? Is any of the information from the nonfiction book showing up here in this fictional story?" You could even stop and jot on a Post-it when you find these connections. Jot down the factual information to help you keep track of what your fiction story is teaching you. Then you can teach it to your partner. Kids will benefit from the concrete support of having a nonfiction book to connect to, rather than trying to pull the information out of the story in the abstract. Once kids are doing this work, you might go a step further, teaching them, "Now that you've read several books on a topic, you can think to yourself, 'What information do I already know about this topic that might connect to this story?' When you come to place in your fictional story that connects or adds to information you already know, stop and jot the information on a

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Post-it so that you can keep track of the new information you are learning. Then you can use your Post-its to teach your partner what you've learned."

As children read, you may hear things like, "Hey, there is a turtle in my book, eating pizza!" or "I didn't know saucers could fly!" Because children will be reading a variety of sources, some of which may not be fact-based (e.g., a poem that has a bit of personification), children will sometimes encounter nontruths. Encourage your students to read their stories and poems with a critical eye. Teach them to not just accept all things in their books as truths, but rather to question things that seem funny or "not quite right," and then to search for answers in other sources, testing if what they read in one book is, in fact, true.

Part Two: Growing Ideas from Information

You may have some children who are "fact collecting" without talking much about their ideas. Encourage these students to pause when they encounter a bit of information they find particularly interesting, and then to jot their idea about it on Post-its. If they struggle still, they may benefit from using prompts such as, "This makes me think. . ." or "The idea I'm having is. . . ." They can use these same prompts when they talk with their partners (or clubs) to share ideas and come up with new ones. Other children may struggle to carry all that they know about a topic across a book and from one book to another. You might begin a chart that lists prompts for partner talk that lends itself to accumulating information and making connections across experiences. Some of these prompts might include "This reminds me of. . . ," "From all that I've read. . . ," "Everything I've heard. . . ," "This is just like. . . ," or "In other books. . . but in this book. . . ." You'll think of other prompts to add to the chart by listening to your children as they talk with their partners during reading workshop and read-aloud time. You might also teach kids that they can lay two books on a topic side by side to talk about how the information in the pictures and text in the two books fits together and how it differs. Throughout all of this, children are sure to be using their new-found vocabulary on the topic—and if they aren't, you can coach them to do so. This acquisition of vocabulary is discussed in the language section of the Common Core State Standards.

You may want to have a chart that lists a few carefully selected choices of work for partners to do together. Along with talking about the topic, you might teach kids, "You've probably noticed that the pictures and words in each book show only some of the information about the topic—they leave out a lot, don't they? One thing you can do together as partners is to create a sketch that shows what the author of a book left out. You can stick it right into the book, so that the next kid that reads it will get to see the information that the author left out." Giant-sized Post-its work well for this, but plain paper is fine, too. It's highly likely that kids will talk as they draw, maybe even talk more than they draw, which is fantastic because we know that one of the most powerful ways to learn new language and content is through talk.

Teach children that as readers make sense of texts, we accumulate information. Children will think about how all the information fits together both on their own and

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in partnerships and clubs. Then, too, you'll want to emphasize that new information and concepts help us read and understand not just the *one* book we are reading but *other* books in our sets, too. On any given topic, some information will come from one text and some from another—it is the reader's job to assimilate all this information. Then too, you may want to remind children that as we accumulate new information, readers try to come up with big ideas about a topic. One way we do this is by thinking about how all the parts of the topic go together, or by thinking how this topic is like and unlike other topics. This is a standard highlighted throughout the Common Core State Standards.

Readers Figure Out Tricky Words and Learn New Vocabulary

As children read, they will encounter new, often unfamiliar words. You can teach them that one big thing readers learn as we read is the lingo of our topic. Whether we are learning about soccer or castles, as we read a variety of texts that illuminate a topic, we encounter the technical vocabulary that goes with it. In levels H, I, and J, children will be encountering many more multisyllabic words and new vocabulary. You will want to be sure that in this unit you encourage children to tackle these words and that you provide strategies for them to collect and talk about new words with partners and clubs.

As they encounter new words, children might create bookmarks that list important vocabulary and place them in the book for the next person to use or even add to. Additionally, it might be helpful to clear a space on one of your bulletin boards or pocket charts for children to write new vocabulary on index cards to put on display for others to see. You can keep this vocabulary wall organized by topic so that the words are easy for kids to locate and use in their book talk and independent writing. You'll definitely want to clear a space for all the charts you'll be making in this unit, charts that list the new word-solving strategies you'll be teaching. The Common Core State Standards highlight language and vocabulary when they discuss the fact that the students need to determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on kindergarten reading and content.

Now that children are reading harder books, the strategies they need for solving tricky words will have shifted. Kids will certainly need to use what they know about the topic to help them. You could say to your readers, "Remember, your baggies are filled with books about one topic. When you get to a tricky word that isn't a word wall word or a word you can figure out using the letter sounds, there is a good chance that word has something to do with your topic. A book that teaches about school is probably going to have words like *reading, classroom,* and *students.* A book that teaches about dogs is probably going to have words like *snout, canine,* and *claws.* When you talk to your partners, be sure to incorporate these words into your conversation."

At the beginning of the year, the books kids were reading likely had strong picture support to help readers figure out the meaning of tricky words, but now that most of your children are reading level G or higher, there is less picture support. One thing you might teach kids is, "When the picture doesn't help you figure out the word, you need to think about what is happening in the story to figure out what the word might

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be." Or you could teach a strategy that pushes kids to cross-check their guess, like, "We think about the topic the book is teaching to figure out what might make sense in that word's place, *and* we can use the first few letters to check to see what it could be." Another teaching point might be, "After you've figured out how to *say* a word by decoding it, you still have to figure out what it *means* by thinking about what else is happening on that page." According to the Common Core State Standards, students need to learn strategies to help them with harder vocabulary.

It's important that readers do not rigidly tackle every word by starting at the left side of the word and progressing letter-by-letter, "sounding the word out." Research shows, rather, that efficient readers are more apt to move across a word, working with word parts. Therefore, teach your children that when readers come to a hard word, we can look at the first few letters of the word, thinking of words we already know that have parts like that. You could demonstrate this by looking, for example, at the word *umbrella* and saying, "I'm looking at the first part of this word. /Um/. That looks like part of words I've read. Um. Let's see, what's the next part?" Pointing to *brel* the teacher might say, "What could that say?"

A word of caution: You are sure to find that children will not always have an easy time chunking words into their parts. The advice for children to "look for little words anywhere in the word" often leads children awry because often they end up finding known words that do not help (e.g., the word *in* in *find* does not help in solving the word). Teach children instead that usually they'll look at the vowel and a couple of letters after it. So a child who is trying to read *waterslide* could end up first tackling the first couple of letters—/wat/—then the vowel and then the letters after it: wat/ersl/ide. That is not a perfect way to break that word apart, but the counsel to look at the vowel and a couple letters after it should get a child on the right track. Remember that in English, every syllable has a vowel in it, so vowels are key when breaking apart a word into its constituent parts. You'll especially look to see if children use multiple word-solving strategies with flexibility. You may describe this to children as playing with the word in your mouth, trying different pronunciations, until you find one that makes sense.

During partner time, you could show children how to work together to create a word bank of vocabulary for the topic basket that they are working in and to use those words as they talk about what they've learned about their topic. You might teach children that partners let each other know when a word is new to them and how to explain unfamiliar words to their partners by making a picture clue to support the new word. You could also steer children to use a small Post-it to flag particularly tricky words as they read so that their partner can help them solve these. It will be important to have a resource in the room that children can look at to remember some of the key strategies they can use to figure out a word. When a child asks you, "What's this word?" you can reply by saying, "Look at our chart of strategies! Try each one. Give it your best go. Figure out something that makes sense, and *move on.*"

Remember that your minilessons are not mini-assignments. Each new strategy you teach should be added to a list of *options* for children. Each day, during partner time, remind children that they have choices. Suggest that they look over the growing list

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of options. That means that during partner time, some of your children will choose to continue sketching to consolidate what they know about a topic, while other partnerships will choose to make bookmarks or word banks or to help each other with tricky words or to talk about their new ideas about a topic.

As you plan instruction for this unit, as with any unit, you'll want to think about the strategy needs your children have by looking at assessment data and the corresponding analysis to see what children can and can't yet do. You'll want to investigate children's current and soon-to-be reading levels to see what strategies they will need to control to read the next higher levels with proficiency.

Part Three: Putting It All Back Together Again: Readers Use a Repertoire of Strategies to Cross-Check and Read Smoothly with Fluency and Expression

Now that many of your children are reading at higher levels, their books will likely have line breaks, designed to help readers read in smooth phrases. Teach children that a line break is a cue for readers to read the chunk of texts that precedes it all the way to the end of the line break before pausing. You might also teach them that readers "scoop up" all the words in the line to read smoothly and with expression. Additionally, you can teach children to rehearse their reading for their partners, rereading the parts with tricky words a few times until they get those just right. This rereading might not seem like word-solving or vocabulary work per se, but by rereading faster and more smoothly, kids will read with increasing automaticity, which is an important aspect of reading that sometimes breaks down when kids are solving tricky words. You might also teach children that after solving an unfamiliar word, readers say it out loud a few times, and we reread the sentence in which it appears a few times until we can do it smoothly. Tell children that readers know to put a new word into our memory, so the next time we encounter it we don't have to start all over again from scratch.

Another important reason to emphasize rereading for phrasing and fluency is that when we read with expression, it is easier to comprehend what we are reading. As children move from book to book about a particular topic, encountering unfamiliar words along the way will be less daunting if they have a sense of how the text is supposed to sound. You could play audio clips from NPR, the National Geographic television channel, or the Discovery channel as examples of what it sounds like to read (and talk) with fluency, in an informative, authoritative teaching voice. Teach kids that it is equally important to *talk* with fluency as it is to *read* with fluency. While this may come easily to confident, talkative children, for whom words (in English) come easily, this is a common challenge for young children, especially when they talk about informational topics. According to the Common Core State Standards, fluency begins in the younger grades; it was part of the primary sections of the fundamental standards.

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Shared reading will provide you with a crucially important way to model strategies for word solving and language learning. During shared reading, you'll show children how to decode tricky words and how to determine what an unfamiliar word might mean. You may cover the ending letters in a few selected words, showing children that they can rely on the letters that are there—perhaps a blend or a digraph—and on the meaning and syntax of the text to make a prediction. You'll show readers that after guessing what a word might be, they need to check by looking at the letters across the entire word. As you model particular strategies for word solving, demonstrate that proficient readers use strategies with flexibility, always confirming a guess by checking that it makes sense. You can also teach children to tackle complex words such as *together, frantically, shorter, bouncing,* and so forth. Teach children that often saying the first three or four letters while also thinking, "What would make sense in the story?" can usually enable them to solve an unknown word. For example, if you encountered this sentence in a shared reading text, "Buzz was at the school court, shooting baskets," you could say, "Gee, I think the boys are playing basketball at school. So they are sh-oo (from our word wall word *too*). . . ." Then you could say, "What would make sense? Hmm. . . I think they are 'shooting.' Let me check the ending of the word to see if there's a *t* and *ing.* I'm right!" You may also want to use this time to help readers tackle compound words and contractions.

It is important that you use a variety of genres during shared reading. Pull out poems and nonfiction texts to help kids not only navigate these texts but also think about the information and ideas readers can grow across them. This is, after all, a unit in which children will be reading across texts and across genres.

Since the overall theme song for this unit is "figuring out what words *mean,*" it would make good sense for that theme to carry over into your word study. All too often, word wall words are treated simply as words to be memorized, with little attention to their meaning or to how to use them in meaningful sentences. As you continue to introduce word wall words, you'll want to highlight how words can have different meanings, depending on the context. Perhaps you might choose one or two word wall words each week that lend themselves to this kind of study. For example, the word wall word *like* can mean "prefer" or "take pleasure in" but can also mean "similar to" or "approximately the same as," among other things. In shared or interactive writing, strategically plan some sentences that allow you to demonstrate the different ways a word can be used. Be sure to stop and talk about the meaning in context, rather than to only teach its meaning in isolation.

At this point in the year, you will want to reassess what students understand about words and how they work within reading and writing. According to the Common Core State Standards, students should be able to have knowledge of long-vowel-patterned words. You will want to help students learn some long-vowel-patterned words that contain a final *e* and common vowel team combinations such as *ee, ea,* and so on. You might begin this instruction by helping students first contrast the short and long vowel sounds with picture sorts. Once students can easily hear the difference in sound, have

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students match words to the pictures. Help students notice how the patterns in short-vowel-sound words are different from long-vowel-sound words. For example, when we look at the word *cap* there is a consonant, a vowel, and a consonant, but when we look at the word *cape* there is a consonant-vowel-consonant and an *e* at the end. You might get students to notice this with a few more words such as *man/mane* and *tap/tape.*

You might also weave some word study into your writing workshop time by spending several minutes, a few times a week, encouraging children to consider their word choices in their writing and to use all the new resources around the room (from the reading workshop study of vocabulary and language) to choose better, more precise language to use in their writing. You can help kids make connections from solving words in reading to spelling tricky words in writing by referring to the charts from reading workshop often, perhaps saying something like, "Writers, I'm going to interrupt you for a quick minute. Everybody please look at the chart that helps us break apart long words in reading. Thumbs up if you are looking at it. Right now, think of a long, tricky word that you might use in your writing today and write it as best you can on a Post-it, using the same strategy we learned in reading workshop. Now you'll have the word ready to go when you want to use it in your writing. From now on, you can always try out a long, tricky word on a Post-it to figure it out, and you can use the charts around the room from reading *and* writing to help you do it."

During small-group work, you will continue to help children become flexible with their knowledge of letters and words and how these work. The goal in phonics instruction is to help children transfer what they know about authors' work to their own reading and writing. This means that during word study, you will want to teach children how they can change the first letter, the last letter, the first part, or the last part of a word to make a new word. Pat Cunningham's *Making Words* activity is a great way to work on this. In addition, there is a whole section devoted to this work in *Phonics Lessons for 1st Grade* by Pinnell and Fountas called *Word-Solving Actions* (pp. 413–end). These activities can be done in whole-group or small-group instruction. You might also do some word work at the end of a guided reading lesson to help children who are having difficulty transferring these concepts to their own reading.

If you decide to teach. . .	**Suggested lessons in *Words Their Way, 4th Edition***	**Suggested lessons in *Phonics Lessons 1st Grade*, Pinnell & Fountas**
Initial blends and digraphs (e.g., /st/, /th/) Final digraphs	Adapt 4-27 to 4-31 (pp. 123–125) 5-6 to 5-10 (pp. 157–159), 5-15 (p. 162) (These can be adapted to final blends and digraphs.)	LS7 to LS11 (pp. 221–240) LS17, LS18 (pp. 261–268)
Short vowel patterns (CVC) Short vowels	pp. 148–150, 5-12 to 5-19 (pp. 160–164) 5-20 to 5-24 (pp. 165–168)	SP1 to SP4 (pp. 283–298)
High-frequency words	pp. 182–183	HF1 to HF8 (pp. 325–356)

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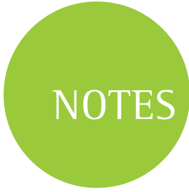
NOTES

COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Reading Workshop

GRADE 2

LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT

An imprint of Heinemann
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912
www.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

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ISBN-13: 978-0-325-04304-3
ISBN-10: 0-325-04304-3

EDITORS:
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PRODUCTION:
Vicki Kasabian

TYPESETTER:
Cape Cod Compositors, Inc.

COVER AND INTERIOR DESIGNS:
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Overview of the Year for Second-Grade Readers

SEPTEMBER	UNIT 1: Taking Charge of Reading
OCTOBER	UNIT 2: Tackling Trouble: Assessment-Based Small-Group Work
NOVEMBER	UNIT 3: Characters Face Bigger Challenges—and So Do Readers
DECEMBER	UNIT 4: Reading Nonfiction, Reading the World
JANUARY/FEBRUARY	UNIT 5: Series Reading and Cross-Genre Reading Clubs
FEBRUARY/MARCH	UNIT 6: Nonfiction Reading Clubs
APRIL/MAY	UNIT 7: Reading and Role Playing: Fiction, Folktales, and Fairy Tales
MAY/JUNE	UNIT 8: Readers Can Read about Science Topics to Become Experts

How happy we are to share the 2011–2012 curricular calendar with you. Those of you who receive new calendars every year may glance at this quickly and notice that in many ways it is similar to last year's. It is true that we've tried to maintain most of the same units, but crucial changes are woven throughout.

This curricular calendar has been designed for second-grade teachers and is aligned with the new Common Core State Standards. We have also taken into account benchmark reading levels for second grade. You can find the TCRWP's Benchmarks for Independent Reading Levels chart on our website, www.readingandwritingproject.com. This chart has been developed based on data that we have collected over the years. To

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determine these levels, we queried New York City schools, researched what other states were doing, learned the levels of passages used in New York State's ELA exams, distributed tentative recommendations, received feedback, and finally settled on some expectations. We acknowledge from the start, however, that they are open to debate. Therefore, we are not necessarily advocating that a district adopt levels we propose.

You'll notice that this year we include the reading benchmarks at the top of each unit. These include the months when you may be formally assessing your students (September, November, March, and June), as well as approximate levels for interim months. The purpose is to give you a sense of how children will ideally progress across the entire year so that you can help pace your students. Please note that this is just a suggested path; it will not hold true for all children. You may find it helps to refer to these month-by-month benchmarks as you create your own big goals for each unit.

We've written this curricular plan imagining that your classroom contains a wide array of readers, as second-grade classrooms generally do. We also assume that many of your children will enter your class reading books that are somewhere around levels I–J or above. The calendar is designed with an eye toward helping your readers progress in a way that, by the end of the year, they'll be in the proximity of levels M–N or above. If the majority of your readers enter second grade reading closer to levels D–G, it will be especially important for you to draw on this curricular calendar, as well as the units of the first-grade reading calendar presented in the spring. Then again, if many of your readers enter second grade reading books like the Magic Treehouse series (level M), you'll probably want to look at the third-grade curricular calendar for the way each of the units described here looks when it supports readers who are working at that level.

Reading instruction happens moment to moment in the classroom as teachers establish the conditions in which children learn to read (and to write), assess what children can do, and then teach children to take one step and then subsequent steps forward as readers. Starting in kindergarten and continuing through higher education, teaching is always responsive; it is always assessment-based. But this doesn't mean that teachers cannot imagine, beforehand, how the classroom work will probably evolve across the year.

As readers grow, their needs change fairly dramatically—and our kids don't all grow in sync! It's as though one teacher needs to support a first-, second-, and even third-grade curriculum simultaneously. Then too, readers always need to integrate sources of meaning, so when you teach a unit of study that focuses on one aspect of reading (say, word attack strategies) you always need to say to children, "Don't forget the topic we're *not* focusing on right now—you need to be thinking about your characters, too!" In this curricular calendar, we discuss ways in which you can use components of balanced literacy to be sure that children progress in all aspects of reading. If the unit of study is on comprehension, for example, you might use shared reading or interactive writing to remind children to use their word attack strategies.

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This curricular calendar was written with input from teachers, literacy coaches, staff developers, and reading experts. We offer it as one informed pathway for your upcoming year, in hopes that as a learning community we can be doing congruent work as the upcoming year unfolds. However, we are under no illusions, and we know that there are hundreds of ways you could plan your curricular calendar for the upcoming year. We expect that all of you, as second-grade teachers, work with grade level colleagues to determine your school's own curricular calendar for second grade. Yours may differ somewhat from this one as you consider your own areas of expertise, your students' needs and interests, the standards and assessments to which you and your children are held accountable, the span of reading levels in your classroom, and your school's larger curricular plans. We hope that you produce a written document representing your own curricular calendar—that you write some of your own descriptions of units or bring some units from last year's calendar into this one. Above all, we strongly recommend that you and your colleagues agree on a shared journey, one in which you will be able to support one another.

New Work for the Coming Year

You will see that we have added some new units to the second-grade calendar and have also made some substantial revisions to units we've carried over from last year. Another important change is that we decided to reduce the number of units from ten to eight. Our rationale for this was that in the past, teachers have felt rushed. Having two fewer units will allow you to spend more time on units you feel will especially benefit your students. In this overview we suggest a possible progression through the units, with the final four spanning longer than a month. You may decide to structure your units in other ways. Always, our intent is that teachers will adapt this curriculum in ways that benefit their particular classroom.

The Common Core State Standards emphasize that children should spend large portions of time reading and writing nonfiction. The second-grade curriculum includes three nonfiction units. This year, we revised these three units to feature new areas and angles. During these units, students will use their growing repertoire of reading skills to read just-right nonfiction texts. The third nonfiction unit—Readers Can Read about Science to Become Experts—spotlights reading about physical science (in second grade, the focus is force and motion). Of course, in addition, you will expect that throughout the year children read just-right books of increasing difficulty on a variety of science and social studies themes. We want to encourage our students to be researchers of the world and to know that reading can be a source of information to grow knowledge both about subjects they are experts in and ones that are newer to them. We have also added a section on reading across genres to the series reading club unit, which will allow second graders to read yet more informational text.

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Finally, we have combined dramatization with fairy tales and folktales this year to highlight their natural partnership. While many units focus on a particular genre—fiction, science, and so on—some are designed to allow children to read more broadly, across genres. This calendar aims to give children a well-balanced reading curriculum in second grade and to prepare them for the work ahead in third grade.

Reading Workshop

The structure your reading workshop will follow day to day will stay the same, even when the unit changes from month to month and grade to grade. For example, every day in your reading workshop, you'll provide direct and explicit instruction through a brief minilesson; you'll provide children with long stretches of time to read just-right books (and sometimes to read books that are a tiny bit challenging); and you'll provide individuals with assessment-based conferences and coaching. Most of your children will enter the year reading level J books, so they should be reading silently the majority of the time, then meeting with a partner at the end of the reading workshop (and perhaps in the middle of it) to talk about their books, just as fifth graders do. Some of your children will not yet be reading level J books, and their partnership work will look more like that in first-grade classrooms, with partners spending some time each day sitting hip-to-hip, one copy of a book between them, reading aloud in unison or taking turns. You'll also convene small groups within the reading workshop. Some schools provide additional time for small groups outside the workshop—this is most apt to be the case for strugglers.

Minilessons generally start the day's reading workshop; this is an important way to rally and instruct children toward an essential skill pertaining to your entire community of learners. For example, you might teach all your students that it is important to test whether a book feels "just right." You'll want to teach your learners to orient themselves to a book before diving in, to generate predictions for the kind of text it is and how it is apt to go. You'll want to teach your kids all about ways of working with partners, how to organize a reading life, tackling tricky words, monitoring for sense, using fix-up strategies when sense falls apart, jotting in response to reading, and so forth. Minilessons revolve around a clear teaching point that crystallizes the message of a lesson. For example, a teaching point might go like this: "Today I want to teach you that readers don't just open a book and start reading! Instead, readers take time to orient ourselves to the book and think, 'So what kind of book is this?' When we figure out what kind of book it is, we have an idea about how it will probably go."

Each minilesson is designed to teach your readers a skill they can draw on that day and any day—not to assign children a particular bit of work one day and another bit of work another day. It is a misunderstanding of workshop teaching when a teaching point is worded, "Today we *will*," or "Today you *should*." Because the goal is for readers to accrue a repertoire of strategies they will use over and over, it helps to create

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and post a chart of abbreviated teaching points so that readers can review what they have learned from prior minilessons. You can then bring these anchor charts from one unit of study to subsequent ones. Always, it is essential that you make these charts fresh each year within the presence of new learners.

The most important part of a reading workshop is the time spent reading. Children disperse after the minilesson, book bins or baggies in hand, and find a spot to read. At the start of the year, you may need to remind children of routines and expectations for independent reading versus whole-class or partner reading. Then, too, children's stamina for maintaining reading may be a bit low early on in the year. Many teachers find it helpful to chart their students' stamina across the first month of the year, evaluating their progress. The length of independent reading time will grow as children's skills grow. It may be that because children's stamina is not strong at the start of the year, you may suggest that all children read alone for twenty or twenty-five minutes, then sit hip-to-hip and read aloud together in partnerships for five or ten more minutes. You will have to gauge what your students are ready and able to do. But by the time September is over, you should have coached readers who are reading level J books or above to read for an entire thirty-minute period, talking but not reading with partners for about five minutes at the end. By February, reading workshops are close to sixty minutes, with at least forty-five minutes reserved for reading independently. Keep this in mind as you set goals with your class.

In any case, while children are reading by themselves they will use Post-its to indicate places they are dying to talk about: funny parts, important pages, places where they grew a big idea or learned something surprising. They'll later share those places with partners. Across the year, you will want to vary configurations so children sometimes meet with just one partner and sometimes meet in clubs comprising foursomes.

As you progress in and out of units of study, you will channel kids' reading so that, for specific chunks of time, they are reading one kind of text. They'll always read books at the text level you've assessed as just-right (as well as at easier levels). Usually, children select ten or twelve books a week to store in their book bin, reading these books several times. They swap bins midweek with a same-level partner, doubling the number of books they read during the week.

Although some children will move quickly and seamlessly from one level to the next, the majority of your students will progress more gradually. During the transition from one level to the next, they will begin to read books at the higher level, probably with some scaffolding, but will still feel mostly at ease in their current level. You'll give your students what we call *transitional book baggies*—baggies that include mostly titles at the child's just-right level as well as a few books at the next one. The latter might be books you've shared with the child through a book introduction or during guided reading, or titles that the child has read with his or her partner. The idea is to scaffold transitional readers as they move into a new level.

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As children read, you'll be conferring with individual students in addition to leading small groups. You'll also sometimes just give book introductions—especially to help children who are relatively new to a level or series. Your reading conferences may follow the research-compliment-teach structure of many writing conferences. Otherwise, you'll coach children's reading. Reading Recovery teachers are expert at the latter, so learn from them! Some small groups will need help with fluency and integrating sources of information, so you might decide to do a bit of shared reading. Some small groups will need help holding tight to meaning while also considering multisyllabic words—you might do a strategy lesson with them. Some small groups may need support moving to the next level with book introductions, and you might do guided reading with them. Your small-group instruction needs to be flexible, need-based, and quick, lasting no more than ten or twelve minutes.

Additional Components of Balanced Literacy

A full, balanced reading program includes not only a reading workshop but also a variety of other structures. Some of the most important for early elementary school children are reading aloud, shared reading, phonics (also referred to as *word study*), and writing workshop.

Once children are in second grade, the reading workshop lasts almost an hour every day. In addition, you'll want to read aloud every day. At least a few times a week, you'll support conversations about the read-aloud book. You will also need to lead a writing workshop, which, like the reading workshop, will last approximately an hour a day. Second graders still have a lot to learn about spelling and phonics, so it will be important for you to lead word study every day. In addition, you'll draw on the other components of balanced literacy, weaving them into your social studies and science work; morning meetings; and additional small-group work, shared reading, and interactive writing.

Reading Aloud

One cannot stress enough the importance of reading aloud. You will want to read aloud to teach children discipline-based concepts that are integral to social studies and science. You'll also read aloud to create a sense of community and to show children why people love to read. And you'll read aloud to teach children vocabulary and higher-level comprehension skills. As you conduct a read-aloud session be sure that it includes opportunities for accountable talk.

To do this, plan the read-aloud to demonstrate a skill or a collection of skills. For example, you may decide to support your students' effort to understand expository nonfiction text by teaching them to approach the text thinking, "What is this mostly about?" After reading just a bit, pause and in your mind create a subtitle for the text

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you've read so far. Then read on, revising that initial subtitle (and with it, your sense of what the text is mostly about). To use the read-aloud text as a forum for teaching reading skills, place Post-its in the text ahead of time, marking places where you'll either think aloud to model a reading strategy or ask students to do similar work together by jotting down their thoughts or turning to talk to a partner about their ideas. Your prompts for getting children to turn and talk could be something like, "Turn and tell your neighbor what you think this is mostly about—it's like writing a subtitle in the air," or "Turn and tell your partner what you think will happen next," or "Let's think about what's going on here. Turn and tell your neighbor about what you think is happening in this part." After a one- or two-minute interlude during which partners externalize their thoughts (that is, talk), you'll read on, not wanting to lose the thread of the text.

After pausing several times while reading the chapter or the section of the text either to demonstrate or to provide children with guided practice doing what you have demonstrated, you'll probably want to have a whole-class conversation. These longer conversations will probably happen at least twice a week. During these conversations, it is important for children to direct their comments to one another and for one child to respond to what another has said. That is, these conversations are not occasions for you to pepper the class with questions, calling on one child and then another. Instead, class members might talk back and forth about a general question—whether Poppleton is really a good friend, for example—saying things like, "I want to add on to what you said," or "Another example of that is ____________," or "But I'm not sure you're right because ____________."

You may wonder, "Should I use the same partnerships to support both independent reading [ability-matched partners read the same books] and reading aloud?" This is a question only you can answer. It is organizationally easier for children to maintain the same partnerships for both independent reading and read-alouds, but it is educationally preferable that read-aloud partnerships not always be ability-based. In fact, some teachers call one partner Partner A (or Partner One) and the other Partner B (or Partner Two) and quietly group students so that the A (or One) partners are the stronger readers and talkers. Then, when you set children up to do challenging work, you can say, "Partner A [One] will you tell Partner B [Two] ____________"; if the task is one you believe is perfect for Partner B [Two], just reverse it.

As mentioned earlier, you need not rely only on the prompt for partners to turn and talk during a read-aloud. You may also have children stop and jot or stop and sketch. If children are jotting or sketching, stop reading and give them a few moments to record their ideas—if you continue to read, many second graders are apt to miss large chunks of the story.

Your read-aloud work will sometimes foreshadow work that the whole class will be doing soon. That is, if your class will soon begin a unit on nonfiction reading, you may want to get a head start by reading nonfiction aloud during the last week of the previous unit. By the time your children embark on their independent work, they will already have a common resource to draw on.

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Shared Reading

Shared reading is that time in the day when teachers and children have their eyes on one text—usually a big book or a song or other text written in large print on chart paper—reading in sync with one another while the teacher points underneath the words. Usually a classroom community spends some time rereading familiar texts and some (usually less) time working together with a new text.

In classrooms with a large number of students reading level J or K texts, many teachers begin the year with daily shared reading (often no more than ten minutes), working on fluency and practicing the print strategies they've determined many of their students still need to internalize to use them on the run as they read. Additionally, the act of gathering all students around a text in the beginning of the year helps build community and inspires enthusiasm for reading.

As your readers progress, you may focus more on fluency, phrasing, and prosody, as well as difficult vocabulary. You may also use whole-class shared reading to provide comprehension instruction, coaching readers to envision, infer, and synthesize.

Shared reading is particularly helpful when working with students who are English language learners (ELLs) or who need continued support with fluency. We'll discuss fluency throughout this calendar, because transitional readers must make a gigantic jump in fluency and there are lots of strategies for helping children do so.

Word Study

A school needs to decide on an approach to phonics. The TCRWP does not try to make this decision for a school. Most schools that we work with draw on a combination of *Words Their Way*, *Phonics Lessons* (the Fountas and Pinnell series), and Pat Cunningham's work.

The reading units of study should not replace the work you will do to grow students' knowledge of phonological awareness and phonics. The purpose of word study is to build students' knowledge of high-frequency words and word features to help children become efficient problem solvers of words in reading and writing. You will want to devote fifteen or twenty minutes each day to explicit, direct phonics instruction. Assess your students' knowledge to determine which features you will focus on. Most teachers use the *Words Their Way* spelling inventory and word identification task to determine their students' stages of spelling development. Once you have assessed your students, you will want to provide whole-group or small-group instruction. If you feel small-group work is daunting you'll probably choose to work with the whole class. If so, focus on what most students are ready to learn next. Choose features to work on that most students are confusing. For example, if you notice that many students are spelling *ee* words with *ea*, you'll want to work on long vowel patterns. If you do decide to divide your class into groups for word study, you'll want to begin by teaching students the routines to several word study activities so

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that the rest of the students can work in partnerships as you are working with a group. Once you have assessed your students and decided how to present your instruction, you will want to follow whatever phonics curriculum you have selected. Be sure you spend enough time studying each feature (blends, spelling patterns, and so on) in a variety of ways. Make sure you are supporting students' ability to read and write these features both in isolation and in context. Always provide explicit phonics teaching as part of your day. In some units, you will notice that there is an emphasis on word solving. During these units in particular, you will want to support children's transfer of their word knowledge into their reading.

Small-Group Instruction

It is critically important that you lead small-group instruction as often as you can. When you think about small-group work, start with the idea that any teaching you do with the whole class can also be done in a small group. You can do small-group shared reading, small-group interactive writing, small-group phonics, small-group read-aloud/accountable talk, and so forth. Your small-group work can be used to preteach, reteach, or enrich. As an example of preteaching, if you are reading aloud a chapter book and notice that five or six children are not joining in the accountable talk, you may want to gather them together before you read the next section and engage them in a very active book talk, so that when they listen to the section with the rest of the class they will be able to talk about ideas you have already sanctioned and thus take a more active role in the whole-class discussion.

Your small-group work will be shaped especially by your assessments. For example, if you have some children whose writing is hard to read or who do not yet use short vowels correctly, you will want to give these students extra help. This extra help needs to begin with extra assessments. How many words do they know on sight? Do they know all of their letters and sounds? Once you've determined the level of work at which these children can be successful, you might look back in these calendars to be reminded of the sort of instruction they will need. That instruction will need to be given intensely over the first six weeks of the year, and you will need to determine whether these children are making rapid progress. Those who are not will need to work not only with you but also with a specialist. That is, those children who enter second grade as early beginning readers and who do not progress very rapidly when given high-quality classroom instruction will need specialized supports.

The instruction this group receives will be multifaceted. They'll need, first and foremost, to read books they can read with 96% accuracy. Book introductions will help them with these books. They will need phonics support that is tailored to their level, which could mean work with the alphabet but will probably mean work with short vowels (like the short *a*) and with simple CVC words such as *rat* and *sat*. In small groups, these children can do the kind of picture sorts and word hunts that are recommended in *Words Their Way*, for example. For these readers you will also need

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to emphasize creating their own writing, hearing all the sounds in words as they write, rereading their writing, finding the short vowel words and fixing them up, and writing more and more often. And you will want to move these children up from one level of text to another as soon as you can, relying on guided reading as a way to prepare children for the characteristics of that harder level of text. That is, in guided reading, much of your teaching will involve setting children up for the features of the new level, especially those that you believe will be challenging. For example, in a guided reading group for children who are moving into level E texts, you may set children up for text that wraps around.

Any children who come into your classroom reading level H or below may also need to receive special attention. If possible, meet more frequently with these readers, making sure they really can read their books with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Book introductions can always help. Keep an eye on their volume of reading and their levels of engagement.

Throughout the year, you will pull children together for small-group instruction whenever you find several children who share the same needs as readers. For example, based on your assessments, you might decide that you have six children who need help orchestrating the sources of information and drawing on multiple strategies to deal with harder words and longer texts. In a small-group strategy lesson, you can build their "toolbox" of print strategies.

Assessment

The first assessment you will want to give your children at the start of second grade is the writing assessment, described in the writing curricular calendar. The TCRWP also recommends that every teacher give the spelling inventory that has been designed by Donald Bear and is foundational to his *Words Their Way* program. This can be given as a whole-class spelling test, so it is the quickest assessment you can deliver. You can consult Bear's book *Words Their Way: Word Study for Vocabulary and Spelling Instruction* for more information on how to analyze this inventory. You'll need to follow his directions for counting the number of correct features for each child (this will take longer than giving the test but still requires just minutes per child). Your calculations will quickly tell you whether a particular child is an early transitional reader (who will probably be reading H/I books and will need you to help him or her learn "within word" spelling patterns, such as those involving long vowels and silent *e*s) or a beginning reader (who will be reading level E books, will need help with "late letter name stage" spelling features and patterns, and will benefit from support with digraphs and blends).

The spelling inventory can be a proxy informal reading inventory. It can, for a few days, take the place of each child reading aloud a leveled text while you take running records to quickly determine the level of books the child is able to read with ease.

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You will still want to conduct running records soon, but before doing so, use the spelling inventory to learn about the range of readers in your class, identify those needing immediate extra supports starting on day one, match readers to books they are apt to handle with ease, and begin tailoring your whole-class instruction—your shared reading, read-alouds, minilessons, and so forth—to the readers in your care. You will also want to begin phonics instruction soon, and your spelling inventory (plus a copy of *Words Their Way* or another book on assessment-based phonics) can get you started.

Of course, you can also use children's last year's book levels and favorite books as a place to start. If teachers across the school are willing, it is ideal for each grade level to begin the year by borrowing a huge armload of familiar texts from the previous year—poems, big books, read-aloud picture books, and independent books. One of the most urgent things you can do is make up for the backsliding in reading ability that often occurs during the summer. If children have the chance to reread books they knew really well at the end of last year, which are preequipped with a book introduction, perhaps they will be able to regain lost ground by reading them. Don't fool yourself for a minute into thinking it will do children good to start this new year reading books that they cannot read with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. That is, make sure they can read the books with 95% accuracy and can answer a couple of literal questions about them, as well as an inferential question.

A word about fluency. It is really important that children read books "like they're talking" and this involves reading with speed as well as with expression and phrasing. The one year in which children especially need to accelerate their fluency is second grade. Hasbrook and Tindle did a study of children at various grade levels and their fluency development. They found that second graders in the 50th achievement percentile tend to progress from reading fifty-three accurate words per minute (wpm) when reading new texts aloud to reading those texts at ninety-four words per minute. Second graders in the 75th achievement percentile typically go from reading aloud eighty-five accurate words per minute to reading 124 words per minute. The interesting thing is that children do not make this sort of a leap at any other grade. For example, those second graders in the 50th percentile will have increased their rate by forty-one words. In third grade, their rate will increase so that by the end of the year, third graders reading in the 50th percentile tend to read 114 words per minute—a 20 wpm increase. The next year, these same children's fluency only increases 10 wpm; fifth grade is just a bit more than that. This is a long-winded way of saying that second grade is the year you really need to watch over fluency, and one important part of this involves simply noting, at the start of the year, the number of accurate words per minute the child reads orally. Monitor this score and make sure that the score changes in ways that reflect progress as the year proceeds. (Adequate reading rates by grade are provided on the next page.) It's a big deal. We include ways to support this throughout the calendar and offer day-long calendar conferences to help you as well.

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General Range of Adequate Reading Rates by Grade Level			
Grade	**WPM**	**Grade**	**WPM**
1	60–90	6	195–220
2	85–120	7	215–245
3	115–140	8	235–270
4	140–170	9	250–270
5	170–195	12	250–300

Harris and Sipay (1990)

Take note of the words your children can read on sight with automaticity. If your children are progressing well, they will enter second grade with a sight vocabulary of approximately 150 words. If your children's sight vocabulary is in this vicinity, you may not need to focus much attention on tracking their sight-word growth at this point. That is, once children have a sight vocabulary of 150 words, as they progress up levels of books and read with increasing fluency, their sight vocabulary will tend to grow. But if you have students who do not have a sight vocabulary of roughly 150 words at this point, you'll want to continue to teach and assess this dimension of reading growth. Give each of these children a key ring of word cards representing the sight words she or he knows or almost knows, so the child can flip through these cards during every reading workshop to, reading each aloud to herself or himself. Children may also use word wall words to play "I spy a word that ____________" with partners, and certainly you may ask each child to take time each day to use the pointer and read aloud all the words on the word wall. (Some teachers try to jazz this up by having the child pull instructions from a can. One day the slip of paper will say, "Read the sight words in a witch's voice," and another day, "Read the sight words like you are a cat—meow each word.") Do whatever you need to do to lure kids to develop automaticity in reading an increasing bank of sight words, and of course help children use these words as they read.

You'll need to attend to your readers' developing abilities to comprehend texts deeply. You'll learn this best by listening closely during book talks, by hearing what children say to partners, and by listening to children's retelling of the books they are reading independently. Although we do not have a scale with which to measure this, the truth is that there is little that is more important. You may want each child to keep a reading portfolio that includes artifacts that represent the child's growing abilities to comprehend. For example, you may read aloud a short story and, at preset places in the text, ask the child to stop and jot a response to the prompt "What do you think will happen next?" You could date the child's responses and keep them, plus the text, from September and from several subsequent months, perhaps also including a rubric that analyzes what that child does and does not do yet when asked to predict. Similar records could be kept for any other comprehension skill. We strongly suggest you

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select a few skills and make a point of keeping this sort of record. There is a rule of thumb that says, "We inspect what we respect."

It's important also to plan for how you'll continue to assess your students throughout the year. Many teachers institute a system for keeping track of children's reading levels and growth (both individual and by class) and for moving readers along to more challenging texts when they are ready. That is, you may decide to devote the reading workshop on the 12th, 13th, and 14th day of each month to a consideration of whether children are ready to progress to new levels. In general, your children need to make rapid progress this year, at least moving to a higher level of text every other month (if not more often), so you need to watch vigilantly for and seize opportunities.

You will find that the TCRWP has assessment tools on our website, www.readingandwritingproject.com. There are two sets of leveled texts used for the primary levels, A–I. One is a set of multicultural books from the BeBop Books series, and one is a set of books from Scholastic. On the website there is information telling you how to order whichever set you select. For readers beyond level I, there are text passages that can be printed right from the website.

Building and Refreshing Classroom Libraries

Once your students have each been assessed and you've matched them to just-right books, you will want to be sure that they know where to get their just-right books in your classroom library. If you have lots of children reading levels H/I/J, for example, you will need lots of books at those levels. If you have no children reading levels O and P, there is little reason to have those books in your library at this time. Your library should reflect your readers. Students will need help, especially early in the year, as they learn to manage their independent book choices. You will establish a system for checking out and returning books that travel between home and school.

One of the key factors in making any unit of study successful is having a collection of excellent books that can be used as just-right books and as read-alouds. Through our work with students and educators across the country, we have begun developing lists of books to support particular units of study. Our website contains many book lists that support our reading units. The book lists include levels—Fountas and Pinnell's levels when those exist, otherwise Scholastic's levels. If neither source exists, we note the Lexile level, which you can convert to an approximation of Fountas and Pinnell levels (take them with a grain of salt, though). You may want to visit our website throughout the year for updated information.

As you well know as second-grade teachers, this is a transformative year for your students. They are ready to be more in control of their reading lives, to plan in more sophisticated ways, and to set loftier goals. It is a year of huge growth and a time for children to meet high expectations as they ready themselves for the demands of third grade. Enjoy this wonderful work with your energetic readers!

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UNIT SIX

Nonfiction Reading Clubs

FEBRUARY/MARCH

(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: K/L/M)

Unit Overview

When a curriculum spirals, it essentially does three things. First, it revisits old ideas or instructional content. Second, it increases the depth and level of this content. Third, in Jerome Bruner's words, it "re-construes" old content, connecting it with "other knowledge." This month, as you revisit expository nonfiction (a genre that you introduced in Unit Four), expect to do all three, in more or less chronological order. You will begin by revisiting earlier teaching, reminding children of the essential "habits of mind" that make for proficient nonfiction reading and tackling difficulty in texts. Once you have children doing this work again, you'll remind readers to continue club conversations around nonfiction texts, the way they began doing in December. But this time you will teach them more complex ways of thinking collaboratively. In Part Two, you'll ask your students to grow from learning what the author is aiming to teach by developing their own ideas about the texts. The third and final part consists of comparing and contrasting information and ideas within books, across books, and across baskets, building on the work of the first two parts and this year's earlier work.

At this point in the school year, your on–grade level readers will be reading around a Level L in nonfiction. If you have students reading below that level (I/J/K), you may want to revisit the Unit Four curriculum for some of the teaching points recommended there. For students who are above grade level (M/N/O), you may look ahead to Unit Eight to see the kind of work children at those levels can be taught to do.

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This unit is strongly aligned with the Common Core State Standards because of its focus on nonfiction and speaking and listening.

Setting Up Your Library

Each club will need its own basket of just-right texts to read, study, and talk about for each week you'll be in this unit. To prepare these baskets, take stock of your existing library and make plans to restock as needed. Like the curriculum, the contents of your class' nonfiction library, too, needs to spiral upward! Of course you'll want to retain most books from the December nonfiction unit. However, remember that your students have grown as readers so they will be reading at higher levels. Therefore, topic baskets must also be dotted with many *new* nonfiction texts, preferably ones that address familiar topics and are at the higher ends of your children's current levels. Prior knowledge or topic familiarity will scaffold readers' climb to a higher-level book. As you present these to your room, however, watch like a hawk to monitor that these are actually within your readers' range of comfort. Check that readers have access to just-right books at all times, that they aren't merely thumbing pages looking at illustrations in books that are too hard for them to understand. As the Common Core State Standards discuss, matching readers to a text at an appropriate level of complexity involves several variables such as motivation, knowledge, and experiences; this is especially true in nonfiction.

Typically, second-grade classrooms will feature baskets of books on animals (wolves, spiders, snakes, and so forth), weather (tornadoes, hurricanes, twisters, and so forth), planets, plants, and habitats (trees, fruits, rain forests, deserts, and so forth), and dinosaurs. If your nonfiction library in December dealt with these topics, it makes sense to shop for new books on the same topics that are a level higher than existing volumes. However, it is important to get slightly *easier* books if the topic is new. While shopping for new books this month, keep in mind that a child can read a just-right book on a topic she may be familiar with—like cats. But if that child decides to read books on a topic about which she has no foreknowledge, like gemstones, it will benefit her to begin with books that are easier than her just-right reading level. As she builds up her vocabulary and background knowledge about gemstones, she'll move on to reading with success books that are at her just-right level (or slightly above that level). You will want to review the books in your library, asking, "For my L/M readers, what leveled books do I have? What topics do I have? Do I know topics that might be of interest to these readers? What are some of the science and social studies themes and topics that my readers know?" These questions will help you put together topic baskets that support your second graders. Consider partnering with a colleague in the third grade and another in first grade with whom you'll share your books—right now, you'll need the books, but later in the year your colleagues may need to borrow some of your easier texts to introduce their students to new content and build conceptual understanding.

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While stocking your nonfiction library in preparation for this month, you will also want to look at subtopics within a larger theme. If your existing nonfiction library contains a couple of well-thumbed books on mammals (such as whales and bears), for example, you might prepare a topic basket containing new volumes on *other* mammals (such as apes and seals) to allow children to compare and contrast something new with what they have read previously. Similarly, if a topic basket already contains books on tornadoes and hurricanes, you might shop for additional books on tsunamis or for books about a specific historic hurricane or tsunami. Layering various aspects and dimensions of a topic next to one another in one book basket will set children up for deeper thinking and inquiry as well as scaffold their climb into higher reading levels.

You'll also want to keep the fiction areas of your library open and set aside some time daily for reading just-right chapter books. Likely, your children have fallen in love with characters and series, and the reading they have done in these kinds of books goes a long way toward helping them become stronger, more confident readers and growing into increasingly more challenging texts.

As you and your students collect texts, you will want to remember that many of your students should be poised to move up text levels within this unit. This is the second unit on nonfiction reading, so they should have developed proficiency by now. Then, too, they'll be reading a bunch of texts on topics of interest. They'll probably read the easier texts first, and those texts will provide readers with the domain-specific vocabulary and the conceptual knowledge they need to be able to comprehend more challenging texts. They'll also be reading alongside other inquirers, and the conversations around shared texts provide the same sort of scaffolding provided during guided reading sessions. Then, too, you can take any text-set inquiry group and think of that group as a guided reading group, working with them to be sure they have the requisite skills to read texts of increasing difficultly.

About Reading Clubs

If you had your children in series reading clubs last month as the TCRWP scope and sequence suggests, and it went well, you can skip this section. If you are new to the idea of reading clubs, you may want to read this section to learn the nuts-and-bolts information that will help them succeed.

Just as reading workshops always aim to do, reading clubs allow children to function like real readers do. Aren't there times in your life when you've decided to start a project of some kind, and you gather a bunch of books on the topic and read them with another person or two? Perhaps you even do this as part of your ongoing professional development at your school—you decide, for example, that your focus for the year will be on improving your reading conferences, and you and your inquiry group read a bunch of books on the topic and meet monthly to talk about it. Reading clubs

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put the natural social aspect of reading at the forefront and help make our reading workshops even more engaging and more fun.

In her book *Reading for Real: Teaching Children to Read with Joy, Power, and Intention*, Kathy Collins explains that a reading club is "a couple of kids reading and talking about a small collection of books that go together in some way. During a cycle of reading clubs, partners choose a reading club of interest that contains books they can read, and they determine their own purposes and plans" (p. 20). She goes on to clarify in Chapter Two that:

- A reading club is formed around a basket of books that has been collected because the books relate to one another in some way.
- A reading club doesn't involve a particular task, other than reading and talking about books.
- Reading clubs aren't a permanent daily structure of every reading workshop period all year, but instead are used a couple times a year for two to four weeks at a time.
- In a reading club, readers partner with other children who are reading at about the same reading level and have the same or similar interests.
- Partners read and talk about texts in their reading clubs, and then they ponder questions, develop ideas, develop theories, celebrate discoveries, and so on.
- The work that students do in reading clubs allows them to become experts on their topics and increases their comfort and familiarity with different kinds of texts and reading strategies.
- Club and partnership work are teacher-supported as the teacher confers with individuals, partners, and club members.
- Reading clubs are in addition to, not instead of, daily independent reading.

Remember that the Common Core State Standards call for collaborative conversations within student groups in which members observe certain protocols of "following agreed-upon rules of discussion" and "building on others' talk in conversations" by "linking their comments to the remarks of others." Students are also expected to "ask for clarification and further explanation as needed about the topics and texts under discussion." At the very start of the month, you'll want to remind children of the rules and protocols that you expect reading clubs to uphold. You will want to revise your charts to spotlight ways of growing more content in

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clubs rather than solely focusing on behaviors. Display these tips prominently in the room. For example, your chart may say:

- When a club member wants to enter the conversation, we. . . .
- Club members listen and help to clarify what other members say.
- Club members try to help build on one another's ideas.
- When a club member cites evidence from text, we. . . .
- Club members help one another ask and answer questions by. . . .

Launching the Unit

In *Reading for Real*, Kathy Collins likens reading clubs in the primary grades to being part of a band that gets together for a jam session. In a jam session, she writes, the musicians each get together and start by sharing some of what they've been working on alone. They've come to the group with some new way the chorus could go, a new chord progression, a new thought about ending the piece. The session is one filled with energy and joy. Every member is grateful for the collaboration, because without one another they may end up with just a bunch of their own notes, but now they have a piece of music. Tell your students that they're going to be like musicians—reading nonfiction independently and then coming together to share. Together, they'll get smarter about the topics that are interesting to all of them, and together they'll come up with new thoughts, ideas, and questions.

Just like a band comes together because they have a shared musical ability and a love of the same genre of music, the readers in your class will come together not only because they read on about the same level but also because of the topics they are curious about and authentically want to pursue. You may consider having readers circle the classroom with a clipboard, interview questions, or a list of topics that will be discussed in book baskets in hand, asking other students, "I'm looking for a few other kids who like wolves. Do you want to learn more about wolves?" or "Which of the following topics sounds most interesting to you: whales, plants, or simple machines?"

Once you've organized your students into groups of two, three, or four, you could have their first task as a club be to begin work on a "Reading and Analyzing Nonfiction" (RAN) chart that Tony Stead mentions in his book *Reality Checks*. You could create a big board (perhaps by using an opened legal-sized manila folder) on which you head columns with "What I Think I Know," "Oops!," "Yes!," "New Information," and "Wondering." The club could meet and talk about the things they *think* they know about the topic. This helps them activate prior knowledge but is different from a KWL chart, on which the first column is meant to contain information the student is *sure* he

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knows. Here, the idea they think they know will launch club members into an exploration to confirm (yes!), revise (oops!), add (new information), and question (wondering). This board could become a living part of the work the group does as they move Post-its from one column to another.

Remember, as always, that about one week prior to the start of the unit, you'll begin a nonfiction read-aloud and perhaps also a nonfiction shared reading book, so kids get into the mindset of the new unit. Consider that your read-aloud can function as a maxiversion of a club—choose a set of books that go together in some way and plan to read several of them aloud. During conversations, mentor children in the kind of independent talk you hope they will initiate in their club. As you mentor their conversations, exemplify the kind of independent thinking you want them to do as they read. Choose a highly engaging topic—maybe something gross or really cool—that will have children on the edge of their seats. Your challenge will be to find books whose density of information doesn't make it too difficult for children to process and visualize as you are reading them aloud.

Unit Parts

Part One: We Know How to Be Strong Nonfiction Readers, and Now We Can Do That with Our Club

This part is all about reminding children that they already know a lot about how to read nonfiction and that it's time to switch from thinking about characters to reactivating that nonfiction mindset. Bring out your old nonfiction charts. Remind children of all they know. For a start, your students know that the most essential, foundational thing they can do as nonfiction readers is to monitor for meaning and learn what the author is trying to teach. Nonfiction readers do this in a number of big ways. We think about how to read nonfiction fluently and with intonation, using our voices to convey that everything the author has to say is the most interesting thing we've ever heard. Your students know, too, that our work as nonfiction readers is to determine the main idea of a section and to think about what supporting details go with that main idea. They know to care about the specific words an author uses and to make it a habit to try to use the language that they learn in their books in their talk. During this unit, they will talk with not just one partner but with their whole club.

In this part, as the Common Core State Standards suggest, you'll revisit some of the key standards in the Informational Text portion of the document. You'll be teaching children to "know and use various text features (e.g., captions, bold print, subheadings, glossaries, indexes, electronic menus, icons)," "to locate key facts or information in a text efficiently," "identify the main topic of a multiparagraph text as well as the focus of specific paragraphs within the text," and "determine the meaning of words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 2 topic or subject area."

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Just as the Common Core State Standards are designed as a spiral, this part essentially deepens the base of nonfiction strategies that you introduced previously. While reiterating December's teaching points, you can add tips that clarify and deepen the essential work you want readers to be doing. For instance, "Nonfiction readers read with explaining voices" is a teaching point you taught in December while working on fluency and intonation. In this part you will reteach it, but halfway through the workshop you may also announce, "We don't just read with explaining *voices*; nonfiction readers, in fact, do actually explain the text to ourselves as we go along—we pause after a few words and explain whatever we've read to ourselves, using our own words if we can. It's almost like the explaining voice in our head is a real teacher who makes sure we understand each section before moving on. This will not only help us understand the text better but also prepare us to talk with and teach our other club members about our topics." Even as you teach children to parse and use intonation as they read, you can also prompt them to monitor for meaning.

Since the texts that students are reading have gotten more complex than those they could read two months ago, you'll want to tweak some of the teaching points and add to others to more closely match the work that's possible and helpful to do in these harder texts. When students read nonfiction earlier in the year, each book was probably about a single topic. If a book was divided into subcategories of information, the subcategories were very clear. Now, students will be grappling with different types of text structures and layouts, ones that may demand that they be more flexible with the kinds of strategies they use for determining the main idea.

For example, where before you may have taught your students to be on the lookout for section headings to help them figure out what the pages are mostly about, here you may alert them that sometimes the section headings can be a bit clever and it'll take a careful reader to turn one into a main idea. For example, in Binns' book *The Lincoln Memorial* (level K), the section headings clearly identify the topic of the two-page spread: "Building the Memorial" and "Huge Statue" and "Outside the Lincoln Memorial." But in Platt's book *Spiders' Secret* (level M), the headings are "Hairy and Scary" and "Watch Out, Dad!" and "Super Scuba." Also, the sections are not confined to a two-page spread, so readers aren't able to see the heading while reading the entire section. Instead, each section is more like a chapter that spans several pages. You may need to teach children to accumulate more information within a section, perhaps reading page by page and thinking, "How does this page fit with the one before it?" or "What are both of these pages talking about?" Look closely at the books that your children are reading, and decide how you'll support the same kind of skill work (figuring out main idea and supporting details) now that the text has become more challenging.

As children are doing the work of reading to understand what the author is teaching, they now have the support of their club, their "band," and can lean on one another. They can come to their reading club ready to teach others about what they've learned. They can talk about new learning by touching their palm and saying, "The big thing I learned in this book/section today is . . ." and then touch each finger saying,

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"For example, for example, for example. . . ." By doing so, they are doing what the Common Core State Standards describes as "identify[ing] the main purpose of a text, including what the author wants to answer, explain, or describe."

When children have difficulty teaching what they read, club members can offer support. A big part of monitoring for meaning is knowing when you don't understand something and then drawing on the tools you have handy to help you understand. Children can bring confusions or misunderstandings to their club and talk to the other members to clarify them. They may start by saying, "In my book it says ____________, but I don't really get it. Did your book talk about that?" or "I thought ____________, but in the book it says ____________ I don't get it."

Part Two: In Nonfiction Clubs We Don't Only Learn What the Author Says, We Have Our Own Ideas, Too

If you began your reading clubs with the RAN chart mentioned in the Launching the Unit section, your children have by now likely collected more main ideas and information, such as content-specific vocabulary words. At this point you want to teach them to alter the facts they thought they knew on new sections of the chart as they confirm or revise their knowledge. They will also come up with new thoughts, ideas, and questions as they continue to explore their topic.

You may begin this part by saying, "Since the beginning of this month, each of you has showed me and one another how you're careful nonfiction readers. You've done strong nonfiction reading by thinking about the main idea, reading with fluency, and learning new vocabulary. You've talked with the members of your club to make sure you're sure about what you're learning, and you've really talked about what the author is trying to teach you. Now we're going to start making some of our own inferences based on the information in the books we're reading. Remember when we were studying characters last month in our series clubs? We talked about how we don't want to just retell our stories to our clubs. That's a good start to the conversation, sure, but then we need to talk about our *ideas*, too. We need to come with our own thinking about character traits, theories about the story, or maybe even ideas about what lessons we're learning from the book. Well, this next week or so, we're going to be doing the same thing in nonfiction. We're still going to be coming to our club meetings with information that we've found fascinating, but now we're also going to talk about our own thinking and reactions to the information."

Over the course of this part, you'll share a handful of teaching points you selected to help your children do this well. You might read some nonfiction books at the levels your students are reading, and think, "What is it that I do to have my own ideas, my own thinking about these books? *How* do I infer when reading factual information?" One way we infer is by reacting to the information in the books we read. Once we understand what the author is saying, we mull over that new bit of information and our reaction to it—eventually landing on an inference. For example, imagine you read

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about how emperor penguin eggs will crack if they touch the ice for even a few seconds. You might think, "Wow. It's amazing that penguins know this and are so careful to keep the egg safe. It must be hard to roll the egg from the mother penguin to the father penguin and keep it off the ground." Notice that the inference comes after the reaction. Likewise, you'll want to encourage your children to push past just "wow" and instead explain their thinking using details from the text.

We also want to teach our students to be flexible thinkers. They enter a book confident of what they know about the topic. However, as they read, rather than holding firm to their preconceived beliefs, we encourage them to be open to learning more and revising their thinking if needed. In some cases, this means confirming what they knew and adding to their knowledge with related information from the book. In other instances, it means taking what they thought they knew and explaining why they had the misconceptions they did. This can also help them grow new ideas. During their club meetings, they may use sentence starters like those below to share their new understanding and ideas:

- I used to think . . . but now I'm thinking. . . .
- My new thinking about . . . is different because. . . .
- I thought I knew something about . . . but then I read this part that says . . . so now I think. . . .
- I was right about . . . and I also learned . . . so now I think. . . .

As your young readers learn to ask questions of their text, you might teach them some questions that almost always lead to deeper thinking, such as: "How do . . . ?" "Why do . . . ?" "How come . . . ?" "Why would . . . ?" Pursuing a question in a single book and, especially, in several related books, can drive a child's or club's reading. Imagine a club reading through all of their insect books looking for the answer to this question: "Do all insect legs make noise like cricket legs do?" Even if the club members don't find the answer, they can use the information they do find to suggest a possible answer. This requires that they're able to synthesize related information to form ideas. They might then say, "Well, since it says here . . . I'll bet. . . ." Asking and answering questions is tied to the Common Core State Standards suggesting that second graders should be able to "ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text."

You might also teach readers to embed their thinking about the text by making their own picture captions or adding to existing captions. Perhaps a reader first discovers that cats carry their babies in their mouths, moving the babies when they sense danger. After reading and studying the picture of the kitten in the cat's mouth, she may include her thinking about and deepen her understanding of the text by adding,

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"Cats know just how to carry the baby so it isn't hurt. It doesn't hurt the kitten, the kitten isn't afraid when the mother cat does this." Or, "Only mother cats carry kittens. Father cats don't do anything to help care for the kittens." Adding these captions will take your children even further in understanding and developing new ideas.

Another crucial strategy as students encounter new information and concepts in nonfiction reading is visualizing. Your students can gather information by looking at the illustrations in the text, recalling images they have seen in other books, and using their imaginations to create movies in their minds as they read. You may want to model how readers create a movie to add to their information by reading a bit of text out loud and then walking children through how you create a visual of that text in your mind. For example, if you read a page that says, "The polar bear swims up under the seal," you can share with children that you picture a seal treading water obliviously. The waves are quiet, until suddenly, a polar bear bursts through the surface of the water, scaring away the unsuspecting seal. The goal is that children are able to envision no matter what they read. As they read about an eagle building a nest, we want them to see the eagle flying through the air and dipping down to collect twigs in its beak. As children read about flowers, we want them to see the flower's roots soak up water and nutrients from the soil, as well as the growth from seed to blossom. Partners can help each other envision, using gestures and facial expressions and pointing out things in pictures to each other as they read to help create a more complete visualization of what is happening in the text.

You may decide to teach your more advanced students to infer and connect by asking them to express why what they are learning is important and then think about a project they might do either alone or with their club to act on what they've learned and thought about. (This is difficult work; not all your students will make this move at this point in the year.) For instance, a child who is learning about polar bears might decide that it is unfair that the polar bears are losing their homes because the ice caps are melting. Perhaps she'll want to make some posters at home to let others know that we can help our environment, which helps global warming, which helps the polar bears still have a home. A child who is learning about insects might decide that the classroom should contain a terrarium with insects. A child who is learning about flowers may decide to plant flowers at home or at school. Children's ideas about the importance of what they are learning can thus be expressed as ethical concerns and/or as action plans.

Part Three: In Nonfiction Clubs We Can Compare and Contrast Information about Our Topics

It's likely that your children have already done some comparing and contrasting in the last two parts. Perhaps, for example, two different readers shared information from two different books about snakes: "My book says. . . ." "That's weird, because my book says. . . ." Or perhaps they compared information within the same book:

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"On this page it talks about . . . but here, it says. . . ." In this new part, you'll take advantage of that work and the fact that each club has likely moved on to a second or third basket of books by now, which means they'll be able to compare, contrast, and synthesize information. As the Common Core State Standards outline, they'll have the opportunity to "describe the connection between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts" and "compare and contrast two texts on the same topic."

Once children have read a number of books on a topic, they'll begin by comparing information and move on to contrast it. Finally, they'll take on the sophisticated work of synthesizing. To model this, you might draw on examples from a class topic, comparing a new fact with something you already know, activating prior knowledge. Imagine your class is studying chimpanzees. You may read from a book, pause, and say, "Chimpanzees use tools to get food. That is a lot like people who live in the wilderness and set traps to catch food." That is, you'll model how to compare a similarity between two species.

Then, too, you could teach your children to compare ideas within texts. For instance, "Chimpanzees use tools to trap and eat ants. They also use tools to construct their nests. Chimpanzees use the *same* materials for *different* purposes. In one way, they use tools to gather food, in another they build their habitat." This work is so closely related to contrasting that contrasting will often come up as a natural counterpart. Second graders are naturals at noticing and commenting on differences.

Alternatively, you could start by reading a section of your class text together. Imagine you read a section about gibbons who use stones to crack the husks of fruit. Model your observation: "So gibbons just started using tools recently, but I just read that chimpanzees have been using them for a long time. Animals must be getting smarter the longer they are around!"

You'll teach your readers that when we notice differences it's helpful to identify them first, then consider what makes two things different, and finally think about what might explain the differences. For example, if the praying mantis has six thin, green, twiglike legs and the beetle has six short, black, spiky legs, then one thing we might consider is how these differently shaped and colored legs are helpful to each of these two insects. We may say that the praying mantis has twiglike legs to blend into trees while the spiky-legged beetle can tightly grip or hold on to leaves. As your clubs compare and contrast the information in their books, be sure to support them as they incorporate more nuanced language to describe information they are comparing and contrasting. For example, your chart could look this:

- On this page . . . but on this page. . . .
- In this book . . . but in this book. . . .
- The difference between . . . and . . . is. . . .
- What's the same about these two . . . is. . . .

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- Unlike the . . . in this book the . . . does [doesn't]. . . .
- When we were learning about . . . we learned . . . but now that we're learning. . . .

Teach children to look across their Post-its and ideas, either on the same page or across pages. First help kids imagine how their ideas or information fit together. Have them place their Post-its side by side. Then have them ask themselves (and their partners), "How are these the same and how are these different?"

As they come up with new ideas, you will want to teach them to read on, to see whether the information fits with their new thoughts and/or ideas. The Post-its will help kids compare information across books.

As children find parts in their books that fit together, you'll teach them how to talk about and compare the parts that are similar. Inevitably, as children find and note similarities, they'll discover differences, too, or at least will engage in a conversation about differences. Help kids lay out their texts and Post-its side by side so they can move easily between the texts and pages, citing examples and thoughts. Sometimes when partners work together, they forget to go back and read from the text to give an example. Teach kids to prompt one another by saying, "Where does it say that? Is there another example? Prove it!"

Perhaps one child will note the similarity between octopuses, which hide in caves, and turtles, which hide in hard shells. After this observation all the kids in the club can discuss the idea that some animals aim to hide and protect themselves. Kids could then open their books or find other texts that support (or refute) the idea. One child might say, "Yeah, these fish hide in the coral. They all hide in places with hard stuff." Then another child might ask, "Is that always true?" As a group, the kids in the club could try either to prove their theory right or to find something that proves their theory wrong.

As students think and talk about the information they discover in their books, you might suggest that they use words like *always*, *sometimes*, *never*, *rarely* or *all*, *most*, *many*, and *few* to explore theories. You can also suggest that they rekindle some of the skills they use in science for observation, such as describing what something looks like in detail. Children might observe and read closely by thinking about the size, quantity, or description of what something looks like. As they look closely and name things, coach them to raise questions like, "How is that important?" or "Why is that happening?"

When reading clubs meet, you can up the ante for accountable talk by reinforcing what children already know and helping them apply it to nonfiction. Get children into the habit of thinking and talking about the answers to questions such as, "Why is it important to know about ___________?" or "What does the author mean by that?" Encourage your students to summarize their ideas by saying things like, "This teaches me . . . ," "I've learned that . . . ," or "I think the author wants us to know. . . ."

As you wind down this last part, you will want to spread the excitement that comes from preparing to share all the new learning you and your children have done during the month. Clubs that are interested in making a project out of their learning

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might pursue a question such as, "How do different animals care for their babies?" Then they can either reread books they've already read during this unit or read new ones (or both) to attempt to answer their question. Club members can mark pages that answer their question and present their findings to another club or to a class of kindergartners or fifth graders. The presentation might feature a table or a chart or a diagram. For example, the club investigating whether various animals care for their young might create a chart that features animals that don't care for their young (seahorses, turtles, spiders) and animals that do (birds, cats, alligators). This club could then extend its study by coming up with a chart of the ways animals care for their young, such as carry them, feed them, and protect them.

Some clubs may find that the differences they discover between one animal and another (or one plant and another) are more subtle. For example, one club that pursued the question "How do animals use their tongues?" discovered that cats and giraffes both have a long, rough tongue. But cat tongues are rough so that they can clean and groom themselves, just as people groom ourselves with a hairbrush, while giraffe tongues are rough so they can eat tough leaves. Cat tongues are long to get to hard-to-reach places on their bodies, while giraffe tongues are long to reach high up in the trees for the leaves.

Unit Celebration

By now, your children are filled to the brim with information, ideas, and theories. They've learned volumes about different topics that excited them from the start, and chances are they're even more excited now. Instead of letting all of that knowledge go underground, think about ways they might spread their thrill of learning about a particular topic to other kids in the class. Think about how you might get children who shied away from certain baskets earlier in the year excited about the stuff that's in there—perhaps by having students from a club that studied that topic become the teachers.

Toward the end of the unit, children will share the expert knowledge they grew as a club and will reflect on how and why others might need to know this information. Kids in one club could get together with kids in another club and teach one another about their topics. You might have a "museum" share in which visitors come to each reading club to hear what children have learned. During these shares, the kids in each club will assume the role of instructors, teaching the information from the texts they have read.

Word Study/Phonics

In keeping with the Common Core State Standards, you will want to make sure your students can recognize and read irregularly spelled high-frequency grade level words.

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If you decide to teach . . .	Suggested lessons in *Words Their Way*, 4th edition	Suggested lessons in *Phonics Lessons Grade 2* (Pinnell and Fountas)
Long vowel spelling patterns	6-2 to 6-15 (pp. 189–199)	SP3 to SP6 (pp. 173–188) SP9 (pp. 197–200), SP11 (pp. 205–208) SP13 to SP15 (pp. 213–224) SP17 (pp. 229–232)
Diphthongs and ambiguous vowels	Adapt 5-19 (p.164) 6-7 to 6-8 (pp. 193–194) 6-11 to 6-15 (pp.195–199)	LS9 (pp. 103–106) LS21 (pp. 151–154) SP10 (pp. 201–204)
High-frequency words	pp. 182–183	HF1 to HF9 (pp. 235–270)

You might group students according to the words they still need to know so that they can tackle them together. Teach students how to study these words so that they can read them with automaticity in continuous text. A routine you might teach students is to say the word, cover it, write the word, and check it.

At this point in the year, students are also encountering more multisyllabic words in their reading. The Common Core State Standards recommend that students be able to decode two-syllable words by the end of second grade. You will want to help students use what they have learned about words and how they work to problem-solve these multisyllabic words. At first, you will want to teach students that every syllable must have a vowel sound. You'll do this to help kids understand how you break up a word into syllables. You might work on this at first in an isolated, explicit way and then move on to show students how to break up unfamiliar words into syllables as they are reading. Specifically, during shared reading, you might say, "Break the word into parts or cover the parts of the word as you move your eyes from left to right or read the word part by part."

Additional Resources

Your children are coming off the heels of series reading clubs, which is often a favorite unit, and you will want to continue the momentum. As you get ready to launch nonfiction reading clubs, keep in mind that nonfiction may be more challenging for some of your children but that some children prefer nonfiction and find it easier to discuss.

You may want to refer to your conferring notes from Unit Four, Reading Nonfiction, Reading the World, to remember which students were particularly strong nonfiction readers and which seemed to need more support. Also make a quick list of the skills and strategies you taught most in the last nonfiction unit. Chances are your

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students will still need support with these now that they will be reading nonfiction again, so you may decide to adapt the plans that follow to match your students' needs. For example, if you look through your conferring notes and see that you worked with students again and again on fluent nonfiction reading, chances are your students will benefit from some reminders of those lessons. You might plan a string of two or three minilessons right at the start of the unit to remind kids of the work they did in the last unit, to get things up and running again.

We invite you to make adaptations and accommodations accordingly, using the teaching points that follow as a starting point. We hope you will pull from all kinds of data sources to make your plans—running records, observations from read-alouds and shared reading, book logs, and more.

Part One: We Know How to Be Strong Nonfiction Readers, and Now We Can Do That with Our Club

- "Today I want to teach you that we need to come to our clubs prepared to talk about our topics. One way we can do this is to really listen to the text. We don't just read with explaining *voices*; nonfiction readers, in fact, actually explain the text to ourselves as we go along—we pause after a few words and explain whatever we've read to ourselves, using our own words if we can. It's almost like the explaining voice in our head is a real teacher who makes sure we understand each section before moving on. Then we will be ready to explain and talk in our clubs about our topic."

- "Today I want to teach you that we need to come to our club ready to talk about the main ideas about our topic. We can figure out the main idea by noticing the *who* and the *what* of the page or part. This helps us name the subject and the action as we read. To find the main idea, we can think, 'What's the relationship between the *who* and the *what*?' and 'How can I say this main idea as a sentence?' "

- "Today I want to teach you that club members don't just 'read' information to one another. We explain and discuss it. Careful nonfiction readers always try to put what we've read into our own words. We might read a bit, then put the text down and say, 'What the author is saying is that . . .' or 'What this means is. . . .' This will help us prepare to talk in our clubs later."

- "Today I want to teach you that nonfiction readers have read closely to find the main ideas in the text. We read the first sentence of a paragraph and ask, 'What is this saying?' Then we read on, sentence by sentence, asking, 'How does this fit with what's been said so far?' to help us find the main idea. Readers take the sentences we've read and say what we learned in one short statement."

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- *Tip:* "Readers of nonfiction can think about the topic of the whole book and the subtopic of the section. Then, as we read the sentences on the page, we can think, 'What's the part of the larger topic this section is dealing with? What does the author want me to think, know, or understand about that subtopic?' "
- *Mid-Workshop Teaching Point:* "Readers are on the lookout for when our book switches topics. We know that sometimes there isn't a heading that will alert us to the change, and instead we should think, 'What part of the main topic is this dealing with? Is it the same or different from the last page?' "
- *Teaching Share:* "Sometimes the author is being clever with the section heading and we need to figure out what the section is *really* about. We can read each sentence and think, 'How does this fact fit with the heading?' Then, at the end of the page or section, we can retitle that section with a heading that makes sense."

- "Today I want to teach you that we can come to our clubs with confusions or misunderstandings and talk to the other members of the club to clarify them. We may start by saying what we read in our book and explaining what's confusing. Then, the other members in the club can talk back to the questioning member to explain or ask further questions to help fix up the confusion."

Part Two: In Nonfiction Clubs We Don't Only Learn What the Author Says, We Have Our Own Ideas, Too

- "Readers can have reactions to the information presented in our books. We can think about how we feel when we read a section or part of our book, and make a statement about what our response is. We can say, 'That is really important because . . . ,' 'This part makes me feel . . . ,' or 'This seems really surprising because. . . .' "

- "Today I want to teach you that readers can use our skills of envisioning what the author is saying to really think about the information being presented. We can read a fact on the page and look at the picture. Then we can make the picture move like a movie by reading more facts on that same page. As we see what the author says, we can say what we think about what we see."

- "To get ideas, readers don't just let the facts fly over our heads. Today I want to teach you that we really try to understand and imagine what we're learning. When we do this, we can think about why this information matters, and what our own thoughts about the information are."

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- “Today I want to teach you that readers can use sentence starters with question words to help us get ideas. We can ask a question and then push ourselves to answer it. We can use words like, ‘How do. . . ?’ and ‘Why do. . . ?’ and ‘How come. . . ?’ ”

- “Today I want to teach you that readers can share our revised thinking with our club members. We can take a fact that we have in the ‘I think I know’ column of our RAN chart and move it based on what we’re now learning. This new information can also help us have an idea.”

- “Today I want to teach you that readers can make our own captions or add to existing captions in the book. We can put together what the author tells us, what the picture tells us, and our own thoughts.”

- “Today I want to teach you that readers can make plans alone or with our club members to take action based on the ideas in our books and our reactions to them. We can think about how we can make a real-world difference based on what we’re learning.”

Part Three: In Nonfiction Clubs We Can Compare and Contrast Information about Our Topics

- “Club members can compare information in our nonfiction books to what we know in our own lives. Today I want to teach you that we can think about what the book says, and compare it with something similar in our own lives. By comparing these two bits of information, we can come to a new conclusion about the topic we’re studying.”

- “Today I want to teach you that club members can talk about differences in the information we’re learning. We can think about why they are different and then what might explain those differences. This can help us come to new understandings about our topics.”

- “Today I want to teach you that club members can use prompts to push our thinking as we compare and contrast. We can say, ‘On this page . . . but on this page . . .’ or ‘In this book . . . but in this book . . .’; ‘The difference between . . . and . . . is . . .’; ‘What’s the same about these two is . . .’; and ‘Unlike the . . . in this book, the . . . in that book does [doesn’t]. . . .’ ”

- “Today I want to teach you that club members can compare and contrast two different kinds or parts of the same larger topic.”

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- *Example:* "We can think about what's the same and what's different about two different kinds of mammals or fish or plants. We can think about the parts of our topic and how parts are the same and different."
- *Tip:* "Sometimes we find these parts and kinds within a single book, and sometimes we look at two or more books."

- "Today I want to teach you that readers can think about how often information shows up in many books on one topic. We can use words like *always*, *sometimes*, *never*, *rarely*, *all*, *most*, *many*, and *few* to talk about our ideas."

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COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Reading Workshop

GRADE 3

LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT

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ISBN-13: 978-0-325-04306-7
ISBN-10: 0-325-04306-X

EDITORS:
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PRODUCTION:
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TYPESETTER:
Gina Poirier Design

COVER AND INTERIOR DESIGNS:
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Overview of the Year for Third-Grade Readers

SEPTEMBER	UNIT 1: Building a Reading Life
OCTOBER	UNIT 2: Following Characters into Meaning: *Envision*, *Predict*, *Synthesize*, *and Infer*
NOVEMBER	UNIT 3: Series Book Clubs
LATE NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER	UNIT 4: Nonfiction Reading: *Expository Texts*
JANUARY	UNIT 5: Mystery Book Clubs
FEBRUARY/MARCH	UNIT 6: Biography Book Clubs
MARCH/APRIL	UNIT 7: Test Preparation
MAY	UNIT 8: Informational Reading: *Reading*, *Research*, *and Writing in the Content Areas*
JUNE	UNIT 9: Social Issues Book Clubs

Each year, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project gathers together the members of our community—the teachers, coaches, schools leaders, and staff developers—to reconceptualize the curricular calendars to reflect the latest research and innovations in the teaching of reading. This year, you'll notice most dramatically the effect of the Common Core Standards in the emphasis, across the year and within each unit, on analytical thinking and reading skills. This community has

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merged its expertise to create curriculum and link that curriculum to tried-and-true teaching pedagogy so that children may rise to the highest levels demanded by the Common Core State Standards. This is demanding work, and as you study the curriculum, you may find that colleagues will want to form some study groups to ensure that teacher leaders in your school are developing the expertise needed to truly teach children to be powerful readers of complex texts.

Of course, the suggested order of units and the teaching points offered with each unit are only one way that this work could go. You'll want to, and need to, collect and study your data on your readers, and then sit together with colleagues to plan your on-site adaptation of the curriculum. It felt important to offer teaching points for as many units as possible this year, because the level of teaching demanded is so high. In response to teacher request, we have provided wherever possible a menu of teaching points, so that there is more time to assess children and use this knowledge to differentiate. As always, we encourage you to have these conversations collaboratively—both across grade levels and across the school. To teach in such a way that children become extraordinarily skilled, it's crucial that teachers in a grade level can depend on children moving up from the prior grade with the highest possible level of shared practices. If teachers on a grade do devise a new unit of study that you are willing to share with other teachers, please send it to Lucy Calkins at contact@readingandwritingproject.com.

The curricular calendar will be supported by a calendar of full-day workshops available to participating Project schools that sign up in advance. Some of these days will support reading and writing work linked closely to these units, and some days will be on special topics that will help teachers support their students across the year. Still other days will support our new content calendar. The conference days, and the units of study, put a special emphasis this year on assessment-driven instruction and on Common Core Standards, and the TCRWP will continue to provide the latest research and expertise on these subjects. Another resource for teachers, that these units depend on, is the *Units of Study for Teaching Reading: A Curriculum for the Reading Workshop, Grades 3–5*.

Below, you'll find brief descriptions of the units of study for third-grade reading. In each unit, we want to teach new skills while simultaneously building up children's repertoire of prior skills. We also want to maintain readers' stamina and volume. So always, in every unit, we're recommending that children read for at least forty minutes in school and at home, in order to read with engagement, fluency, accuracy, and meaning.

Changes from Last Year to This Year

Across all the units this year, you will see increased emphasis on the skill of interpretation. This work is in response to the Common Core State Standards, which raise the expectations for readers across all grade levels, moving them toward more sophisticated reading work. The unit "Following Characters into Meaning" has been split, putting some of the character work into the unit "Series Book Clubs." In "Following Characters into Meaning," children will think deeply about characters and grow theories. In "Series

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Book Clubs," children will grow more complex theories. "Series Book Clubs" provides children with the opportunity to read multiple books on a set of characters, and, in doing so, carry theories they grow across books in that series. Carrying a theory across books makes revising and forming more complex theories easier for kids, so this is a more supportive structure. Also, it provides children with more time to study characters, thinking deeply about them, so they will have greater chances to do the work and move beyond the simplistic ideas such as "characters are nice and kind."

In addition to separating the character work across two units, a new part was added into "Series Book Clubs." During the third part of the unit, children will compare and contrast characters and themes across texts. This work will build upon the theory work that children have done up to this point. Children will create theories in each of the texts that they read and then compare these theories as they move from text to text, ultimately revising their theories and creating new ones as they do this work.

The emphasis on interpretation was also carried into the mystery unit. The mystery genre is typically a moralistic black and white, intended to teach right from wrong. Someone commits a crime and the detective must figure out who did it so that the person can be stopped. The genre naturally supports the work of interpretation. So, in addition to the work on prediction and close reading of the text to find clues, you will find that there are lessons on studying the characters' decisions and learning from them, asking themselves if they would do the same thing in that situation. Readers will think about motivations and strong emotions, carrying forward all their character work through the angle of finding life lessons in texts.

This year, we also made narrative nonfiction its own unit of study, creating Biography Book Clubs. This provides more time to read expository text during the December unit while also providing more space to delve into narrative nonfiction. During this unit, children will bring their fiction reading to nonfiction, using what they know about stories to make meaning. Just as the character work of growing theories was carried into series and mystery book clubs, so too it was brought into this unit. Again, children will use their reading strategies to extract life lessons from the texts they are reading. This carryover from the prior units will strengthen their narrative nonfiction reading skills and set them up for the final part in the unit, during which they will apply all that they know about reading narrative nonfiction to a range of narrative texts.

Then too, you will notice changes in the unit of study "Informational Reading: Reading, Research, and Writing in the Content Areas." This unit has been reworked so that it differs greatly from the content area units in grades 4 and 5. And, the work in this unit pulls from the work that has been outlined in the Content Area Curricular Calendar, a resource we developed this year. Children will use reading and writing as tools to summarize and analyze information. As with the prior units, you will also see a heavy emphasis on growing ideas and interpreting texts.

Finally, "Social Issues Book Clubs" will end the year in reading. This unit has long been a favorite of teachers and children alike. The increased engagement that builds during this unit is the perfect send-off to summer. It will build an excitement for reading that will motivate kids to continue reading throughout the summer months. Then too, during this

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unit children learn how to create text sets, putting books together based on a topic of interest and reading through those books to explore that interest. This is the work that we want them to do over the vacation. Providing them with a chance to do this during this school year will set them up to do this independently during the break.

Assessment

We all know the joy of finding a book that is "just-right" for us. When we are well matched to a book, reading can be one of life's greatest joys. On the other hand, when a book is "all-wrong" instead of "just-right," reading can feel interminable, humiliating, and tedious. There will never be a single litmus test that can accurately match a child to books, but as teachers we can make some progress toward this goal if we provide each child with four things: 1) the opportunity to choose books that he or she wants to read; 2) a community of other readers (including especially the teacher) who promote, summarize, and talk about books with enthusiasm; 3) books that are easy enough for the reader that he or she will be given lots of opportunities for high-success reading; and 4) encouragement to occasionally read a text that is just a little challenging, with the scaffolding to make the experience fruitful.

Assessing reading is enormously complex. Reading is every bit as rich, multilayered, and invisible as thinking itself. Anyone who aspires to separate one strand of reading from all the rest, and then to label and measure that one strand or aspect of reading, must approach this effort with proper humility. No number, no label, no indicator is adequate for the task. Still, as responsible people, teachers need to assess children's reading in ways that give us as full a view as possible. New York City teachers have all been asked to track each child's progress in reading and to send the results of those assessments home at regular intervals throughout the year.

Some NYC schools may opt to use an assessment tool patterned after the state test. This assessment instrument contains passages of widely varying difficulty levels, followed by multiple-choice questions that aim to ascertain whether the child can infer, synthesize, predict, and so on. The TCRWP's position is that this assessment alone is not sufficient unless a teacher knows the text difficulty of the passage in question; a wrong answer in a multiple-choice question may not in fact say anything about a child's ability to infer, for example, or to determine importance. A teacher will not know whether the error reflects a problem with inference or whether it suggests that the child couldn't read the passage in the first place.

Therefore, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, in concert with many NYC schools, developed an alternate way to track readers' progress. This system has been accepted by NYC's Department of Education as an option for all schools. This tool is available on the TCRWP website: readingandwritingproject.com. The tool contains two passages at each text level, A–Z, ranging in length from twenty to four hundred plus words, followed by literal and inferential comprehension questions for each passage. Level A–K readers read books from one or two small sets of leveled texts. The TCRWP uses collections of books that are described on the website. Children read the

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text at one level aloud to teachers, who record reading behaviors and miscues. Teachers record miscues for the first one hundred words; if the child reads with 96–100% accuracy, then the child reads the remainder of the passage silently and then answers questions (hopefully answering at least three of the four questions correctly). Through this assessment, a teacher can ascertain the general level of text difficulty that a child is able to read with ease and comprehension.

The truth is that using a short passage and a handful of questions to ascertain whether a child can read, say, a T- or a V-level text, is not perfect. We've also been using some book-length assessment tools, and these are described in the Assessment Interludes within *Units of Study.* But the system of tracking readers' progress along a gradient of text difficulty does provide an infrastructure to your reading workshop and allows a teacher to have some handle on kids' progress.

Following is a table of benchmark reading levels. These levels are recommended *independent* reading levels. They are derived from a study of data from AssessmentPro, as well as the state and city benchmarks. The chart is updated and available always at www.readingandwritingproject.com.

	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Apr	May	June
3rd	1*K 2 L 3 M 4 N	1 K 2 L 3 M 4 N	1 K 2 L/M 3 N 4 O	1 L 2 M 3 N 4 O	1 L 2 M 3 N 4 O	1 M 2 N 3 O 4 P	1 M 2 N 3 O 4 P	1 N 2 O 3 P 4 Q	1 N 2 O 3 P 4 Q	1 N 2 O 3 P 4 Q
4th	1 M 2 N/O 3 P/Q 4 R	1 N 2 O 3 P/Q 4 R	1 N 2 O/P 3 Q/R 4 S	1 N 2 O/P 3 Q/R 4 S	1 N 2 P 3 R 4 S	1 O 2 P 3 R 4 T	1 O 2 P/Q 3 R/S 4 T	1 O 2 Q 3 S 4 T	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U
5th	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 Q 2 R/S 3 T/U 4 V	1 Q 2 R/S 3 T/U 4 V	1 Q 2 R/S/T 3 U 4 V	1 Q/R 2 S/T 3 U 4 V	1 R 2 S/T 3 U/V 4 W	1 R 2 S/T 3 U/ V 4 W
6th	1 R 2 S/T 3 U/V 4 W	1 R 2 S/T/U 3 V 4 W	1 S 2 T/U 3 V/W 4 X	1 S 2 T/U 3 V/W 4 X	1 S/T 2 U/V 3 W 4 X	1 T 2 U/V 3 W 4 X	1 T 2 U/V 3 W 4 X	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y
7th	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U/V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z
8th	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 W 2 X 3 Y 4 Adult Lit	1 W 2 X 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Z /Ad Lit 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Z /Ad Lit 4 Ad Lit

* The numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 in this table represent the NY ELA test scores that would predictably follow from a student reading at the text level named, at the grade level named. There is no text level that predicts a 4, because a score of 4 generally only allows for one or two errors—and is therefore unpredictable.

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A word of caution. Our data also suggest that running records on a 200-word passage give a teacher only a little window into what a child can do as a reader. We strongly suspect that reading a lower-level passage with great depth and thoughtfulness and attentiveness to details, using high-level comprehension skills, is extremely important. It could be that children should *be able to* read the levels listed above with accuracy and basic level of comprehension, but that in fact they'd be well advised to spend most of their time reading easier texts with deep levels of comprehension—that is a judgment call that schools and teachers need to make.

You'll also want to track each child's reading rate and note the way this changes across time. Here's a table that shows *targeted* oral reading rates (words per minute) by grade level:

General Range of Adequate Reading Rates by Grade Level

Grade	WPM	Grade	WPM
1	60–90	6	195–220
2	85–120	7	215–245
3	115–140	8	235–270
4	140–170	9	250–270
5	170–195	12	250–300

Harris and Sipay (1990)

Reading Level Bands of Difficulty

The TCRWP thought collaborative is convinced that as readers learn how to process a variety of increasingly challenging texts, the texts become more complex and the work that readers need to do changes. We do not think that it is advantageous for you to attempt to keep in mind a score of tiny characteristics for each and every level of book difficulty, nor do we think that it holds true to try to specify the characteristics of any one level of text difficulty beyond a certain point. On the other hand, we have found there are some general characteristics of texts that one will tend to find at different bands of text difficulty and that understanding these complexities will help you to work toward Common Core State Standards. If you grasp the general characteristics of any one band of text levels, this provides you with a sense of how to differentiate your instruction for readers according to the band of text difficulty in which they are reading.

Some of your readers will enter third-grade reading within the K–M text band. In these books, it is sometimes a challenge for readers to carry a storyline through the chapters of the book. The good news is that the chapters and the episodes will tend to be short, and the book's title and the blurb on the back will usually highlight the main plotline. Readers of these books should not have much trouble identifying the main character's traits because the character's feelings may change, but the traits generally stay consistent and are often related to the central problem and/or the solution. These

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readers will need help dealing with tricky words. Many, many children get stalled at level M—so plan on leading guided reading groups and otherwise providing special support to get these children over that hump and into level N books.

Most third graders will read in the N–Q band of text difficulty. The texts are more complex at this level. Before now, the reader needed to follow a single story line of a main character who encounters one main problem, and comes to one main solution, but now there is apt to be more than one cause of a problem, and the problem itself may be multidimensional. If a teacher asked the skilled reader of texts in this band of difficulty, "What's the central problem in this story?" the reader would be wise to stall a bit over the question, and to suggest that there is more than one problem, or that the problem has different parts of different layers. In this band of levels, the plot and the main character will be more complex.

Although characters are more complex, the character will come right out and tell readers how he or she feels, what he or she is like. Then later in the book, the character will act in certain ways, and it will be up to the reader to supply the label for what that action reveals. Usually that label will have been provided earlier by the character or the narrator. So characters will be complex, but readers will be told about this complexity. It will not be subtle. Readers at this level will probably need help dealing with figurative language.

Consider the Results of a Spelling Inventory—Synthesizing Data across Assessment Measures

Another window into students' reading is the spelling inventory designed by Donald Bear et al. This spelling inventory is not about getting the word right. It indicates the *spelling features* that students control, such as beginning and ending consonants, long and short vowels, the variety of suffixes, and so on. The spelling inventory reveals a child's developmental level on graphophonics and also suggests the level of text at which a student will be successful. You can use this as a source of information to draw upon when determining students' reading levels. More importantly, this information will suggest the word study work that will most benefit this reader. It is the act of reading across this information that is most important. You may refer to the assessment section of the TCRWP website (www.readingandwritingproject.com) to access more information about spelling inventories.

Maintaining Reading Logs

We recommend that schools establish and implement policies so that each child in the school (grades 2–8) maintains a daily record of the books he or she reads in school and at home. This log must contain the title, author, the level of difficulty (for example, level P), the numbers of minutes the child spent reading, and the starting and ending page number. Some people question whether it is necessary to include the level of difficulty (when it is available). Our response is that this provides the teacher with

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vitally important information that exponentially increases the usefulness of the tool. For example, if a child devotes a week to reading *The Stolen Pony*, and we know that book is level M (the level of the *Magic Treehouse* books), then we know that the child has done an alarmingly small amount of reading during that week. On the other hand, if the book is level Z, then we would draw a different conclusion.

These logs are not places for responses to reading, nor do children write book summaries in them. They are simply records of time spent reading and volume of reading accomplished. You may ask, "How can a teacher be sure that the log accurately reflects the reading that the child has done?" We've found that if both logs and books are out on the table every day, this transparency brings a huge amount of accountability to logs.

We suggest that every day during reading time, every child should always have his or her log out on the table. The first thing the child does at the start of reading is to enter the starting time and page number; the last thing the child does before moving from reading to talking is to enter the ending time and page number. We also encourage teachers to refer to logs often in reading conferences: "I see you have been reading this book especially slowly. You galloped through that last book—why is this one progressing so differently for you?" "You seem to be skipping between books a lot lately—why do you think it has been hard for you to stay engrossed in one book?" "I notice this book is easier than the ones you have been reading—do you find your reading process is different now, when you are reading a lighter text?"

After a few weeks, we suggest you encourage children to study their own reading logs in order to articulate their reading habits. Children can work analytically with their partners to notice and think about changes in the average number of pages they've read. Children can also notice the genre choices they have made across time and the relationship between genres or levels and volume. They can discuss patterns by studying the time they spend reading at home versus at school. The logs provide an irreplaceable window into students' reading lives. It is helpful to gather logs across one grade after a month, or across several grades, to compare how much students are reading and how they are moving through books.

School leaders, as well as teachers, must collect, save, and study these critical records. For example:

- A general rule of thumb is that a child should read approximately three-quarters of a page a minute. (This rule of thumb works across texts of varying levels because, generally, as the pages become denser, the reader's abilities also become stronger.) A teacher and/or a principal will want to take notice if a child is reading a book at a dramatically slower rate than this. For example, alarms should go off if a child reads eight pages in thirty minutes. Why is the child not reading closer to twenty-four pages in that length of time? There may, of course, be good reasons.
- If a child reads an amount—say, thirty-four pages—during a half-hour in school, then brings that same book home and claims to read a much smaller amount—say, eight pages—within half an hour of reading time at home, alarms should go off. Is the child actually making enough time for reading at home?

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- If you suggest the child reads books that are Level T, and she instead reads many books that are far easier, this discrepancy must be researched and addressed. Perhaps the easier books are nonfiction texts and the child has wisely found that when reading nonfiction, she needs to search for books she can read with meaning. Perhaps the child recently completed a very taxing book and wants some easier reads. Then too, perhaps the child simply can't find other books that are more challenging and needs your help.
- It is crucial to let parents know if the volume of reading their child is doing is high, fairly high, quite low, or very low. The wonderful thing about this information is that parents can do something about it, and progress on this one front will have enormous payoff for every aspect of a child's reading development.

Above all, student logs are a way to be sure that everyone—teachers, principals, and students—keeps their eyes on the volume of reading that children are doing. Dick Allington's research suggests that it takes four hours for a student who reads 200 wpm to complete *Hatchet*. The chart that follows shows how long it should take students to complete different leveled books. Assuming that your students read for thirty minutes in class and thirty minutes at home, at a rate of 200 wpm, then you should expect a student to finish reading *Hatchet* in eight days, which seems reasonable. You may find that a particular child takes twice as long to read *Hatchet*. This should prompt some research. Why is this child reading especially slowly? (If the child is reading below 120 accurate wpm, then alarm bells should go off. This child should be reading easier texts! Or perhaps the child is sitting in front of a text rather than reading it.)

How Long Should It Take a Child to Read a Book According to His or Her Reading Level?

Title	Level	Approx # of words	Reading rate	# of minutes per book
Henry and Mudge (Rylant)	J	800–1000	100 WPM	10 minutes
Horrible Harry (Kline)	L	4500	100 WPM 200 WPM	45 minutes 25 minutes
Magic Tree House Series (Osborne)	M	6000	100 WPM 200 WPM	60 minutes 30 minutes
Henry Series (Cleary)	O	25000	100 WPM 200 WPM	4 hours 2 hours
Howliday Inn (Howe)	P	30000	100 WPM 200 WPM	5 hours 2½ hours
Stone Fox (Gardiner)**	P	12000	100 WPM 200 WPM	2 hours 1 hours
Hatchet (Paulsen)**	R	50000	100 WPM 200 WPM	8 hours 4 hours
Missing May (Rylant)**	W	24500	100 WPM 200 WPM	4 hours 2 hours

***Allington (2000)*

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Getting Time to Assess at the Start of the Year

Years ago, the Project suggested that a teacher start the year by putting crates of mixed-level texts at the center of each table in the classroom, then asking kids to graze through those crates, reading whatever appealed to them while the teacher circled quickly about the room, assessing. Once a child was assessed, the teacher would give that reader a magazine box for his or her books. This child would no longer read from the mixed level bin but would instead choose a few just-right, leveled books, storing the short stack of these books in his or her private bin. Visitors to the room in mid-September could see at a glance the percentage of kids who had been launched into just-right reading because these children had magazine boxes containing their books. The aim was to get everyone to this point within two weeks from the start of school.

By this time, however, the entire school has been working for a year or two to match readers to books. Therefore, it should no longer be necessary for you to begin the year with children in the holding pattern of reading through a random collection of books from a crate at the center of the table. Instead, your class roster will convey the level of just-right books that each child was reading at the end of the previous school year. Ideally, children will also keep logs of the books they read during the summer so you can estimate whether a child's reading progressed or took a dive during those crucial months. If a child did not read during the summer, she will lose several levels. So if you ascertain from the summer log that this child read only a few books, then you will move her back two levels from where she ended the previous school year. If a child did a lot of just-right reading during the summer, that child can resume reading at the level he or she was reading in June. In this way, you can rely on reading records to start the year off with each child reading from a short stack of appropriate books.

Of course, the fact that you start children reading books you've been told will be just right for them does not mean you won't reassess their reading; you will. But you can weave this assessment into your reading workshop once it is going full swing. You could either do running records a week or two after school starts and then again right before your first report card or, if your school agrees, you could rely on informal assessments for now, watching kids with leveled books rather than doing running records, relying on June assessment levels and these informal observations. You may find that after two or three weeks with tons of reading, summer rustiness wears off and kids are already ready for another level of text difficulty. You could, then, wait to do your more formal assessments prior to fall report cards. This, of course, is a decision your school will need to make.

No matter what, it will be a huge priority to assess any reader who seems to not actually be reading. Watch for signs of disengagement: the head that revolves, the child who is always losing his or her place in a book, the youngster who uses reading time as a chance to get a drink of water or go to the bathroom.

When you do begin to do running records, we suggest you call three children over to you at a time, each carrying a book. Get one child started on the TCRWP formative assessment. While you listen to his or her reading, the other two can read independently. The assessed child needn't finish the passage before you ascertain whether it is too hard;

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and if it is, move to another passage right away. Once one child has read aloud one hundred words and you have recorded the child's miscues, he or she can read the rest of the passage silently while you get the second child—who will already be right beside you—started reading aloud to you.

The Components of Balanced Literacy

The term *balanced literacy* comes, in part, from the recognition that readers need a variety of different opportunities to learn. The reading workshop provides children with time to read with a mentor who is a passionately engaged reader and wears his or her love of reading on the sleeve. It gives opportunities to talk and sometimes write about reading, and with explicit instruction in the skills and strategies of proficient reading. All of this is incredibly important, but alone, it is not sufficient. Children also need the opportunities to learn from other components of balanced literacy.

They need, above all, to write. We assume that the reading workshop, as described in these pages, is balanced by a daily writing workshop, and we assume Teachers College Reading and Writing Project teachers will refer to the writing curricular calendar for help with writing. Children also need to study the conventions of written language, including writing with paragraphing, punctuation, and syntactical complexity. Either as part of this or separately, children need time to learn about spelling patterns and to study words—both their meanings and their spellings. Then, too, children also need daily opportunities to hear wonderful literature read aloud and frequent opportunities to participate in book talks around the read-aloud text. We expect teachers to read aloud and to lead interactive read-aloud sessions several times a week. Children need opportunities to read texts within content-area disciplines and to receive instruction in reading those texts well. Finally, children who struggle with fluency (that is, children who read slowly and robotically) need opportunities to participate in shared reading and in repeated oral readings.

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is crucial even in instances where the teacher does nothing more than read spectacular literature aloud in such a way that children listen with rapt attention, clamoring for more. The payoff for reading aloud becomes even greater when teachers read from a wide range of genres, which generally happens when teachers comb reading aloud into all parts of the days, including science, social studies, math, and so on.

The best way to tap into the potential power of reading aloud, however, is to use the read-aloud and book talk time to explicitly teach the skills of higher-level comprehension. To do this, a teacher first reads the upcoming section of the read-aloud book to himself or herself, noticing the mind-work that he or she does while reading. Then the teacher decides whether to use the upcoming read-aloud to help children draw upon their full repertoire of reading strategies or whether to angle the read-aloud in such a

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way as to support the development of a particular comprehension skill. Based on this decision, the teacher decides to demonstrate and then scaffold children in using either one or many skills and strategies.

If you decide, for example, to highlight envisionment, then insert Post-its in a couple of places during the first pages of the read-aloud, as a reminder to pause as you read, to lower the book, and to muse a bit. Perhaps you can say, "I'm just picturing this. I can see Artie in the lead, walking down the path in the woods. It's a narrow path, so Cleo is a few steps behind—there's just room for one of them. The sun is filtering through the canopy of leaves overhead." Of course, the teacher's envisionment could spin on and on and on—it is important to stay brief! After demonstrating in such a manner for thirty seconds, tuck in a comment that names what has been done, like "Readers, I don't really know that the path is narrow—the book hasn't said that. But I draw on all the forest trails I've ever seen, adding details from my own experiences. When I read on, though, sometimes I need to revise my picture. Let's see." Once the teacher has demonstrated the skill (in this case, envisioning) a few times, across perhaps three or four pages of the read-aloud, the teacher is apt to pause in the midst of reading and scaffold the children in envisioning. "I can just see the river, can't you? I'm picturing it—the colors . . . I'm hearing stuff too, aren't you? . . . Use all the rivers you've ever stood beside to help you imagine the river." Sometimes these pauses are followed with, "Tell the person beside you what you are seeing, hearing . . ." and sometimes they lead to the prompt, "Stop and jot what you see, what you hear." Either injunction can, a moment or two later, be followed with specific tips: "Make sure you are talking/writing in details. Are you using specific words to make your mental movie real?"

Of course, you could alter the sequence described above to show children how to develop theories about characters, think across texts, predict, or a host of other reading skills.

If you choose carefully, the read-aloud text can support the independent reading work your students are doing. For example, if the class is engaged in the unit of study on character (and students are thinking about characters as they read independently), you'd be wise to read aloud a chapter book with strong characters who change over the course of the text. If, on the other hand, the class is working on nonfiction, and some of the children's independent reading involves nonfiction texts, you will want to read aloud texts that allow you to show children how nonfiction readers talk and think about texts.

Whatever skill you aim to teach, it's essential that you read in ways that not only demonstrate skills, but that above all bring stories to life. Read with expression, fluency, intonation, and good pacing so that children feel like they are a part of the story and understand that this is what good reading sounds and feels like.

Supporting Children's Vocabulary

Teachers are wise to recognize that we need to model not only a love of books and of writing, but also a fascination with words themselves. If you wear your love of language on your sleeve, exuding interest in words and taking great pleasure in them, you'll help your children be more attentive to vocabulary.

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Research is clear: the single most important thing you can do to enhance your children's knowledge of words is to lure your children into lots and lots and lots of reading. If children read a diverse range of books, they'll encounter a wider range of words. The vocabulary in historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, and nonfiction will often be richer than vocabulary in realistic fiction and mysteries.

Teach children that when they come to unfamiliar words in a text, it really helps to pronounce the word as best as they can, trying it out one way and then another to see if any pronunciation sounds familiar. Then ideally, the reader reads on past that word for just a bit before pausing to reread the section, thinking, "What might this word mean?" The good reader substitutes a reasonable synonym—thus, the "ominous" clouds become the "rainy" clouds—and reads on. Some teachers tape an index card to each child's desk so that children can collect a few such words throughout the day, with page numbers for references. The children and teacher should aim to use these same words in conversations with each other and the class.

There will also be times for a teacher to lead the whole class into word inquiries, and that work will certainly involve the class exploring prefixes and suffixes and using these to alter the meaning of a base word. The key word is *explore.* Word study will be vastly more helpful if it is engaging to youngsters.

Finding Great Literature to Refresh or Fill Up Libraries

One of the key factors in helping to make any reading unit of study exciting, rigorous, and independent is the interface between the unit and books. This year we interviewed wonderful educators across the country to develop book lists of recommended books. We understand the responsibility involved in this work and did not put a single book on the list unless that book was recommended by more than one person, and unless these were people whose judgments we trust. The lists are carefully organized—for historical fiction, for example, there will be a time period (say, colonial America) and leveled books we recommend around that time. Similarly, the social issue list is organized around social issues and leveled books we recommend for each social issue. All the books on the lists are leveled, either with Fountas and Pinnell's levels, if those exist, or with Scholastic Book Wizard levels. If neither source existed we noted the lexile level, which you can use to create levels by converting this lexile level to an approximation of Fountas and Pinnell levels (take those with a special grain of salt). The books are all available through Booksource, and we're assured that their price is the lowest available price for books of comparable production quality.

The following booklists have been created to support the different reading workshop units of study: Anthologies, A Special List of Mentor Texts to Use When Teaching Writers That Also Make for Great Read-Alouds, Books Students Want on the Shelves Now, Biography, Expository Nonfiction, Fantasy, Historical Fantasy, Historical Fiction, Multicultural, Mystery, Narrative Nonfiction, and Social Issues.

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For more information about these lists, along with many others, please visit our website at www.readingandwritingproject.com. To order from the lists referenced above, choose from one of the following options:

1. Call Booksource Publishing at 1-800-444-0435 and reference Lucy Calkins's TCRWP booklists.
2. Visit www.readingandwritingproject.com to download the lists and mail your orders to 1230 Macklind Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63110.
3. Email Booksource Customer Service at service@booksource.com.

The Logistics of the Workshop: Establishing Routines and Expectations

Reading is a skill that requires practice. Just as a student learns to swim by swimming, and to play the piano by playing the piano, students need protected time to read in order to improve as readers. In every classroom, teachers will probably want to spend a bit of time at the start of the year stressing the importance of stamina and encouraging students to read for longer stretches of time, both in school and at home. Just as runners have goals to reach, readers also have goals. Students may learn that when they begin to lose stamina in their books, they can reread or look back over their Post-its for a moment before continuing. Readers can take brief breaks to think, and then continue reading. They can set goals for themselves, as runners do. If students worked last year to develop stamina, you may make student testimonials central to your teaching. You may want to speak about the transformation of a particular reader from the previous year, or invite past students to come in and speak about their growth and attitude shift in reading. Consider the role of your prior students as transformational speakers. You may also emphasize the power of finding stolen moments throughout the day to read by highlighting that the readers carry books with them everywhere they go.

During the first few days of school, you will want to establish clear routines and expectations. You'll want to remind (or teach) students to gather quickly and efficiently for whole-class instruction, teaching this bit of management in a way that upholds the joy of reading. "We won't want to waste one precious moment of reading time, so this year, let's get really good at gathering efficiently for the minilesson." Similarly, if you want to emphasize the importance of students listening (and not constantly interrupting) during the minilesson, you could say, "This year, I want to be sure you have lots and lots of time to read the incredible books we have in this room, so let's try to keep our minilessons efficient. How about saving your questions until the minilesson is over?"

This is a good time, too, for you to consider whether you have planned minilessons that are too long or complicated, that are usurping too much of students' reading time. Most teachers use the strategy of demonstration and, more specifically, of thinking aloud, in reading minilessons. If you do this, try to make the reading and thinking *feel* like *reading*, which usually means holding the book in your lap, reading aloud from the

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book, not from the overhead projector. You will want your thinking-aloud to be very brief—usually no more than three sentences. Avoid rambling; if you see students start to tune out, take this as a cue! After watching you once or twice, students get the idea of what you are trying to show them, and they'll want a chance to try whatever you have demonstrated. You'll see the written story of scores of minilessons in *Building a Reading Life*, as well as a DVD containing four hours of snippets from classroom life, so you may want to lay your teaching up against that resource. Teach students to expect that although the minilesson will be an occasion to learn a new reading skill or strategy during any one day's reading time, they will hopefully draw on *all* the skills and strategies they have been taught up to and including that day.

Of course, at the heart of your teaching will be the work that students do. Your teaching of reading won't amount to much until students are choosing just-right books and reading them with stamina. Unless students are reading books they can read with *at least* 96% accuracy, fluency, and strong comprehension, it is superfluous to worry about minilessons that teach strategies for identifying with characters or developing theories.

As mentioned earlier, if students have not yet been assessed and matched to books, and if you do not have the previous year's records to draw upon, you may need to put a bin of easier, high-interest books at the center of each table and set to work assessing your readers. Increasingly, though, teachers are sending students into classrooms with plastic baggies of books that were selected in June of the previous year. If your students come to you with books they selected, and input from their prior teacher, you may want to bypass the start-of-the-year formal assessments for all but your strugglers. Even if you do assess readers now, they tend to be rusty and can probably progress pretty soon. You may, then, instead devote these first weeks to rigorous teaching and intimate conferences, keeping kids reading books that either were selected with support from their last year's teacher or books that match those, and then conduct in-book running records by the end of September to see if you can perhaps already move kids up a notch. Most of you will conduct formal running records in October, before parent-teacher conferences and before data need to be entered into software that tracks student growth over time.

Either way, once you've determined which books are just right for a particular reader, you'll give that student a personal bin or bag in which he or she can keep a few just-right books. It helps to get the student started enjoying these books if you rave about a few you believe will be perfect for that student.

The books a student keeps in his or her bin will all be equivalent in level, except in two instances. First, an English language learner who is literate in his or her first language will read difficult books in the native language and easier books in English. Second, when a student is transitioning to a new book level, that student's book bin will contain books at both the comfort level and the new instructional level. Ideally, the latter will be books the teacher has introduced to the student; this works especially well if you introduce the first book in a series of two or three books because one book provides an introduction to the next. If a reader is working with a slightly more difficult text

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(96%, not 98% accuracy) this is an important time to be sure that the student's partner is reading the same slightly more challenging book, so the two partners can support each other.

You will also want to teach students procedures for keeping track of their volume of reading. Earlier we described the cumulative reading log, which is absolutely essential for you and for the reader. You will need to make sure these logs become integral to the reading workshop. Every day during reading time, each student needs to get his or her log out along with his or her book. Many September conferences will reference these logs. You might say, "I notice you've been reading faster. Has it been hard to hold on to the story as you read faster?" If a student's pace has slowed, you might ask, "What's slowing you down? I notice you read less today. What got in the way?" The log will also influence your observations. If you see from a glance at a student's log that the student is making slow progress through a book, observe the student as she reads silently, checking for any noticeable reading behaviors that might be slowing the student's pace. Does the student move her lips while reading, move her head from side to side, point at words as she reads, use a bookmark to hold her place as she reads, or read aloud to herself? If the student does any of these things, you will want to intervene. Tell her that she has graduated and no longer needs to engage in those behaviors. You may need to tell students that they should only read aloud when they come to tricky words, or devise other strategies to help them get into the habit of reading silently.

It's helpful to know how many pages a student can actually get through in half an hour of reading time. If we know that a student can read twenty pages of a 120-page *Amber Brown* book in half an hour of reading time, then we'd expect that student to read that much at home each night. At this rate, the student should finish this book after three days and nights of reading.

Usually teachers design systems for take-home reading. If nothing else, each student has a take-home book bag. The important thing is that the student needs to read the *same* book in home and at school, carrying the book between places. Often teachers suggest that in a partnership discussion, students give themselves assignments in school, such as: "Let's read to page 75."

Few things matter more in teaching reading than students progressing through books. To encourage slow readers, you might walk around at the beginning of the reading workshop, marking kids' starting page numbers. Then you survey again during the middle of the workshop to jot down how many pages students have read. Lean in and encourage students to push themselves by saying, "Push your eyes across the page," or "I love it that you've read seven pages. See if you can read eight more." Mostly, make sure they have books they love, that they can understand. Kids who are holding books they adore get a lot of reading done.

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UNIT EIGHT

Informational Reading

Reading, Research, and Writing in the Content Areas

MAY

(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: P)

It's May. You made it. Congratulations! Many of you have the state test behind you, spring is in the air, and there is an entire month in front of you. As we exit a time in the year that is laden with pressure and high-stakes tests, we enter the finale of the year. Chances are that energy and spirits are low for both students and teachers. It would be easy to coast through the next few months into the summer without doing much learning. However, we owe it to ourselves and our students to create a unit that feels fun, not frivolous, and end the year strongly. This unit enables you and your students to embark once again into the rich world of information reading, which, as the Common Core State Standards remind us, is crucial. This means that in this unit, you'll focus not just on conveying the content of study, but teaching the reading skills to learn content successfully. You will invite your third graders to draw on all they know about information reading and note-taking from the nonfiction reading and content area work you did earlier this year.

This unit draws on the year's work in the Content Area Curriculum Calendar. If you taught those units to your third graders, you provided them with a rich background in note-taking and using notes and writing-to-learn strategies as tools to generate their own thinking in a content area study. In this unit, students will have multiple opportunities to grow their thinking while in conversations with others about all they are learning as well as to practice once again key writing-to-learn strategies such as summarizing, comparing and contrasting, and analyzing quotations. To give shape to this unit, we'll look at the New York State suggestion to embark on a country study in third grade, with a specific focus on European countries. Of course, you can substitute content that is relevant to your particular classroom, at this particular time of year.

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Getting Ready: Preparing a Research Library

You'll need to gather as many resources as possible from any sources at hand. As researchers, your third graders will need to read more than one text on a subject—which of course is not only a crucial part of research; reading across texts also supports a critical awareness of perspective and point of view, an invaluable reading skill highlighted by the Common Core State Standards. Scour the school building for books on the study you want to launch. Visit the public library with your children, and have them bring back as many texts as they can find on the topic. Teach them about interlibrary loans and book-request forms! Get online (you and your colleagues, not the kids, yet), and sort through some of the great social studies websites that are available to you and your students. It seems like there will never be enough money for us to buy all the nonfiction books we want—but the kids need us to teach social studies anyway, and they need us all to get involved in seeking texts and building libraries to support the studies that we think are important. Help each other share resources—this may be a time when you want to stagger when teachers in your grade teach social studies, and have a cart of materials, including books, art images, a list of websites and a couple of laptops or DVD players, and your FOSS kits, that are shared across classes. If you have enough resources, you can make some baskets of texts, and sort them, perhaps starting with countries in Europe but then letting your baskets evolve as your students' interests in particular topics are piqued. One could imagine possible labels for baskets being: Sports in Europe, Food and Dining, History, and the like.

If resources are limited, here are a few tips when assembling subtopic bins or text sets. First, create fewer bins with more materials in the bin. This means the groups of students may be larger, but it will be less content to prepare. Second, use all forms of literacy—visual literacy, like photographs; map literacy, like maps of major European cities; media literacy, like video or audio clips. Third, there are some helpful professional resources when compiling text sets, like Stephanie Harvey's *Toolkit Text*, Harvey "Smokey" Daniels's *Texts and Lessons for Content-Area Reading*, or Lucy Calkins and Kathleen Tolan's *Units of Study for Teaching Reading*.

Part One: The Research Cycle: Starting with Collecting, Vocabulary, and Essential Questions

At the start of a research cycle, we generally gather and scan our resources. This means that we look across the available texts and begin to get a sense of what there is to know about this subject. You'll probably want to sort the books you have into some categories—though if your students are experienced social scientists, you could begin with all the texts in one place, and the students will sort them as they browse. For the first day or two, you'll probably want to teach your students that researchers read fairly quickly, trying to get a broad overview of the topic at hand. It's often helpful to start a

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word chart for words related to this study—students can add to these teaching tools as they study, putting up information they feel would help the class, using index cards and markers.

For instance, after a first day of reading across some of the texts on European countries, you could help children to notice how the books they read about countries often have similar subtopics. In addition to giving some facts about the country, such as major cities, population size, and population statistics, they often talk about daily life, food, history, sports, government, and culture. In clubs, children will be reading about these different aspects of countries and can discuss what they learn, bringing forward all they know about powerful nonfiction reading. As they read, coach your readers to draw on strategies that served them well when reading nonfiction in the past, such as noting big ideas and comparing and contrasting. This would certainly be a good time to pull out some of the charts you created earlier in the year to support nonfiction reading work.

In these early, collective inquiry stages, teach your students that vocabulary and concepts that appear in more than one text, or in more than one place in a text, are probably important. Remind them that right now, we want to get a lot of reading done, so we're not stopping to write lots of notes in our notebooks—instead, we're using Post-its to mark information that might be important, going on and reading more, and then sharing our findings at the end of class. You may need to reteach a quick lesson on how to sort texts from easier to harder, which readers should do quickly with a partner before choosing a text to read. By this time of year, though, readers don't necessarily have to begin with the easiest available text—instead, they can look across the texts, figure out where they, as readers, are on that continuum of difficulty, and get started there. Teach your readers to use the strategies they already know—to quickly walk through a book, looking at how it is organized, at how much white space there is, at how dense the text is, at how much the vocabulary is explained, and to start with a book they can read comfortably. Partners may share books, reading silently, pausing briefly to synthesize, scribbling very quick Post-its as they go, saving big conversation until they have read lots of pages. However, stress that this time is about reading the words and synthesizing the information in the words with other text features and pictures on the page, not just for perusing interesting photographs.

If you haven't already taught your children how to make on-the-run teaching tools for a classroom study, take a moment to model how to use an index card or Post-it, and markers or pencils to *swiftly* contribute to the classroom word charts, time lines, and so on. These types of visuals will support the Common Core State Standard of interpreting visual representations of information and realizing how the information contributes to the understanding of a topic. A group that is studying art in Italy might have a card that says: "Uffizi—famous museum in Florence." Another partnership might add on to this card with a Post-it, saying: "Old museum—has Renaissance paintings!" A group that is studying people might dash up and put a Post-it on the map that has the words: "Rome—Vatican—where Pope lives."

Meanwhile, during read-aloud, you might choose both narrative and nonfiction texts, and perhaps some primary documents. This work will assist in the Common Core

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State Standards' supported skill of drawing central ideas and information from primary and secondary sources. After each read-aloud experience, add to your learning tools—kids will stop and jot as you read, and then at the end of the read-aloud they could add names, places, events, and so forth to your charts in the room. As you read aloud, model how you make connections between what you are studying and what you have previously studied as a class. You'll want to emphasize how the new information you are collecting is adding to the knowledge you already had. As the Common Core State Standards remind us, students should be able to summarize new information they are collecting and distinguish new information from prior knowledge or opinions. For example, if you're learning about the cultures of Italy and England, you may want to encourage students to make connections between what they are learning and what they already knew about these places.

By Day 4 or so, you'll guide student groups to pay attention to specific aspects of Italy and England. You will show them how to break apart a topic into smaller, more specialized, and more manageable subtopics. For instance, you'll gather students together and say, "Readers, for the last two days we've taken a survey course on Italy and England. We've been working hard to get a broad overview of these countries. I noticed that a lot of you were reading, talking, and writing about different ideas that you are learning about both countries. It made me realize that this might be a time where we can break down this big topic and begin to research smaller topics to be able to do a better job comparing and contrasting—for example, the culture of Italy and England, the geography, or even study the differences between the urban and rural communities within each country."

Encourage students to keep up their reading strategies, like using Post-its to mark information that might be important or keeping track of names that repeat or specific dates that begin a chapter or paragraph. We know that if students are reading about the music of Italy, they are probably going to hear the names Luciano Pavarotti and Andrea Bocelli again and again. This is something to draw students' attention to as they read, to find important information by looking for names or ideas that repeat.

Part Two: Becoming Specialists and Reading as Researchers—Synthesizing, Analyzing, and Exploring Essential Questions in Subtopics

Once your students have developed a general sense of knowledge by browsing the texts you have available, having lots of partner- and some large-group conversations, and creating classroom learning tools, they're ready to start zooming in on more specialized subjects. If you're aligning this reading unit to your social studies workshop and writing unit, then students can begin collecting information toward their writing projects. Even if you're not doing a writing unit, students will be writing to think and sharing their knowledge with other students. The Common Core State Standards emphasize the importance of short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic. This unit provides the perfect opportunity

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for students to do just that. You'll want to help students to zoom in on an area of interest and to form inquiry groups around these special topics. Two ways to focus our research are through essential questions we have and topics we find fascinating.

One way to help you guide your students' research is generating meaningful, powerful, and possibly essential questions. You can teach your students to look back over their notes, revising their thinking to form questions that become springboards into inquiry. Some of you have been laying the groundwork for questioning and categorizing information in your past units. Informally assess your students—are they familiar with the practice of looking over their notes, seeing what larger categories emerge and questions they could pursue? You might choose to draw on some of the charts the class did earlier in the year to remind students of this work.

Some teachers like to pose essential questions, or guide their students toward the kinds of essential questions that social scientists often ask, such as:

- What information do I know about this topic?
- What am I curious to learn more about? What questions do I have?
- How might I find some of the answers to my questions?
- What are my hypotheses to my questions?

You might also want to steer children toward unit specific questions like:

- What are some characteristics of this country that make it unique?
- What are some similarities and differences between two countries?
- What are some ways to describe some elements of a culture, such as language, religion, customs, artistic expression, and money?
- Describe the stories, folktales, music, and artistic creations that are part of the country's culture. Compare and contrast these with those of another culture.
- Compare elements of the country or culture you're studying with elements of your own culture or country.

Teach your students that researchers search for answers to questions such as these as a way to guide their study. Teach your third graders to return to their texts, reading in order to develop more knowledge about the essential questions the classroom is researching. Of course, as they read, they may decide to add to the essential questions and expand the scope of the classroom inquiry—or they may decide that one question is too broad, and you'll teach them how to create smaller, more focused questions.

You don't have to begin with questions, though—you can also begin with what you find fascinating. You may find that it's easier for your students to come up with categories of information about subtopics they find fascinating. In that case, their inquiry groups may form around topics such as:

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- Music and the Arts
- Languages and Cultures inside a Country
- Government Systems and Money
- Sports and Recreation

Once your students have some areas of focus, help them to organize themselves into research groups around their special topics. As your students embark on their research, you may wish to return to the unit on writing to learn, and to the nonfiction reading unit, to see if there are any particular strategies that you want to reinforce with small groups of readers. Continue giving students time to read, to talk to their partner, and to share some of what they've learned with other students. They'll probably no longer be putting as much up on the walls of the classroom, since they'll be busy filling their notebooks with the Post-its and notes they're jotting as they read. You may find it helpful to teach some quick note-taking strategies, including boxes and bullets, tables and charts, time lines, and labeled drawings. You'll also want to revisit how readers use their strategies for narrative and expository texts, to read across texts that are multi-structured. Show how you look across a page and synthesize the information you gain from the captions, the sidebars, and the main text. Then show how you ponder not just the information but also the feelings that are instilled by the informational images you encounter. Teach your students to begin to read each new text against the ones they have already read. What new information does each text offer? What new perspectives are included?

At this point in the unit, the goal is for kids to not only be reading a lot but also to be reading with purpose. By the nature of reading like a researcher, your students may not be reading each text in their bin from beginning to end. Rather, they are poring over multiple texts, collecting information from a lot of different sources. The Common Core State Standards remind us that students need to learn this process of gathering relevant information through multiple print and digital sources, as well as drawing evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. Some students will soar with this type of reading, while others might get overwhelmed. Teach kids the powerful tool of signal words—*all*, *most*, *few*, *but;* these words almost always indicate important information for readers. This means that as kids are reading potentially at a quicker pace than usual, they can be on the lookout for those words as cues of when to slow down and take note.

Additionally, capitalize on the fact that students are working collaboratively in this unit! Have students stop and share with their research groups often, processing the information they are collecting and learning about the essential question they are pursuing. Teach your students that researchers can work together to identify all of the possible facts that might help address or explore a question, wondering how all of these facts fit together and hypothesizing possible answers. Many teachers find it very helpful to remind or teach partners or groups to make quick lists of information, describe an important scene, explain something using a boxes-and-bullets structure

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to organize the information, discuss a specific cause-and-effect relationship, or explore the dynamics of a topic by comparing and contrasting.

One last note about the questioning process: Teachers have found great success when modeling their own reading and research process, generating their own questions as they read. We put the highest regard on modeling our own reading and writing for our students; Harvey and Daniels remind us of the importance of modeling your own research process, including modeling your own curiosity and pursuing your own questioning. Carry this modeling beyond the content area study—demonstrate this inquiry process in other subject areas or even in everyday occurrences. Begin a connection to a minilesson by saying, "You know, class, I've been wondering what all the orange flags mean that have been recently put in, lining the sidewalk outside my house. I'm especially interested in this because the flags go right past my favorite old tree that my grandfather planted years and years ago. I'm worried about it! Can't you see why? So I did a little research . . ." You might bring out a printout from a recent Google search or perhaps a book that you checked out from the library on urban planning and preservation. Or even an informal transcript of an interview you did with a worker who was putting down flags in other parts of the neighborhood. Examples like these model how natural and curious the research process can be for people. They also model the quick, on-the-run, responsive research the Common Core State Standards highlight.

Part Three: Presenting Knowledge to Others—Teaching Others with New Knowledge Gained

As your researchers become experts, they'll be eager to share what they've learned and the ideas they have about all the new information they know. Students might, then, begin to turn their research into a writing project, or you can imagine small-group or classwide projects.

One possibility for this study is outlined in the corresponding writing curriculum calendar. If you follow that path, students make nonfiction books that you can add to your library on the subjects they find fascinating. They will return to the structure they already know how to write: information books; and they will lean on mentor pieces that will help them to lift the level of what they did earlier in the year.

You can decide the form that your reading and writing celebrations take. Perhaps you'll have some sort of symposium where you invite younger children to learn from the third graders. Children might stand in areas around a room with displays of the books they read, visuals they studied, the "stuff" they observed and pondered over, together with their writing pieces. They might learn some basics of public speaking—like talking from your mind and heart, not from your page or note cards. Visiting learners might ask questions of the presenter, showing children that their own inquiry can spark inquiry in others.

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COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Reading Workshop

GRADE 4

LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM
THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT

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An imprint of Heinemann
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801–3912
www.heinemann.com

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ISBN-13: 0-325-04308-6
ISBN-10: 978-0-325-04308-1

EDITORS:
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PRODUCTION:
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TYPESETTER:
Valerie Levy, Drawing Board Studios

COVER AND INTERIOR DESIGNS:
Jenny Jensen Greenleaf

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Overview of the Year for Fourth-Grade Readers

SEPTEMBER	UNIT ONE: Building a Reading Life
OCTOBER/ EARLY NOVEMBER	UNIT TWO: Following Characters into Meaning: Envision, Predict, Synthesize, Infer, and Interpret
LATE NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER	UNIT THREE: Nonfiction Reading: Using Text Structures to Comprehend Expository, Narrative, and Hybrid Nonfiction
LATE DECEMBER/ JANUARY	UNIT FOUR: Nonfiction Research Projects: Teaching Students to Navigate Complex Nonfiction Text Sets Using Critical Analytical Lenses
JANUARY/FEBRUARY	UNIT FIVE: Historical Fiction: Tackling Complex Texts
FEBRUARY/MARCH	UNIT SIX: Interpretation Text Sets
MARCH/APRIL	UNIT SEVEN: Test Preparation
MAY	UNIT EIGHT: Informational Reading: Reading, Research, and Writing in the Content Areas
JUNE	UNIT NINE: Social Issues Book Clubs

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Each year, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project gathers together the members of our community—the teachers, coaches, schools leaders, and staff developers—to reconceptualize the curricular calendars so that they reflect the latest research and innovations in the teaching of reading. This year, you'll notice most dramatically the effect of the Common Core State Standards in the emphasis, across the year and within each unit, on analytical thinking and reading skills. This community has merged its expertise to create curriculum, and to link that curriculum to tried and true teaching pedagogy so that children may rise to the highest levels demanded by the Common Core State Standards. This is demanding work, and as you study the curriculum, you may find that colleagues will want to form some study groups, to ensure that teacher leaders in your school are developing the expertise needed to truly teach children to be powerful readers of complex texts.

Of course, the suggested order of units and the teaching points offered with each unit are only one way this work could go. You'll want to, and need to, collect and study your data on your readers, and then sit together with colleagues to plan your on-site adaptation of the curriculum. It felt important to offer teaching points for as many units as possible this year, as the level of teaching demanded is so high. In response to teacher requests, we have provided wherever possible a menu of teaching points, so that there is more time to assess children and use this knowledge to differentiate. As always, we encourage you to have these conversations collaboratively—both across grade levels and across the school. To teach in such a way that children become extraordinarily skilled, it's crucial that teachers in a grade level can depend on children moving up from the prior grade with the highest possible level of shared practices. If teachers on a grade do devise a new unit of study that you are willing to share with other teachers, please send it to Lucy Calkins at: rwproject@tc.columbia.edu.

The curricular calendar will be supported by a calendar of full-day conferences available to participating Project schools who sign up in advance. Some of these days will support reading and writing work linked closely to these units, and some days will be on special topics that will help teachers support their students across the year. Still other days will support our new content calendar. The conference days, and the units of study, put a special emphasis this year on assessment-driven instruction and on Common Core State Standards, and the TCRWP will continue to provide the latest research and expertise on these subjects. Another resource for teachers, that these units depend on, is the *Units of Study for Teaching Reading: A Curriculum for the Reading Workshop, Grades 3–5*.

You'll find, below, brief descriptions of the units of study for fourth-grade reading. In each unit, we want to teach new skills while simultaneously building up children's repertoire of prior skills. We also want to maintain readers' stamina and volume. So always, in every unit, we're recommending that children read for at least forty minutes in school and as much time again at home—and to read with engagement, fluency, accuracy, and meaning.

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Changes from Last Year to This Year

Throughout the curricular calendar, across all units of study, you will see increased emphasis on the skills of synthesis, interpretation, and critique. The Common Core State Standards raise the expectations for children across all grade levels, making higher-order thinking skills a priority and an emphasis. The curriculum reflects this call to action, embedding teaching points that will support children in accessing each of these skills and revisiting these skills across genres and units of study so that children have multiple opportunities to practice each one, strengthening their reading muscles.

Then too, the Common Core State Standards research reinforced something that our research at Teachers College was already telling us—that children need more practice with nonfiction reading. They also need more expert, explicit instruction in nonfiction reading skills. Therefore, both November and December are nonfiction units, with November focusing on using text structures to comprehend expository, narrative, and hybrid texts, and December focusing on nonfiction research projects. For both units of study, you'll want to look at your libraries and do what you can to buy, borrow, and share books so that kids have enough to read. They'll keep reading their chapter books during these units as well. Unit Four, on nonfiction research, is closely tied to the concurrent unit in writing, Informational Writing: Building on Expository Structures to Write Lively, Voice-Filled Nonfiction Picture Books.

The May unit, Informational Reading: Reading, Research, and Writing in the Content Areas, builds nicely off this nonfiction work. This unit ratchets up the level of work. Children will spend more time exploring primary and secondary sources, critiquing texts, and being analytical readers and researchers. Then too, there is an increased emphasis on using multiple media to learn and convey learning throughout the unit. This year we have developed a Content Area Curricular Calendar, which outlines a possible curriculum of reading and writing in social studies. The work that is outlined in the Content Area Curricular Calendar is carried into the May unit, pulling on skill sets that children have been building from September.

Finally, Social Issues Book Clubs will end the year in reading. This unit has long been a favorite of teachers and children alike. The increased engagement that builds during this unit is the perfect send-off to summer. It will build an excitement for reading that will motivate kids to continue reading throughout the summer months. Then, too, during this unit children learn how to create text sets, putting books together based on a topic of interest and reading through those books to explore that interest. This is the work that we want them to do over the vacation. Providing them with a chance to do this during this school year will set them up to do this independently during the break.

Assessment

We all know the joy of finding a book that is "just-right" for us. When we are well matched to a book, reading can be one of life's greatest joys. On the other hand, when

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a book is "all-wrong" instead of "just-right," reading can feel interminable, humiliating, and tedious. There will never be a single litmus test that can accurately match a child to books, but as teachers we can make some progress toward this goal if we provide each child with four things: (1) The opportunity to choose books that he or she wants to read, (2) a community of other readers (including especially the teacher) who promote, summarize, and talk about books with enthusiasm, (3) books that are easy enough for the reader that he or she will be given lots of opportunities for high-success reading, and (4) encouragement to occasionally read a text that is just a little challenging with the scaffolding to make the experience fruitful.

Assessing reading is enormously complex. Reading is every bit as rich, multilayered, and invisible as thinking itself. Anyone who aspires to separate one strand of reading from all the rest, and then to label and measure that one strand or aspect of reading, must approach this effort with proper humility. No number, no label, no indicator is adequate for the task. Still, as responsible people, teachers need to assess children's reading in ways that give us as full a view as possible. New York City teachers have all been asked to track each child's progress in reading and to send the results of those assessments home at regular intervals throughout the year.

Some NYC schools may opt to use an assessment tool patterned after the state test. This assessment instrument contains passages of widely varying difficulty levels, followed by multiple-choice questions that aim to ascertain whether the child can infer, synthesize, predict, and so forth. The TCRWP's position is that this assessment alone is not sufficient unless a teacher knows the text difficulty of the passage in question; a wrong answer in a multiple-choice question may not in fact say anything about a child's ability to infer, for example, or to determine importance. A teacher will not know whether the error reflects a problem with inference, or whether it suggests that the child couldn't read the passage in the first place.

Therefore, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, in concert with many NYC schools, developed an alternate way to track readers' progress. This system has been accepted by NYC's Department of Education as an option for all schools. This assessment tool is available on the TCRWP website: www.readingandwritingproject.com. This tool contains two passages at each text level, A–Z, ranging in length from 20 to 400-plus words, followed by literal and inferential comprehension questions for each passage. Level A–K readers read books from one or two small sets of leveled texts. The TCRWP uses collections of books that are described on the website. Children read the text at one level aloud to teachers, who record reading behaviors and miscues. Teachers record miscues for the first 100 words; if the child reads with 96–100% accuracy, then the child reads the remainder of the passage silently and then answers questions (ideally answering at least three of the four questions correctly). Through this assessment, a teacher can ascertain the general level of text difficulty that a child is able to read with ease and comprehension.

The truth is that using a short passage and a handful of questions in order to ascertain whether a child can read, say, a T or a V level text is not perfect. We've also been using some book-length assessment tools, and these are described in the Assessment Interludes within *Units of Study.* But the system of tracking readers' progress along a

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gradient of text difficulty does provide an infrastructure to your reading workshop and allows a teacher to have some handle on kids' progress.

Following is a table of benchmark reading levels. These levels are recommended *independent* reading levels. They are derived from a study of data from AssessmentPro, as well as the state and city benchmarks. The chart is updated and available always at www.readingandwritingproject.com.

	Sept	**Oct**	**Nov**	**Dec**	**Jan**	**Feb**	**March**	**Apr**	**May**	**June**
3rd	1 K 2 L 3 M 4 N	1 K 2 L 3 M 4 N	1 K 2 L/M 3 N 4 O	1 L 2 M 3 N 4 O	1 L 2 M 3 N 4 O	1 M 2 N 3 O 4 P	1 M 2 N 3 O 4 P	1 N 2 O 3 P 4 Q	1 N 2 O 3 P 4 Q	1 N 2 O 3 P 4 Q
4th	1* M 2 N/O 3 P/Q 4 R	1 N 2 O 3 P/Q 4 R	1 N 2 O/P 3 Q/R 4 S	1 N 2 O/P 3 Q/R 4 S	1 N 2 P 3 R 4 S	1 O 2 P 3 R 4 T	1 O 2 P/Q 3 R/S 4 T	1 O 2 Q 3 S 4 T	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U
5th	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 Q 2 R/S 3 T/U 4 V	1 Q 2 R/S 3 T/U 4 V	1 Q 2 R/S/T 3 U 4 V	1 Q/R 2 S/T 3 U 4 V	1 R 2 S/T 3 U/V 4 W	1 R 2 S/T 3 U/ V 4 W
6th	1 R 2 S/T 3 U/V 4 W	1 R 2 S/T/U 3 V 4 W	1 S 2 T/U 3 V/W 4 X	1 S 2 T/U 3 V/W 4 X	1 S/T 2 U/V 3 W 4 X	1 T 2 U/V 3 W 4 X	1 T 2 U/V 3 W 4 X	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y
7th	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U/V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z
8th	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 W 2 X 3 Y 4 Adult Lit	1 W 2 X 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Z / Ad Lit 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Z / Ad Lit 4 Ad Lit

** The numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 in this table represent the NY ELA test scores that would predictably follow from a student reading at the text level named, at the grade level named. There is no text level that predicts a 4, because a score of 4 generally only allows for one or two errors—and is therefore unpredictable.*

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Because a score of 4 generally only allows for one or two errors, it is hard to assure parents or students that a correlation will exist between level of text difficulty and a score of 4.

A word of caution: Our data also suggest that running records on a 200-word passage give a teacher only a little window onto what a child can do as a reader, and we strongly suspect that reading a lower-level passage with great depth and thoughtfulness and attentiveness to details, using high-level comprehension skills, is extremely important. It could be that children should *be able to* read the levels listed above with accuracy and basic level of comprehension, but that in fact they'd be well advised to spend most of their time reading easier texts with deep levels of comprehension—that is a judgment call that schools and teachers need to make.

You'll also want to track each child's reading rate and note the way this changes across time. Here's a table that shows *targeted* oral reading rates (words per minute) by grade level:

General Range of Adequate Reading Rates by Grade Level

Grade	WPM	Grade	WPM
1	60–90	6	195–220
2	85–120	7	215–245
3	115–140	8	235–270
4	140–170	9	250–270
5	170–195	12	250–300

**Harris and Sipay (1990)*

Reading Level Bands of Difficulty

The TCRWP thought collaborative is convinced that as readers learn how to process a variety of increasingly challenging texts, the work that readers need to do changes somewhat. We do not think that it is advantageous for you to attempt to keep in mind a score of tiny characteristics for each and every level of book difficulty, nor do we think that it holds true to try to specify the characteristics of any one level of text difficulty. On the other hand, we have found there are some general characteristics of texts that one will tend to find at different *bands of text difficulty*. If you grasp the general characteristics of any one band of text levels, this provides you with a sense of how to differentiate your instruction for readers according to the band of text difficulty in which they are reading.

Many children may enter your class reading in the N–Q band of text difficulty. These readers will find that the texts they are reading are more multidimensional than they were when they were in the earlier band of text difficulty. The texts will not follow a straight narrative structure, such as the character encountering a problem and coming to a solution. For example, the problem itself may be multidimensional. If a teacher asked the reader of texts in this band of difficulty, "What's the central problem

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in this story?" the reader would be wise to stall a bit over the question, and to suggest that there is more than one problem, or that the problem has different parts of different layers. The character's traits will tend to be ambivalent—Amber Brown wants to be nine and wants to be thirteen. But on the other hand, the character will come right out and tell readers how he or she feels, what he or she is like. So characters will be a bit complex—but this will not be subtle.

Most of your students will move into books in the R-S-T band of text difficulty at some point across the year. They will find that holding onto the central plotline becomes increasingly difficult because seemingly minor characters may end up as important to the plotline. This means that readers need to hold minor characters and subordinate plots in mind. Children's predictions, for example, might include the expectation that a character who made a somewhat fleeting appearance or a plotline that seemed unrelated to the main story line could return, playing a more important role than expected. At this level of text difficulty, readers need to follow not only the evolving plotline, but also the evolving setting. The setting becomes a force in the story, influencing characters and the plot just as, say, an antagonist might. In historical fiction, for example, readers need to construct a time line of historical events as well as a time line of the protagonist's main events, and more than that, to see the two time lines intersect. An event happens in the world, and that event becomes part of the chain of cause and effect that motors the story's plot. In books within this band of difficulty, characters continue to be complex, and now their character traits are often not explicitly stated. Readers need to infer these from their actions. Often in books at this level, readers may realize something about a character that the character does not know about himself or herself. Also at this level, a character's changes are often left for the reader to infer (whereas in the earlier band, the character's inner thinking essentially told the reader those changes).

Consider the Results of a Spelling Inventory–Synthesizing Data across Assessment Measures

Another window into students' reading is the spelling inventory designed by Donald Bear and others. This spelling inventory is not about getting the word right. It indicates the *spelling features* that students control, such as beginning and ending consonants, long and short vowels, the variety of suffixes, and so on. The spelling inventory reveals a child's developmental level on graphophonics and also suggests the level of text at which a student will be successful. You can use this as a source of information to draw upon when determining students' reading levels. More importantly, this information will suggest the word study work that will most benefit this reader. It is the act of reading across this information that is most important. You may refer to the assessment section of the TCRWP website (www.readingandwritingproject.com) to access more information about spelling inventories.

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Maintaining Reading Logs

We recommend that schools establish and implement policies so that each child in the school (grades 2–8) maintains a daily record of the books he or she reads in school and at home. This log must contain the title, author, the level of difficulty (for example, Level P), the number of minutes the child spent reading, and the starting and ending page number. Some people question whether it is necessary to include the level of difficulty. Our response is that this provides the teacher with vitally important information—information that exponentially increases the usefulness of the tool. For example, if a child devotes a week to reading *The Stolen Pony*, and we know that book is Level M (the level of the *Magic Treehouse* books), then we know that the child has done an alarmingly small amount of reading during that week. On the other hand, if the book is Level Z, then we would draw a different conclusion.

These logs are not places for responses to reading, nor do children write book summaries in them. They are simply records of time spent reading and volume of reading accomplished. You may ask, "How can a teacher be sure that the log accurately reflects the reading that the child has done?" We've found that if both logs and books are out on the table every day, this transparency brings a huge amount of accountability to logs.

We suggest that every day during reading time, every child should always have his or her log out on the table. The first thing the child does at the start of reading is to enter the starting time and page number. The last thing the child does before moving from reading to talking is to enter the ending time and page number. We also encourage teachers to refer to logs often in reading conferences: "I see you have been reading this book especially slowly. You galloped through that last book—why is this one progressing so differently for you?" "You seem to be skipping between books a lot lately—why do you think it has been hard for you to stay engrossed in one book?" "I notice this book is easier than the ones you have been reading—do you find your reading process is different now, when you are reading a lighter text?"

After a few weeks, we suggest you encourage children to study their own reading logs in order to articulate their reading habits. Children can work analytically with their partners to notice and think about changes in the average number of pages they've read. Children can also notice the genre choices they have made across time and the relationship between genres or levels and volume. They can discuss patterns by studying the time they spend reading at home versus at school. The logs provide an irreplaceable window into students' reading lives. It is helpful to gather logs across one grade after a month, or across several grades, to compare how much students are reading and how they are moving through books.

- School leaders, as well as teachers, must collect, save, and study these critical records. For example: A general rule of thumb is that a child should read approximately three-quarters of a page a minute. (This rule of thumb works across texts of varying levels because generally, as the pages become denser, the reader's abilities also becoming stronger.) A teacher and/or a principal will want

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How Long Should It Take a Child to Read a Book According to His or Her Reading Level?

Title	Level	approx # of words	Reading rate	# of minutes per book
Henry and Mudge (Rylant)	J	800–1000	100 WPM	10 minutes
Horrible Harry (Kline)	L	4,500	100 WPM	45 minutes
			200 WPM	25 minutes
Magic Tree House Series (Osborne)	M	6,000	100 WPM	60 minutes
			200 WPM	30 minutes
Henry Series (Cleary)	O	25,000	100 WPM	4 hours
			200 WPM	2 hours
Howliday Inn (Howe)	P	30,000	100 WPM	5 hours
			200 WPM	2 ½ hours
Stone Fox (Gardiner)*	P	12,000	100 WPM	2 hours
			200 WPM	1 hours
Hatchet (Paulsen)*	R	50,000	100 WPM	8 hours
			200 WPM	4 hours
Missing May (Rylant)*	W	24,500	100 WPM	4 hours
			200 WPM	2 hours

**Allington (2000)*

to take notice if a child is reading a book at a dramatically slower rate than this. For example, alarms should go off if a child reads eight pages in thirty minutes. Why is the child not reading closer to twenty-four pages in that length of time? There may, of course, be good reasons.

- If a child reads, say, thirty-four pages during a half-hour in school, then brings that same book home and claims to read a much smaller amount—say, eight pages—within half an hour of reading time at home, alarms should go off. Is the child actually making enough time for reading at home?

- If you suggest the child reads books that are Level T, and she instead reads many books that are far easier, this discrepancy must be researched and addressed. Perhaps the easier books are nonfiction texts and the child has wisely found that when reading nonfiction, she needs to search for books she can read with meaning. Perhaps the child recently completed a very taxing book and wants some easier reads. Then, too, perhaps the child simply can't find other books that are more challenging and needs your help.

- It is crucial to let parents know if the volume of reading their child is doing is high, fairly high, quite low, or very low. The wonderful thing about this information is that parents can do something about it. Progress on this one front will have enormous payoff for every aspect of a child's reading development.

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Above all, student logs are a way to be sure that everyone—teachers, principals, and students—keeps their eyes on the volume of reading that children are doing. Dick Allington's research suggests that it takes four hours for a student who reads 200 words per minute to complete *Hatchet*. The chart above shows how long it should take students to complete different-leveled books. Assuming that your students read for thirty minutes in class and thirty minutes at home, at a rate of 200 words per minute, then you should expect a student to finish reading *Hatchet* in eight days, which seems reasonable. You may find that a particular child takes twice as long to read *Hatchet*. This should prompt some research. Why is this child reading especially slowly? (If the child is reading below 120 accurate words per minute, then alarm bells should go off. This child should be reading easier texts! Or perhaps the child is sitting in front of a text, rather than reading it.)

Getting Time to Assess at the Start of the Year

Years ago, the Project suggested that a teacher start the year by putting crates of mixed-level texts at the center of each table in the classroom, then asking kids to graze through those crates, reading whatever appealed to them while the teacher circled quickly about the room, assessing. Once a child was assessed, the teacher would give that reader a magazine box for his or her books. This child would no longer read from the mixed-level bin but would instead choose a few just-right, leveled books, storing the short stack of these books in his or her private bin. Visitors to the room in mid-September could see at a glance the percentage of kids who had been launched into just-right reading because these children had magazine boxes containing their books. The aim was to get everyone to this point within two weeks from the start of school.

By this time, however, the entire school has been working for a year or two to match readers to books. Therefore, it should no longer be necessary for you to begin the year with children in the holding pattern of reading through a random collection of books from a crate at the center of the table. Instead, your class roster will convey the level of just-right book that each child was reading at the end of the previous school year. Ideally, children will also keep logs of the books they read during the summer so you can estimate whether a child's reading progressed or took a dive during those crucial months. If a child did not read over the summer, she will lose several levels during the summer, and so if you ascertain from the summer log that this child read only a few books, then you will move her back two levels from where she ended the previous school year. If a child did a lot of just-right reading during the summer, that child can resume reading at the level he or she was reading in June. In this way, you can rely on reading records to start the year off with each child reading from a short stack of appropriate books.

Of course, the fact that you start children reading books you've been told will be just-right for them does not mean you won't reassess their reading; you will. But you can weave this assessment into your reading workshop once it is going full-swing. You could either do running records a week or two after school starts and then again

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right before your first report card or, if your school agrees, you could rely on informal assessments for now, watching kids with leveled books rather than doing running records, relying on June assessment levels and these informal observations. You may find that after two or three weeks with tons of reading, summer rustiness wears off and kids are already ready for another level of text difficulty. You could, then, wait to do your more formal assessments prior to fall report cards. This, of course, is a decision your school will need to make.

No matter what, it will be a huge priority to assess any reader who seems to not actually be reading. Watch for signs of disengagement: the head that revolves, the child who is always losing his or her place in a book, the youngster who uses reading time as a chance to get a drink of water or go to the bathroom.

When you do begin to do running records, we suggest you call three children over to you at a time, each carrying a book. Get one child started on the TCRWP formative assessment. While you listen to his or her reading, the other two can read independently. The assessed child needn't finish the passage before you ascertain whether it is too hard; and if it is, move to another passage right away. Once one child has read aloud 100 words and you have recorded the child's miscues, he or she can read the rest of the passage silently while you get the second child—who will already be right beside you—reading aloud to you.

The Components of Balanced Literacy

The term "balanced" literacy comes, in part, from the recognition that readers need a variety of different opportunities to learn. The reading workshop provides children with time to read, with a mentor who is a passionately engaged reader and wears his or her love of reading on the sleeve, with opportunities to talk and sometimes write about reading, and with explicit instruction in the skills and strategies of proficient reading. All of this is incredibly important, but alone, it is not sufficient. Children also need the opportunities to learn from other components of balanced literacy.

They need, above all, to write. We assume that the reading workshop, as described in these pages, is balanced by a daily writing workshop, and we assume Teachers College Reading and Writing Project teachers will refer to the writing curricular calendar for help with writing. Children also need to study the conventions of written language, including writing with paragraphing, punctuation, and syntactical complexity. Either as part of this or separately, children need time to learn about spelling patterns and to study words—both their meanings and their spellings. Then, too, children need daily opportunities to hear wonderful literature read aloud and frequent opportunities to participate in book talks around the read-aloud text. We expect teachers to read aloud and to lead interactive read-aloud sessions several times a week. Children need opportunities to read texts within content area disciplines and to receive instruction in reading those texts well. Finally, children who struggle with fluency (that is, children who read slowly and robotically), need opportunities to participate in shared reading and in repeated oral readings.

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Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is crucial even in instances where the teacher does nothing more than read spectacular literature aloud in such a way that children listen with rapt attention, clamoring for more. The payoff for reading aloud becomes even greater when teachers read from a wide range of genres, which generally happens when teachers comb reading aloud into all parts of the days, including science, social studies, math, and so on.

The best way to tap into the potential power of reading aloud, however, is to use the read-aloud and book talk time to explicitly teach the skills of higher-level comprehension. To do this, a teacher first reads the upcoming section of the read-aloud book to himself or herself, noticing the mind-work that he or she does while reading. Then the teacher decides whether to use the upcoming read-aloud to help children draw upon their full repertoire of reading strategies, or whether to angle the read-aloud in such a way as to support the development of a particular comprehension skill. Based on this decision, the teacher decides to demonstrate and then scaffold children in using either one or many skills and strategies.

For example, if you decide to highlight envisioning, then insert Post-its in a couple of places during the first pages of the read-aloud as a reminder to pause as you read, to lower the book, and to muse a bit. Perhaps you can say, "I'm just picturing this. I can see Artie in the lead, walking down the path in the woods. It's a narrow path, so Cleo is a few steps behind—there's just room for one of them. The sun is filtering through the canopy of leaves overhead." Of course, the teacher's envisioning could spin on and on and on—it is important to stay brief! After demonstrating in such a manner for thirty seconds, tuck in a comment that names what has been done, like "Readers, I don't really know that the path is narrow—the book hasn't said that. But I draw on all the forest trails I've ever seen, adding details from my own experiences. When I read on, though, sometimes I need to revise my picture. Let's see." Once the teacher has demonstrated the skill (in this case, envisioning) a few times, across perhaps three or four pages of the read-aloud, the teacher is apt to pause in the midst of reading and scaffold the children in envisioning. "I can just see the river, can't you? I'm picturing it—the colors . . . I'm hearing stuff too, aren't you? Use all the rivers you've ever stood beside to help you imagine the river." Sometimes these pauses are followed with, "Tell the person beside you what you are seeing, hearing . . ." and sometimes they lead to the prompt, "Stop and jot what you see, what you hear." Either injunction can, a moment or two later, be followed with specific tips: "Make sure you are talking/writing in details. Are you using specific words to make your mental movie real?"

Of course, you could alter the sequence just described to show children how to develop theories about characters, think across texts, predict, or a host of other reading skills.

If you choose carefully, the read-aloud text can support the independent reading work your students are doing. For example, if the class is engaged in the unit of study on character (and students are thinking about characters as they read independently), you'd be wise to read aloud a chapter book with strong characters who change over the course of the text. If, on the other hand, the class is working on nonfiction, and

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some of the children's independent reading involves nonfiction texts, you will want to read aloud nonfiction texts that allow you to show children how nonfiction readers talk and think about (and between) texts.

Whatever skill you aim to teach, it's essential that you read in ways that not only demonstrate skills, but that above all bring stories to life. Read with expression, fluency, intonation, and good pacing so that children feel like they are a part of the story and understand that this is what good reading sounds and feels like.

Supporting Children's Vocabulary

Teachers are wise to recognize that we need to model not only a love of books and of writing, but also a fascination with words themselves. If you wear your love of language on your sleeve, exuding interest in words and taking great pleasure in them, you'll help your children be more attentive to vocabulary.

Research is clear: the single most important thing you can do to enhance your children's knowledge of words is to lure your children into lots and lots and lots of reading. If children read a diverse range of books, they'll encounter a wider range of words. The vocabulary in historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, and nonfiction will often be richer than vocabulary in realistic fiction and mysteries.

Teach children that when they come to unfamiliar words in a text, it really helps to pronounce the word as best the reader can, trying it out one way and then another to see if any pronunciation sounds familiar. Then ideally, the reader reads on past that word for just a bit before pausing to reread the section, thinking, "What might this word mean?" The good reader substitutes a reasonable synonym—thus, the "ominous" clouds become the "rainy" clouds—and reads on. Some teachers tape an index card to each child's desk so that children can collect a few such words throughout the day, with page numbers for references. The children and teacher should aim to use these same words in conversations with each other and the class.

There will also be times for a teacher to lead the whole class into word inquiries, and that work will certainly involve the class exploring prefixes and suffixes and using these to alter the meaning of a base word. The key word is *explore.* Word study will be vastly more helpful if it is engaging to youngsters.

Finding Great Literature to Refresh or Fill Up Libraries

One of the key factors in helping to make any reading unit of study exciting, rigorous, and independent is the interface between the unit and books. This year we interviewed wonderful educators across the country in order to develop booklists of recommended books. We understand the responsibility involved in this work, and did not put a single book on the list unless that book was recommended by more than one person, and unless these were people's judgments we trusted. The lists are carefully organized—for historical fiction, for example, there will be a time (say, Colonial America) and leveled

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books we recommend around that time. Similarly, the social issue list is organized around social issues and leveled books we recommend for each social issue. All the books on the lists are leveled, either with Fountas and Pinnell's levels, if those exist, or with Scholastic Book Wizard levels. If neither source existed, we noted the Lexile level, which you can use to create levels by converting this Lexile level to an approximation of Fountas and Pinnell levels (take those with a special grain of salt). The books are all available through Booksource, and we're assured that their price is the lowest available price for books of comparable production quality.

The following booklists have been created to support the different reading workshop units of study: Anthologies, A Special List of Mentor Texts to Use when Teaching Writers which Also Make for Great Read-Alouds, Books Students Want on the Shelves Now, Biography, Expository Nonfiction, Fantasy, Historical Fantasy, Historical Fiction, Multicultural, Mystery, Narrative Nonfiction, and Social Issues.

For more information about these lists, along with many others, please visit our website at www.readingandwritingproject.com. To order from the lists referenced above, choose from one of the following options:

1. Call Booksource Publishing at 1-800-444-0435 and reference Lucy Calkins' TCRWP booklists.
2. Visit www.readingandwritingproject.com to download the lists and mail your orders to 1230 Macklind Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63110.
3. Email Booksource Customer Service at service@booksource.com

The Logistics of the Workshop: Establishing Routines and Expectations

Reading is a skill that requires practice. Just as a student learns to swim by swimming, and to play the piano by playing the piano, students need protected time to read in order to get better as readers. In every classroom, teachers will probably want to spend a bit of time at the start of the year stressing the importance of stamina and encouraging students to read for longer stretches of time, both in school and at home. Just as runners have goals to reach, readers also have goals. Students may learn that when they begin to lose stamina in their books, they can reread or look back over their Post-its for a moment before continuing. Readers can take brief breaks to think, and then continue reading. They can set goals for themselves, as runners do. If students worked last year to develop stamina, you may make student testimonials central to your teaching. You may want to speak about the transformation of a particular reader from the previous year or invite past students to come in and speak about their growth and attitude shift in reading. Consider the role of your past students as transformational speakers. You may also emphasize the power of finding stolen moments throughout the day to read by highlighting that the readers carry books with them everywhere they go.

During the first few days of school, you will want to establish clear routines and expectations. You'll want to remind (or teach) students to gather quickly and efficiently

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for whole-class instruction, teaching this bit of management in a way that upholds the joy of reading. "We won't want to waste one precious moment of reading time, so this year, let's get really good at gathering efficiently for the minilesson." Similarly, if you want to emphasize the importance of students listening (and not constantly interrupting) during the minilesson, you could say, "This year, I want to be sure you have lots and lots of time to read the incredible books we have in this room, so let's try to keep our minilessons efficient. How about if you save your questions until the minilesson is over?"

This is a good time, too, for you to consider whether you have planned minilessons that are too long or complicated, usurping too much of students' reading time. Most teachers use the strategy of demonstration and, more specifically, of thinking aloud, in reading minilessons. If you do this, try to make the reading and thinking *feel* like *reading*, which usually means holding the book in your lap, reading aloud from the book, not from the overhead projector. You will want your thinking-aloud to be very brief—usually no more than three sentences. Avoid rambling; if you see students start to tune out, take this as a cue! After watching you once or twice, students get the idea of what you are trying to show them, and they'll want a chance to try whatever you have demonstrated. You'll see the written story of scores of minilessons in *Building a Reading Life*, as well as a DVD containing four hours of snippets from classroom life, so you may want to lay your teaching up against that resource. Teach students to expect that although the minilesson will be an occasion to learn a new reading skill or strategy during any one day's reading time, they will draw on *all* the skills and strategies they have been taught up to and including that day.

Of course, at the heart of your teaching will be the work that students do. Your teaching of reading won't amount to much until students are choosing just-right books and reading them with stamina. Unless students are reading books they can read with *at least* 96% accuracy, fluency, and strong comprehension, it is superfluous to worry about minilessons that teach strategies for identifying with characters or developing theories!

As mentioned earlier, if students have not yet been assessed and matched to books, and if you do not have the previous year's records to draw upon, you may need to put a bin of easier, high-interest books at the center of each table and set to work assessing your readers. Increasingly, though, teachers are sending students into classrooms with zip-lock bags of books in hand, selected in June of the previous year. If your students come to you with books they selected, with input from their last teacher, you may want to bypass the start-of-the-year formal assessments for all but your strugglers. Even if you do assess readers now, they tend to be rusty and they can probably progress pretty soon. You may, then, instead devote these first weeks to rigorous teaching and intimate conferences, keeping kids reading books that either were selected with support from their last year's teacher or books that match those, and then conduct in-book running records by the end of September to see if you can perhaps already move kids up a notch.

Most of you will conduct formal running records in October, before parent-teacher conferences and before data need to be entered into software that tracks student growth over time.

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Either way, once you've determined books that are just-right for a particular reader, you'll give that student a personal bin or bag in which he or she can keep a few just-right books. It helps to get the student started enjoying these books if you rave about a few you believe will be perfect for that student.

The books a student keeps in his or her bin will all be equivalent in level, except in two instances. First, an English language learner who is literate in his or her first language will read difficult books in the native language and easier books in English. Second, when a student is transitioning to a new book level, that student's book bin will contain books at both the comfort level and the new instructional level. Ideally, the latter will be books the teacher has introduced to the student; this works especially well if you introduce the first book in a series of two or three books because one book provides an introduction to the next. If a reader is working with a slightly more difficult text (96%, not 98% accuracy) this is an important time to be sure that the student's partner is reading the same slightly more challenging book, so the two partners can support each other.

You will also want to teach students procedures for keeping track of their volume of reading. Earlier we described the cumulative reading log, which is absolutely essential for you and for the reader. You will need to make sure these logs become integral to the reading workshop. Every day during reading time, each student needs to get his or her log out along with his or her book. Many September conferences will reference these logs. You might say, "I notice you've been reading faster. Has it been hard to hold onto the story as you read faster?" If a student's pace has slowed, you might ask, "What's slowing you down? I notice you read less today. What got in the way?" The log will also influence your observations. If you see from a glance at a student's log that the student is making slow progress through a book, observe the student as she reads silently, checking for any noticeable reading behaviors that might be slowing the student's pace. Does the student move her lips while reading, move her head from side to side, point at words as she reads, use a bookmark to hold her place as she reads, or read aloud to herself? If the student does any of these things, you will want to intervene. Tell her that she has graduated and no longer needs to engage in those behaviors. You may need to tell students that they should only read aloud when they come to tricky words. Or devise other strategies to help them get into the habit of reading silently.

It's helpful to know how many pages a student can actually get through in half an hour of reading time. If we know that a student can read twenty pages of a 120-page *Amber Brown* book in half an hour of reading time, then we'd expect that student to read that much at home each night. At this rate, the student should finish this book after three days and nights of reading.

Usually teachers design systems for take-home reading. If nothing else, each student has a take-home book bag. The important thing is that the student needs to read the *same* book in home and at school, carrying the book between places. Often teachers suggest that in a partnership discussion, students give themselves assignments in school, such as: "Let's read to page seventy-five."

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Few things matter more in teaching reading than students progressing through books. To encourage slow readers, you might walk around at the beginning of the reading workshop, marking kids' starting page numbers. Then you survey again during the middle of the workshop to jot down how many pages students have read. Lean in and encourage students to push themselves by saying, "Push your eyes across the page," or "I love the way you read seven pages. See if you can read eight more." Mostly, make sure they have books they love, that they can understand. Kids who are holding books they adore get a lot of reading done.

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UNIT THREE

Nonfiction Reading

Using Text Structures to Comprehend Expository, Narrative, and Hybrid Nonfiction

LATE NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: Q/R)

Before you launch into this unit, you'll want to make some decisions, and to do this, you need to think about the nonfiction texts you have available and your plan for supporting nonfiction reading across the year. Presumably, you'll be teaching nonfiction reading as part of your content area instruction in social studies and science, and if you follow this calendar, then you'll also devote almost half a month of your reading workshop to nonfiction reading. This is one of the demands of the Common Core State Standards. That's a lot of nonfiction reading!

In this curricular calendar write-up, we outline a unit of study in which you give your students stretches of time to read whole texts, reading not to answer a specific question or to mine for an interesting fact, or to follow just the features of the text, but rather, to learn all that the author wants to teach. This write-up is aligned with *Navigating Nonfiction*, a recently published two-volume unit of study within *Units of Study for Teaching Reading: A Curriculum for the Reading Workshop, Grades 3–5* (Tolan and Calkins) and the Common Core State Standards. The unit spotlights the skills of determining importance, finding the main ideas and supporting details, summary, and reading to learn. Students will learn to increase their expertise with interpretation, cross-text comparisons, synthesis, research, and nonfiction projects, as asked for in the Common Core State Standards.

In order for students to be able to ascertain the big ideas in a nonfiction text in such a way that they can summarize as well as think critically, they need to grasp the text's infrastructure of ideas and supporting details. We envision that your students will be writing essays during writing workshop on topics of their own choice while they engage in this nonfiction reading work. They will, therefore, be able to recognize, in the expository texts they read, a template that they'll know as "boxes and bullets." If

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readers expect an infrastructure of big ideas and supportive information within expository texts and if they learn to use text features, white space, and cuing systems such as transitional phrases to help them discern that infrastructure, they will be able to glean what matters most even from texts that contain an overwhelming amount of raw information. Of course, the infrastructure will be different when students read narrative nonfiction—and it is important students know this and use that knowledge to help them approach texts differently after ascertaining their structure. In this unit, you'll teach students to become expert at explicit and implicit structures of texts.

The unit highlights the importance of structures and channels students to read texts of a particular structure for a bit, noting that structure. You'll need to decide whether to start by channeling students toward expository or toward narrative nonfiction. For a number of reasons, we encourage you to start by spotlighting expository nonfiction. Not only will this feel fresher to your students, but there also tend to be more accessible texts available in this structure. Then, too, beginning with expository nonfiction will put you in a position to recruit involvement from readers who have decided that fiction reading isn't their cup of tea. Finally, beginning in this way allows you to hug the shores of *Navigating Nonfiction*, leaning on that book for minilessons and small-group ideas. If you decide to start with an emphasis on expository texts, you can convey to your class that this unit will invite readers into a whole new kind of reading—and that some readers will like it even better than they liked fiction. Once you have provided almost two weeks of instruction in expository text structures, you'll introduce narrative nonfiction, again alerting students to the ways in which expository and narrative texts differ in structure and to the fact that they require a different alertness from the reader. Though the narrative structure of most biographies and true adventures will feel familiar to young readers who have a strong grasp of story grammar, other narrative nonfiction texts might provide a challenge, especially if the main "character" is a plant or an animal and if technical, content-specific vocabulary blurs comprehension. You'll want to alert readers to decoding strategies as well as teach them to recognize unlikely, inanimate protagonists within their narratives so that they counter these comprehension hurdles.

To support the work of this unit, you'll want to evaluate your classroom library and consider how to expand it. If you bring forward just your expository nonfiction texts, do you have enough texts to keep your students "in books" for the period of time in which you'll highlight expository nonfiction? As you mull over this question, keep in mind that many nonfiction books are deceptive. Their lush photographs can mask the difficulty level of a book. Also keep in mind that a fair percentage of your readers may need to read expository texts that are a notch easier than the fiction books they generally read. If this is a new genre to them, they may need a bit of warm-up time before they can read expository books that are as hard as the fiction they read. If possible, you will want to gather multiple texts on a few subjects, so that students have access to more than one book about a topic. On the TCRWP website, we've included a leveled bibliography of nonfiction texts, which includes a large section for texts that are expository. This collection is angled to include books designed to support kids' volume of reading, with lots

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of text, as well as books with a clear exoskeleton, often structured with headings and subheadings. The books on that list are all available from Booksource. Please contact us with more book suggestions that you have found keep up student stamina at different skill levels. Our booklists are constantly evolving, and we always appreciate input.

You'll also want to decide on which text or texts you'll highlight in your read-alouds and minilessons. In Volume I of *Navigating Nonfiction*, Kathleen Tolan and Lucy Calkins model on a collection of texts, including *Bugwise* and *Frogs and Toads*. You can find a list of recommended texts for read-aloud for this unit, on our website, and on the DVD that accompanies the *Units of Study*. In general, we recommend choosing texts that are lively, accessible, and include many of the text features and reading challenges that your students will face in the expository and narrative texts they'll be reading in the unit. That is, choose a few texts where the ideas and categories of information are explicit, and others where the reader needs to read between the lines to infer the message of the author. The first part of this unit focuses on expository texts, and the second on narrative and hybrid, so you'll want to choose one or two short texts for each of these structures.

A word of advice: especially if you do not have enough just-right texts for students to maintain their volume of reading during this unit, we strongly suggest that you reserve time every day (at least fifteen to twenty minutes in school and more time at home) for students to continue reading just-right chapter books and novels in fiction, using and practicing all the skills you've already taught. Be sure readers continue to maintain their outside-school reading and their reading logs. Monitor that they're reading the proper number of chapter books each week—probably anywhere from one to four, *in addition to* the informational nonfiction texts they read. The Common Core State Standards emphasize the significance of students reading informational texts and literature—and usually, students can keep going with both across these two months to keep up their stamina and skill level. Of course, if your students are doing a lot of informational reading in science and social studies, that helps as well—or if they have related novel book clubs in those classes, that can also help. Students become powerful readers when teachers plan across the curriculum—which is a necessity if we want our students to achieve at the high levels demanded by the Common Core State Standards and to reach our own dreams and aspirations for them.

For the very start of your unit, you may want to locate the expository texts that have a fairly clear infrastructure of headings and subheadings. You may even get two copies of some of these texts so that readers can start by reading at least one book in same-text partnerships. Creating same-text partnerships early on in the unit can provide effective scaffolds for readers. Soon students will be able to read these texts independently and they will be able to work with texts that expect that it will be the reader who almost "writes" the subheading, chunking the text by topic as he or she reads it. As you examine books, determining which are worth having multiple copies of in your library, look for ones that:

- have a clear organizational infrastructure
- are at difficulty levels where students can read with fluency, comprehension, and accuracy

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- are highly engaging texts
- span a variety of topics, including history, social studies, and science

Part One: Determining Importance and Synthesizing in Expository Nonfiction

To start this work, you will teach text-previewing strategies, what Norman Webb's *Depths of Knowledge* levels describe as a Level 3 skill. Your teaching might model that paying attention to expository text features such as the table of contents, diagrams, charts, graphic organizers, photos, and captions helps develop a sense for text content. These features help you get ready to take in the new information on the page, thinking, "What's this page (or two-page spread, or chapter) likely to be about?" Then too, you might encourage students to also activate their prior knowledge of the topic, orienting themselves to predict the likely subheadings and content-specific vocabulary they'll encounter reading forward. If the text is about a wild animal you're discussing, you'd teach students to approach it asking, "I wonder if this text will have the usual categories of information: ecosystem, body, eating habits, predators, and so forth." If the text is about a war, you'd teach students to bring their expectation that they will learn about the two warring sides, the reasons for the war, the series of major battles, the turning points, and so on. Even before they begin to read, you want readers to be alert to the visual features of expository texts as well as to anticipate particular content. This work of previewing a text so we can read with power is described in Session I, Volume 1 of *Navigating Nonfiction*. The session lays out the important work readers can do to "rev up" their minds for reading. You may give your children actual phrases to use as they talk with partners about their predictions, such as, "This heading says . . . so I think this page is mostly about . . ." or, "I looked at this (picture/caption/graph) and saw . . . and this (picture/caption/graph) and saw . . . If I put them together, I think these pages will be about . . ." You might also teach them to go across the page, part by part, and use their finger to point to or circle the aspects they are paying particular attention to. Too often, you'll see students pick up nonfiction books and just flip through them with little apparent focus or even only read the backs of books! That's browsing, not readying to read. It's what we do in magazines in a supermarket line—it's not what we do when we study a subject seriously. Malcolm Gladwell, in *Outliers*, reminds us that one of our jobs is to teach students to work hard—that is the key to extraordinary success. So here, you'll begin by showing students how to approach a text in a serious, intellectual manner.

You will follow this initial instruction on previewing texts by telling children that actual reading of a text means constantly confirming, revising, or adding to one's initial expectations about the text. Rather than letting children dive into texts uninitiated, you'll be teaching engagement from the outset where children read with a curious stance, checking what they read against what they had *expected* to read. In the shift from previewing to reading, your goal is that readers find their expectations become more focused and specific: "Oh, this is not just about moose in general. It's about the

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new dangers to their habitat," or "This looked like an all-about-whales text but it actually *compares* whales and dolphins."

In the next lesson, you might teach students how to look for structure within a nonfiction text, particularly teaching them how to "chunk" a text and say back the important information as a summary. Right away, you will want to alert students to the boxes-and-bullets infrastructure of expository texts, which is what enables readers to ascertain the main idea (box) and the supporting details (bullets) of their texts. This awareness is crucial to understanding the interconnectedness of ideas within the text; you want to guard against children picking up a random fact (smaller bullet) from the text without connecting it to the bigger idea (box) that validates it. It is no easy task for readers to determine the main idea of a paragraph or a passage, especially when these are mired in intriguing or overwhelming new facts and details. You will need to constantly remind readers to ask themselves, "What is the one big thing that this text is teaching and how do all the other details connect with this?"

Once students develop an eye for the architecture and layout of expository texts, it becomes possible to take in, synthesize, learn from, and respond to large swaths of nonfiction texts. That is, once readers recognize a text structure, they can use that information to structure their own reading, allowing parts of the text to take on greater significance while letting other parts of the text fall away. You'll want to teach students that most expository nonfiction has a central idea followed—or surrounded—by supporting evidence. In your teaching, you will probably model reading a mentor text with an eye for that central idea as well as for supportive specifics, demonstrating that expository reading involves gleaning outlines and summaries of the text. The goal is that this awareness becomes foundational to the way your children approach expository texts. In this way, you'd support reading expository texts in their entirety, enabling children to understand the main *concepts* that the text teaches as opposed to an "extractive" way of reading expository in which readers mine texts for isolated nuggets of trivia or "cool facts" that, to their eye, might bear no connection at all to the larger scheme of a topic.

As students move up levels, the sections of the texts they are reading will often contain more than one idea—a fact that is emphasized in the Common Core State Standards. So in your next lesson, you'll probably want to teach students to notice, as they read on, whether the next part of the text holds a new idea with supporting information, or whether it adds more information about an idea that was already introduced. It's important to emphasize that nonfiction readers read with the same kind of stamina and pace that fiction readers do—they don't linger over one picture for an hour; rather, they move on to gather as much information as possible, while constantly asking themselves, "How does all of this fit together?" Sometimes it is helpful for children to simply look for the "pop-out sentence" as they read, knowing that often one sentence summarizes the content of a paragraph or a passage. Teach students that this topic sentence is often the first or last sentence—but not always! Students could read the first sentence of a paragraph and ask, "What is this saying?" and then read on, sentence by sentence, asking, "How does this fit with what's been said so

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far? And this?" To find the main idea, readers need to take the sentences they've read and say what they learned in one short statement, not a question. It may help readers initially to make this underlying boxes-and-bullets infrastructure visible by using a pencil to underline or "box" the main ideas and "bullet" the supporting details. You'll want to teach readers to break dense swaths of expository text into chunks—either with a pencil or with their mental eye—and to tackle these chunks by fishing out and holding onto the main ideas within, rather than being sidetracked by supporting facts and details. At the end of each chunk, readers may profit from saying (or writing on a Post-it), "This part teaches me. . . ."

Readers can move from finding the main idea of a paragraph to figuring out the overarching idea of a multiparagraph text by noticing, as they read from one paragraph to another, whether the two paragraphs continue to build on one main idea or whether the second paragraph turns a bend, laying out yet another idea. Nonfiction texts can be tricky because section dividers are often invisible; readers need to be vigilant, reading in such a way that they notice when the text has gone through a transition and saying, "Oh, this is about a new subtopic." You'll also want to teach young readers to be flexible, poised to revise their thinking as they read on: "I was right about the *topic* of these two pages, it is about whales," you might model thinking, "but I was wrong about the main *idea*. This part is actually mostly about how fishermen are a danger to whales in the Arctic, not just where whales live." This flexibility of thinking, though challenging, is an important goal to take on!

You will want to teach readers to reproduce the same boxes-and-bullets work in reading that they've used to structure their essays in the writing workshop (see *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*). That is, you will ask students to read in such a way that they can take the sort of notes you might take at a well-organized lecture—notes that look like very rough outlines. For a while, they will paraphrase at the end of a chunk of text, pausing to name the gist of what they just read, and to do so in ways that build on what they learned from previous sections. This "reading for gist" builds the muscles foundational to summarizing—a skill that Dick Allington reminds us about in *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers* by saying, "This is, perhaps, the most common and most necessary strategy. It requires that students provide a general recitation of the key content. Literate people summarize texts routinely in their conversations. They summarize weather reports, news articles, stock market information and editorials. In each case, they select certain features and delete, ignore, others" (p. 122).

As students become more skilled at the work of nonfiction reading, you'll want to remind them to draw on knowledge they bring to the text as well as strategies they have learned in prior units. They'll want to add what they're learning now to a growing repertoire that includes such things as making just-right book choices, paying attention to volume, and using logs to track their reading progress. Readers may want to revisit old charts, making sure they are applying old strategies to new work. You'll meanwhile want to encourage them to read broadly, learning as much as they can on any single topic before moving on to a new one.

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As your readers become expert on subjects, by reading whole books, and then trying to read another book on that subject, they'll need regular opportunities to synthesize their learning by teaching someone else. This expectation creates accountability to the text; readers know they will have to explain the big ideas of the text to someone else, but this makes what could otherwise be a mechanical process into something vital and lots of fun. You're offering a chance for ownership and the opportunity to develop expertise on a nonfiction topic—creating a real incentive for children to want to know how to master the structure and organization of texts. Ideally, in the next lesson, you'll teach how to do this work in partnerships. To set readers up to teach so that their partner will understand, you'll guide them through some ways to explain what they've learned to their partners. You might have them prepare for partner talk by rehearsing how they'll explain important information by using the text's pictures and charts, an explaining voice, and explaining finger and gestures. You might teach that when partners meet, instead of just saying what they have learned, they:

- Point out the details in the pictures or diagrams that highlight what they're saying.
- Link previous learning to the new information that they just encountered by flipping back and forth to show pictures that build off of one other and by explaining how those pictures go together.
- Add gestures to their explanations and use their voices to emphasize what's important.
- Act out what they learned and invite their partner to join in. For example, if one partner is explaining to his partner that owls don't flap their wings like most birds, but rather, they glide, he could have his partner put out his arms and flap them like wings. Then, he could instruct his partner to sway his body and keep his arms out and still to illustrate the difference between gliding and flapping. There's good research to show that adding kinesthetics to our reading process helps move information from short-term to long-term memory—so don't underestimate the value as well as the engagement of using your hands to demonstrate what you've learned.

Once your readers are adept at learning from expository texts and at teaching others the information and significant ideas of those texts, a natural next step to paraphrasing and synthesizing text is to respond personally and intellectually to what the text teaches. You can expect young readers to have comments for all the new information contained in expository texts: "That's weird," "That's cool," "That's interesting," or "That's gross." Of course, these are just launching points—quick reactions children might have to these sorts of texts. You'll want them to take such responses further intellectually, so that they also think and talk about the texts and generate their own claims about what the Common Core State Standards describe as the implications of

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what they read. One way that you could encourage independent thinking off the text is to situate partnerships for conversations around the books they read. Positioning a reader to locate a big idea in the text so that he or she may then talk back to that big idea in the audience of a partner enables collaborative response to texts, but you want to take care to ensure that these conversations are actually *responses to* and *not reiterations of* textual content. To this end, it will make the world of difference to introduce conversational thought prompts that might help students phrase responses to the text. For example, the thought prompts, *But I wonder* . . . and *I used to think that . . . but now I am realizing* . . . will structure and channel a response to the text. They are also great scaffolds for facilitating talk, allowing students sure and predictable ways to pilot their ideas off the text. You might develop your own conversation prompts for your students to use, ones that facilitate prediction, paraphrasing, or questioning. For a more detailed list of conversation prompts and for guidance on instruction that incorporates these, you might visit Session XII in Volume I of *Navigating Nonfiction.*

Students will naturally question the information they are reading in expository texts. "Why do male emperor penguins stay alone, keeping the egg warm on its feet for two months with nothing to eat, while the female leaves to fish in the ocean?" a reader might ask. You'll want to teach your readers to not only read on, seeking answers, but also to think back over everything they've read so far and everything they already know. In response to his own question, the reader might offer as answer, "Maybe the male emperor penguin keeps the egg warm instead of the mother because, on page 12, it says he has that big flap of fat that she doesn't have," or "Maybe the emperor penguin is like the sea horse, and the males are the ones who are responsible for the babies until they are born." Again, such an inquiry and research stance toward their expository texts has greater urgency and meaning for readers when it is undertaken collaboratively with a partner rather than in solitude by a lone reader—readers need to read for implication and for the possibility, in their lives, of applying what they know, what the Common Core State Standards highlight as the relevance and significance of what they read.

Finally, you may find it useful to teach a lesson or two designed to help readers tackle challenging words, what the Common Core State Standards call "domain language." Much of this instruction will merely reiterate decoding strategies of the past, such as "break up the word into its root, prefix, and/or suffix to see." You might alternatively remind students, "substitute the hard word with a synonym and then read on." In many expository texts, however, after an author uses a technical or content-specific word a casual reader isn't likely to know, he or she provides clues about the meaning of the word, occasionally even defining the word outright and explicitly within the text or in a marginal glossary feature. Consider the following lines from *The Yangtze River* by Nathan Olson; they are typical of how many expository texts tend to go:

> The Yangtze flows north and then east into a series of **gorges**. **Gorges** are deep valleys with steep, rocky sides.

Even when the text makes overt efforts like this one, to give readers direct access to unfamiliar vocabulary, young readers will often resist adopting the new words they see

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in print. Technical vocabulary, with its infrequent real-world usage, unconventional spellings, and vague pronunciation, is not the most easy or natural for students to incorporate into their own language. You'll need to urge readers to actively adopt the technical jargon of whatever subject they're exploring. You will also want to create a classroom environment that encourages this—asking readers to think of themselves as teachers and topic experts and creating space for partnership conversations around these topics, so that students may have the chance to verbally use new content-specific words in a real context.

Students will also profit from learning how to use text features to make sense of unfamiliar vocabulary—illustrations, photographs, and diagrams often accompany the text's effort to define and explain new words or concepts. For example, an illustration that accompanies text that introduces "baleen whales" to a reader will likely have a visual representation of what baleen looks like. Some readers need explicit instruction in order to learn to "read" illustrative portions of the text carefully (e.g., photographs, quotes, time lines, charts, and maps). Teach them to peer closely at the visual features of the text for more clues and explanations for the difficult words or concepts that the text introduces them to.

Part Two: Navigating Narrative and Hybrid Nonfiction Texts

In this second part of the unit, you will teach students to now read *narrative* nonfiction with attentiveness to structure, using story grammar to synthesize and determine importance across large stretches of text. Like expository texts, narrative nonfiction is shaped according to a template. This one is familiar and easier for many children to identify and grasp, since their knowledge of story grammar is well developed by now. Once students recognize that most narrative nonfiction focuses on the goals and struggles of a central character—that the text conveys an underlying idea, and that many nonfiction narratives culminate in an achievement or a disaster—they will be able to make sense of such texts, following the events and details on the pages, and holding onto the information in such a way that it is memorable.

You'll recall that one of the important lessons you taught readers during the expository portion of this unit was to draw on all that one knows about a topic to anticipate how a text might unfold. If a reader is reading an expository text about a moose, the reader can think, "I've read other books on wild animals," and can draw on that prior experience with texts about similar topics to anticipate that this text will contain sections on the animal's body and how that body is adapted to the ecosystem and allows the animal to handle enemies, and so forth. In this portion of the unit, you'll want to remind readers to draw on what they know when reading narrative nonfiction, too. If, for example, they are reading the story of a famous dog, like Balto, they'll access their prior knowledge about dogs and possibly even about sled dogs or Alaska. But they'll also access what they know about reading narratives—that is, they'll expect a story structure. Of course, you'll need to teach your students to read for more than character development and plot in narrative nonfiction. They'll

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also read for information and ideas. In this part, then, you'll teach students to use their narrative expertise, while simultaneously drawing on their new expertise in accumulating and summarizing nonfiction information and ideas. Students must be prepared to read, expecting that a nonfiction book of any sort will teach them something new about the subject.

You may want to begin by giving readers an opportunity to sort books as expository or narrative so that they practice recognizing the different explicit structures of these kinds of nonfiction texts. Recognizing the structure of a text will help them prepare for how to read it. Be sure that the texts you choose adhere to story structure in ways that will pay off for readers. You will likely have noticed that many—even most—nonfiction texts are hybrids, containing chunks that are expository as well as chunks that are narrative. Eventually you will help students navigate those hybrid texts too, *but for now* your goal is to help readers see how their knowledge of story grammar can help them read nonfiction that is exclusively narrative in nature. To support this work, the books you choose to place before kids ought to be exclusively narrative in structure.

As they familiarize themselves with narrative nonfiction, readers will come to see that a good portion of the texts they read tells the story of people and their achievements. The structure is similar in fiction. Characters have traits and motivations, and as they interact with each other and their environments they come to face challenges or obstacles that the story highlights, which they usually overcome. In narrative nonfiction, the overcoming of obstacles tends to create the story of why a famous person is famous, what he or she achieved, and why these achievements matter. You'll want to refer children back to the prompts that helped them develop theories in the character unit, asking "What does this character want/wish/hope for? What stands in his or her way?" Your students will already know from reading fiction that it is helpful to pay attention to the important events and decisions in a character's life; you'll also want to remind them that a character's response to those events often reveals his or her traits. Now, teach your readers to develop generalizations about the famous characters or groups of characters they meet in narrative nonfiction, formulating ideas about how certain traits might lead to a character's ability to overcome difficulty and achieve something meaningful—something so big that it has been recorded in a book. Session IX, Volume 2 of *Navigating Nonfiction* demonstrates how to expand the definition of a main character to apply to the main presence in the book, as in a meerkat colony, or "the Pilgrims."

Next, you will teach your students that narrative nonfiction contains underlying ideas—and that it is the role of the reader to seek those ideas. Your readers are used to activating schema about characters—now you want to activate their schema for realizing that these stories, like all complex narratives, also teach ideas. The story about meerkats probably teaches something about community survival techniques. That story about the Pilgrims probably did too! Moreover, the books the students are reading are undoubtedly about more than one idea. Teach them to keep track of ideas, using that same boxes-and-bullets structure, jotting Post-its as they read, talking to a partner, expecting their books to teach them important ideas and information. Having opportunities to teach a partner will be just as important in this part, as it was in the first part of the unit.

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If you have access to biographies and adventure stories, you may want to begin reading these aloud. Children are likely to find this work more accessible when the books they read take the form of "true stories" that are written engagingly, such as the beautifully illustrated biographies or true adventure stories that line the shelves of so many bookstores. In these, the "hero" or "heroine" is easy to identify and the "challenge" or "mission" that drives this main character is also clearly spelled out. As children gain confidence, however, you may move to narrative nonfiction texts that are not so easy to classify according to the strict rules of story grammar. These will often be fact-laden—an account of a war or revolution, or of a chronological scientific process such as the metamorphosis or life cycle of a particular bird or plant. In the latter, readers won't always easily identify the main character, who, as a shape-shifting caterpillar or a nonspeaking/emoting/moving plant, doesn't immediately register as animate. You'll want to show readers alternate ways of determining that a text is indeed narrative in structure and also teach how to hold onto big trajectories in a text rather than simply fact-mining to get "notes." Session IX in Volume Two of *Navigating Nonfiction* charts one direction for this instruction using *Cactus Hotel* as a mentor text, a narrative nonfiction picture book that will feel deceptively like expository to many young readers.

No matter the kind of text children read during this part, the important thing for them to learn is that narrative nonfiction tells a story that teaches both information *and* ideas. For instance, we can anticipate that a sports biography about a famous basketball player will tell an engaging story about a character who faces interesting challenges, it will teach the reader some of the intricacies of basketball, and it will probably teach the reader why this particular basketball player is famous. It will do all that explicitly. The reader will have to infer what he or she can learn from this famous basketball player; it might be "big idea" lessons such as the importance of determination or the need for people to help each other succeed.

As this part progresses, you'll want to be sure that children move from retelling to inferring. One way you might help readers with this transition is to model for them how to retell the text by saying, "This text (or this part of a text) is mostly about . . ." and then to make a more inferential retelling by adding, "And the big new thing it teaches me is. . . ." Alternatively, the reader could say, "And the big way this adds to what I already knew about this subject is. . . ." For instance, the story of Balto tells the story of a desperate race across Alaska to deliver medicine that could save children's lives. It also teaches the reader about how sled dogs lead and pull their teams.

Finally, you'll want to teach students to use what they've learned from focusing on expository texts in isolation, and then narrative texts in isolation in order to tackle any part of a text that includes narrative and expository sections, such as many of the DK Readers and many of the articles and textbooks that students will encounter in their academic studies in the future. So somewhere near the end of the unit, you'll show students that some texts are a mixture of nonnarrative and narrative structure. These texts present an idea supported by facts and then may tell a story that relates to or illustrates the idea. Some texts like this begin with a story, a letter, a diary entry, or a mini-biography and then move into expository text structures. Because texts structured

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this way often can't be broken down into boxes-and-bullets, you can teach readers instead to treat them like photographs and quotes, asking, "What is this letter or story teaching me?" and "How does it fit with what I have been learning?" Teach students to synthesize all the information on a page or in a section by determining how all the parts of the text fit together. It is essential then to teach your students to assess a text using what they now know about expository and narrative text structures and then to use appropriate strategies for each part of the text, as well as to synthesize the whole. You can also teach readers to stop at the end of a text they've read and to reflect on what they have learned. You can teach them to try to answer these questions: "What do I know now that I didn't know before reading this book/text?" or "How is my thinking different from reading this text?"

Read-Aloud

During the nonfiction unit of study, you will want to read aloud a variety of nonfiction texts so you can provide students with opportunities to synthesize, have thoughts off the text, make connections, activate prior knowledge, and so on. Your read-aloud should mirror (and act as a prelude to) the reading work you want your students to do. You'll want to show readers how nonfiction readers assess a text, make plans for how to read it, and begin by chunking it and moving across the sections and pages, including the pictures and diagrams. In the read-aloud, you'll want to demonstrate how readers learn new words from the context clues and from glossaries, and demonstrate word attack strategies they use as they read nonfiction. You'll show them how to summarize a text in a boxes-and-bullets format, and how to keep adding to those ideas, sorting out when a text has introduced new ideas, and when it is giving the reader additional information about a current idea. As you read aloud, you may want to organize a chart that shows how readers synthesize and retell the text as main ideas and supporting information/examples. So if you're reading a book called *Owls' Nests*, you might teach readers that they could try to infer the main idea of the text so far, after reading the first page—and that the system they may use to organize these notes is a boxes-and-bullets one that looks like this:

Owls Don't Build Their Own Nests

- They move into abandoned nests.
- They live in holes in the ground.
- They live in holes in trees.

There are several ways to make a read-aloud interactive. You might pause at strategic points in the text to nudge readers into making an inference, into predicting what happens next, or articulating a personal response. Such participation from students provides unique and valuable instructional potential as well as the chance to scaffold and manage children's engagement with and response to the texts you read them. However, you will

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want to keep this participation brief and well timed so as not to interrupt the flow and power of the read-aloud itself. Quick methods such as "Turn and tell your partner . . ." or "Stop and jot," allow efficiency in managing children's responses. To make nonfiction read-alouds interactive, you may also demonstrate acting out the information as you explain the part you just read before giving readers an opportunity to act out a part as *they* explain information to their partner. Having readers stop and sketch what you read, and encouraging them to add details to the sketch as you read on, is another way to do this. The chance to put the information they are hearing into action by adding their own drama will enhance comprehension. This allows students to synthesize the text they're hearing by activating their own experiences and imagination as they create meaning.

Of course, one of the most important elements of a read-aloud is your own voice. Your intonation alone might clarify the structure of expository texts. For example, as you read, you might use your voice to emphasize main ideas, varying your intonation where support details are suggested. You might count out bullets or listed points across your fingers. While reading aloud narrative nonfiction such as biographies or true stories of animals or people, you will want to teach students to turn on their minds to listen for story structure and pay attention to character. Show them how readers of narrative nonfiction expect the text to teach them something, so they can stop and jot after parts of the story about what the story teaches so far. You will need to model such thinking and inferring explicitly to scaffold and model the kind of work you hope children will ultimately do automatically and without prompting.

When navigating nonfiction, readers will encounter specialized vocabulary. This makes it an opportune time to use read-aloud to highlight how readers take on new vocabulary and incorporate the words into their conversations. You may find it helpful to chart the most important vocabulary from the sections you will be reading aloud that day. You may want to give individuals or partners a word bank of the specialized vocabulary so they can find the words on their own sheets. Then, when students turn and talk, or during whole-class conversation, remind them to use their word banks. This way, they are actively using these words not just that day, but across the days that you read aloud that book. If you read aloud many books on the same topic, readers will have repeated opportunities to use and learn these words.

You might also help students understand the information they are learning by giving them a picture or two that you have copied from the book, so they can label these as you read. For example, if you are reading about insects' bodies, and students have a picture of a grasshopper and a beetle in front of them, you can stop to have them add labels like *exoskeleton*, *thorax*, *abdomen*, and *spiracles* as you read about each one. Then, partners can meet and explain to each other what they learned, or during whole-class conversations, students can reference their diagrams to explain, compare, and contrast.

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Additional Resources

This unit draws upon *Navigating Nonfiction* from the series *Units of Study for Teaching Reading: A Curriculum for Reading Workshop.* The first part focuses on reading expository texts, emphasizing making meaning out of our texts and determining the main idea. The second part focuses on reading narrative nonfiction, drawing upon the character work of determining main ideas and growing theories as we read.

As you approach this unit, your first goal will be to try to avoid the almost universal problem of kids not doing enough reading during the upcoming nonfiction work because of either a shortage of just-right books, an increase in note-taking-type writing, or terribly slow fluency. Chances are high that you will not have enough just-right nonfiction to risk having students put aside their fiction books, so first, be sure you keep that independent fiction reading going and that you pay special attention to their logs and other indicators of time spent reading. The next goal will be to scaffold students so they actually *do* the work of determining a main idea. Expect this to be vastly harder for kids than you dreamed, and plan to listen closely, to do lots of quick, decisive small-group teaching and coaching, and to be inventing ways to get your teaching across in ways that allow kids' skills to get better. Watch for students who are belaboring texts—there will be many—and be ready to move many to easier texts and to give text introductions to others. You may want to use readers who know a lot about a topic or who have loved a book to welcome newcomers to that topic or that book about it, thereby sharing the workload of scaffolding readers. You'll want to look around the class during reading time and to literally count the number of kids who are engaged in reading. Hold yourself to the goal of supporting sustained and deep engagement. Also watch for kids who didn't get into the idea of reading when fiction was foremost in your teaching and see if you can build new self-concepts around nonfiction reading.

You may decide that your children need additional support with expository text. If so, you will want to linger longer in the first part, teaching additional strategies and repertoire lessons to provide additional practice. Then, too, if you find that your children are in need of more work with narrative nonfiction, you might stretch out the second part, again adding additional teaching points and repertoire lessons. If you have small groups of struggling readers, you might refer to the third-grade nonfiction reading write-up, which contains lots of specific strategies that can help you lead these groups.

If you decide to forge your own pathway based on your readers, think about how to make the parts of your unit seem coherent and logical, so that readers feel as if they are on a pathway that will inevitably help them emerge as more powerful and independent readers and thinkers.

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One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Expository Nonfiction

- "Although great nonfiction readers are very different, one from another, today I want to teach you that every great nonfiction reader reads with energy, with power. One way that nonfiction readers do this is that we rev up our minds for reading. Even before we shift into "go" and read a sentence, a paragraph, of the text, we read the title and subtitles, look over chunks of the text, and we think, 'I think this book is mostly about . . . and then it will also tell. . . .'"

- "Another way readers can hold onto what we are learning is that when we come to the end of a chunk of text—or when our mind is brimful—we can pause and say to ourselves, 'What did I just read?' Then we can come up with little summaries of the important stuff. This helps us to recollect what we've learned."

- "As nonfiction readers learn new ways to make sense of their texts, they hold onto everything they know about good nonfiction reading. They add 'tools' for reading nonfiction to their 'toolbelt,' using these tools as needed when they encounter difficulty."

- "When people read nonfiction books on a topic, we become experts on that topic, teaching others what we know. To teach someone, we need to know the main ideas and the supporting details, and it helps to use an explaining voice and sometimes even to use your face, hands, and whole body to illustrate what you mean."

- "Reading nonfiction is like taking a course in which a person is told a whole lot of new and detailed information. Instead of trying to memorize all that information, it helps to create larger categories to organize that information. That way, as we read, we sort the little bits of information under bigger points, creating a boxes-and-bullets outline that matches the text. It is almost as if, as we read, we write headings for the texts that don't have any."

- "Readers talk to let texts get through to us, to let texts change our minds. We talk to grow ideas."

- "Whether you are reading nonfiction or fiction texts, it is equally important to talk about those texts with each other, saying, 'Isn't it weird how . . .' and 'I wonder why . . .' and 'Did you notice that. . . .' But I want to add one more thing. Readers read differently because we're going to be in conversations later. We read holding conversations in our minds."

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Part Two: Narrative Nonfiction

- "If you divide nonfiction texts into piles based on how those texts are put together, you'll end up with one pile of true stories (narrative nonfiction) and one pile of all-about texts (little courses on a topic). Readers read these kinds of nonfiction texts in very different ways. When readers know what kind of nonfiction book we have, that helps us decide how to read it. When we know we have narrative nonfiction in our hands, we know we can read it like narrative fiction. A story is a story is a story!"

- "You can use what you know about getting to know characters in fiction books to get to know main ideas in narrative nonfiction books. You can often get to some big ideas by stretching the definition of main character to apply to a different sort of main presence in the text. Doesn't this sound interesting? Soon you'll be able to try it—to see if you can regard a meerkat colony or a Venus flytrap or a whole group of people, like the Pilgrims, say, as the 'main character' of your nonfiction narrative."

- "Narrative nonfiction readers keep in mind that narrative nonfiction texts are written to convey not just facts, but ideas. The idea is what allows the storyteller to shape information, experience, into something that fits together so the story is not just a hodgepodge of junky details strung along a line of time. While that is a writer's goal, it is also a reader's goal. Readers have to find the unifying idea behind the texts they read, to make coherence and find meaning out of what would otherwise be strings of events and facts."

- "Today I want to teach you that if you find yourself flooded with facts as you read and want to discern what is and is not important, it can help to see that beneath the details, many true stories are either tales of achievement or of disaster, and each of those kinds of story follows a predictable path. That path can help readers determine what matters most in the story—which details to pay most attention to and which to pay less."

- "The most powerful readers don't already know what every single word in a book means. The most powerful readers work hard to figure out what a tricky word means! One of the ways we can do that is to get a picture in your mind of what's going on in that part of the story and to think about what would make sense."

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A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Reading Workshop

LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM
THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT

An imprint of Heinemann
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801–3912

www.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

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"Dedicated to Teachers" is a trademark of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

ISBN-13: 978-0-325-04310-4
ISBN-10: 0-325-04310-8

EDITORS:
Kate Montgomery and *Teva Blair*

PRODUCTION:
Sonja Chapman

TYPESETTER:
Cape Cod Compositors, Inc.

COVER AND INTERIOR DESIGNS:
Jenny Jensen Greenleaf

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY:
Peter Cunningham, www.petercunninghamphotography.com

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Overview of the Year for Fifth-Grade Readers

SEPTEMBER	UNIT 1: Agency and Independence: *Launching Reading with Experienced Readers*
OCTOBER	UNIT 2: Following Characters into Meaning: *Synthesize, Infer, and Interpret*
NOVEMBER	UNIT 2: Nonfiction Reading: *Using Text Structures to Comprehend Expository, Narrative, and Hybrid Nonfiction*
DECEMBER	UNIT 4: Nonfiction Research Projects: *Teaching Students to Navigate Complex Nonfiction Text Sets with Critical Analytical Lenses*
JANUARY/FEBRUARY	UNIT 5: Historical Fiction Book Clubs or Fantasy Book Clubs
FEBRUARY/MARCH	UNIT 6: Interpretation Text Sets
MARCH/APRIL	UNIT 7: Test Preparation
MAY	UNIT 8: Informational Writing: *Reading, Research, and Writing in the Content Areas*
JUNE	UNIT 9: Option 1—Historical Fiction or Fantasy Fiction
JUNE	UNIT 9: Option 2—Author Study: *Reading Like a Fan*

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Each year, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project gathers together the members of our community—the teachers, coaches, schools leaders, and staff developers—to reconceptualize the curricular calendars so that they reflect the latest research and innovations in the teaching of reading. This year, you'll notice most dramatically the effect of the Common Core State Standards in the emphasis, across the year and within each unit, on analytical thinking and reading skills. This community has merged its expertise to create curriculum, and to link that curriculum to tried and true teaching pedagogy so that children may rise to the highest levels demanded by the Common Core State Standards. This is demanding work, and as you study the curriculum, you may find that colleagues will want to form some study groups, to ensure that teacher leaders in your school are developing the expertise needed to truly teach children to be powerful readers of complex texts.

Of course, the suggested order of units and the teaching points offered with each unit are only one way that this work could go. You'll want and need to collect and study your data on your readers, and then sit together with colleagues to plan your on-site adaptation of the curriculum. It felt important to offer teaching points for as many units as possible this year, because the level of teaching demanded is so high. In response to teacher requests, we have provided, wherever possible, a menu of teaching points, so that there is more time to assess children and use this knowledge to differentiate. As always, we encourage you to have these conversations collaboratively—both across grade levels and across the school. To teach in such a way that children become extraordinarily skilled, it's crucial that teachers in a grade level can depend on children moving up from the prior grade with the highest possible level of shared practices. If teachers on a grade do devise a new unit of study that you are willing to share with other teachers, please send it to Lucy Calkins at contact@readingandwritingproject.com.

The curricular calendar will be supported by a calendar of full-day conferences available to participating Project schools who sign up in advance. Some of these days will support reading and writing work linked closely to these units, and some days will be on special topics that will help teachers support their students across the year. Still other days will support our new content calendar. The conference days, and the units of study, put a special emphasis this year on assessment-driven instruction and on Common Core State Standards, and the TCRWP will continue to provide the latest research and expertise on these subjects. Another resource for teachers, which these units depend on, is the *Units of Study for Teaching Reading, A Curriculum for the Reading Workshop, Grades 3–5*.

You'll find, below, brief descriptions of the units of study for fifth-grade reading. In each unit, we want to teach new skills, while simultaneously building up children's repertoire of prior skills. We also want to maintain readers' stamina and volume. So always, in every unit, we're recommending that children read for at least forty minutes in school and at home, to read with engagement, fluency, accuracy, and meaning.

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A Quick Guide to the Reading Units 2011–2012

This year we changed the launch unit for fifth-grade graders so that it steps up their reading work to higher levels of agency and independence. The focus of the unit is on teaching students to take charge of their reading life. This includes using statistics to monitor their reading volume, studying the authors and genres that they are becoming passionate about, and accessing their repertoire of reading skills to read complex texts with high levels of engagement and comprehension. In the same way, the character unit ratchets up from fourth-grade character work, moving readers to infer about characters' motivations, changes, and the lessons they learn, and to interpret across texts by analyzing characters. In both Units One and Two, there is an increased emphasis on writing about reading—but we want to make sure that this emphasis doesn't interfere with reading volume, so you'll want to keep an eye on this balance.

The Common Core State Standards research reinforced something that our research at Teachers College was already telling us—that children need more practice with nonfiction reading. They also need more expert, explicit instruction in nonfiction reading skills. Therefore, both November and December are nonfiction units, with November focusing on using text structures to comprehend expository, narrative, and hybrid texts, and December focusing on nonfiction research projects. For both units of study, you'll want to look at your libraries and do what you can to buy, borrow, and share books so that kids have enough to read. They'll keep reading their chapter books during these units as well. Unit Four, on nonfiction research, is closely tied to the concurrent unit in writing research-based argument essays.

The fantasy unit has remained mostly the same as last year, because it was a great success. It helps students get to the higher levels of synthesis demanded by the Common Core State Standards, while the fantasy series helps students read with tremendously high volume. Teachers may decide, however, whether they want to choose to pursue fantasy or historical fiction at this time. They will probably want to pair their writing unit with this decision.

Interpretation text sets is a unit that builds on our thematic text sets from this year but clarifies the teaching so that more students can accomplish this high-level, analytical work, with greater success. The unit leads beautifully into the test-prep unit, which most schools in this high-stakes testing environment feel compelled to turn toward in March.

In May, we've included, once again, a content unit that collaborates with social studies. We do this because the content calendar offers units that can be taught within social studies time. This unit is a reading, writing, and research unit, and we imagine teachers might devote class time to it across all three disciplines.

Finally, we end the year with a unit of study on "reading like a fan," which is essentially an author study that becomes a "'getting ready for summer reading" opportunity. Our fifth graders are increasingly experts on the authors they adore, and as they go off to middle school, we want to encourage them to take up what we hope will be life-long reading passions.

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There is one addition that you'll see runs across units. That is, on the top of each unit, you'll find a reminder about the recommended benchmark reading level for that time of year. We hope this benchmark will help teachers keep in mind what the grade level standard is for that month, so that they'll be alert to which children we're most concerned about helping reach, or get closer to, that level.

Assessment

We all know the joy of finding a book that is "just right" for us. When we are well matched to a book, reading can be one of life's greatest joys. On the other hand, when a book is "all wrong" instead of "just right," reading can feel interminable, humiliating, and tedious. There will never be a single litmus test that can accurately match a child to books, but as teachers we can make some progress toward this goal if we provide each child with four things: 1) the opportunity to choose books that he or she wants to read, 2) a community of other readers (including especially the teacher) who promote, summarize, and talk about books with enthusiasm, 3) books that are easy enough for the reader that he or she will be given lots of opportunities for high-success reading, and 4) encouragement to occasionally read a text that is just a little challenging with the scaffolding to make the experience fruitful.

Assessing reading is enormously complex. Reading is every bit as rich, multi-layered, and invisible as thinking itself. Anyone who aspires to separate one strand of reading from all the rest, and then to label and measure that one strand or aspect of reading, must approach this effort with proper humility. No number, no label, no indicator is adequate for the task. Still, as responsible people, teachers need to assess children's reading in ways that give us as full a view as possible. New York City teachers have all been asked to track each child's progress in reading and to send the results of those assessments home at regular intervals throughout the year.

Some NYC schools may opt to use an assessment tool patterned after the state test. This assessment instrument contains passages of widely varying difficulty levels, followed by multiple-choice questions that aim to ascertain whether the child can infer, synthesize, predict, and so on. The TCRWP's position is that this assessment alone is not sufficient unless a teacher knows the text difficulty of the passage in question. A wrong answer in a multiple-choice question may not in fact say anything about a child's ability to infer, for example, or to determine importance. A teacher will not know whether the error reflects a problem with inference or whether it suggests that the child couldn't read the passage in the first place.

Therefore, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, in concert with many NYC schools, developed an alternate way to track readers' progress. This system has been accepted by NYC's Department of Education as an option for all schools. This tool is available on the TCRWP website: www.readingandwritingproject.com. This tool contains two passages at each text level, A/Z, ranging in length from 20 to 400-plus words, followed by literal and inferential comprehension questions for each passage. Level A/K readers read books from one or two small sets of leveled texts. The TCRWP

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uses collections of books that are described on the website. Children read the text at one level aloud to teachers, who record reading behaviors and miscues. Teachers record miscues for the first 100 words; if the child reads with 96–100% accuracy, then the child reads the remainder of the passage silently and answers questions (hopefully answering at least three of the four questions correctly). Through this assessment, a teacher can ascertain the general level of text difficulty that a child is able to read with ease and comprehension.

The truth is that using a short passage and a handful of questions to ascertain whether a child can read, say, a level T or V text is not perfect. We've also been using some book-length assessment tools, and these are described in the Assessment Interludes within *Units of Study*. But the system of tracking readers' progress along a gradient of text difficulty does provide an infrastructure to your reading workshop and allows a teacher to have some handle on kids' progress.

Following is a table of benchmark reading levels. These levels are recommended *independent* reading levels. They are derived from a study of data from AssessmentPro, as well as the state and city benchmarks. The chart is updated and available always at www.readingandwritingproject.com.

	Sept	**Oct**	**Nov**	**Dec**	**Jan**	**Feb**	**March**	**Apr**	**May**	**June**
3rd	1 K 2 L 3 M 4 N	1 K 2 L 3 M 4 N	1 K 2 L/M 3 N 4 O	1 L 2 M 3 N 4 O	1 L 2 M 3 N 4 O	1 M 2 N 3 O 4 P	1 M 2 N 3 O 4 P	1 N 2 O 3 P 4 Q	1 N 2 O 3 P 4 Q	1 N 2 O 3 P 4 Q
4th	1 M 2 N/O 3 P/Q 4 R	1 N 2 O 3 P/Q 4 R	1 N 2 O/P 3 Q/R 4 S	1 N 2 O/P 3 Q/R 4 S	1 N 2 P 3 R 4 S	1 O 2 P 3 R 4 T	1 O 2 P/Q 3 R/S 4 T	1 O 2 Q 3 S 4 T	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U
5th	1* P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 Q 2 R/S 3 T/U 4 V	1 Q 2 R/S 3 T/U 4 V	1 Q 2 R/S/T 3 U 4 V	1 Q/R 2 S/T 3 U 4 V	1 R 2 S/T 3 U/V 4 W	1 R 2 S/T 3 U/ V 4 W
6th	1 R 2 S/T 3 U/V 4 W	1 R 2 S/T/U 3 V 4 W	1 S 2 T/U 3 V/W 4 X	1 S 2 T/U 3 V/W 4 X	1 S/T 2 U/V 3 W 4 X	1 T 2 U/V 3 W 4 X	1 T 2 U/V 3 W 4 X	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y
7th	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U/V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z
8th	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 W 2 X 3 Y 4 Adult Lit	1 W 2 X 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Z/Ad Lit 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Z/Ad Lit 4 Ad Lit

* The numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 in this table represent the NY ELA test scores that would predictably follow from a student reading at the text level named, at the grade level named. There is no text level that predicts a 4, because a score of 4 generally only allows for one or two errors—and is therefore unpredictable.

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A word of caution: our data also suggests that running records on a 200-word passage gives a teacher only a little window onto what a child can do as a reader, and we strongly suspect that reading a lower-level passage with great depth and thoughtfulness and attentiveness to details, using high-level comprehension skills, is extremely important. It could be that children should *be able to* read the levels listed above with accuracy and a basic level of comprehension, but that in fact they'd be well-advised to spend most of their time reading easier texts with deep levels of comprehension—that is a judgment call that schools and teachers need to make.

You'll also want to track each child's reading rate and note the way this changes across time. Here's a table that shows *targeted* oral reading rates (words per minute), by grade level:

General Range of Adequate Reading Rates by Grade Level

Grade	WPM	Grade	WPM
1	60–90	6	195–220
2	85–120	7	215–245
3	115–140	8	235–270
4	140–170	9	250–270
5	170–195	12	250–300

Harris and Sipay (1990)

Reading Level Bands of Difficulty

The TCRWP thought collaborative is convinced that as readers learn how to process a variety of increasingly challenging texts, the work that readers need to do will change somewhat. We do not think that it is advantageous for you to attempt to keep in mind a score of tiny characteristics for each and every level of book difficulty, nor do we think that it holds true to try to specify the characteristics of any one level of text difficulty. On the other hand, we have found there are some general characteristics of texts that one will tend to find at different bands of text difficulty and that understanding these complexities will help you to work toward Common Core State Standards. If you grasp the general characteristics of any one band of text levels, this provides you with a sense of how to differentiate your instruction for readers according to the band of text difficulty in which they are reading.

Some of your students will come to you reading in the N/Q band of text difficulty. Before they read these texts, the reader will have needed to follow a single story line of a main character who encounters one main problem and comes to one main solution—now for these readers there is apt to be more than one cause of a problem, and the problem itself may be multidimensional. If a teacher asked the reader of texts in this band of difficulty, "What's the central problem in this story?" the reader would be wise to stall a bit over the question and to suggest that there is more than one

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problem or that the problem has different parts of different layers. In this band of levels, not only the plot but also the main character will be more complex than they used to be, but the character will come right out and tell readers how he or she feels. It will not be subtle. Readers at this level will probably need help dealing with figurative language.

Many of your students reading in the R/S/T band of text difficulty will find that holding onto the central plotline becomes increasingly difficult because seemingly minor characters may end up as important to the plotline. This means that readers need to hold minor characters and subordinate plots in mind. Children's predictions, for example, might include the expectation that a character who made a somewhat fleeting appearance or a plotline that seemed unrelated to the main story line could return, playing a more important role than might have been expected. At this level of text difficulty, readers need to follow not only the evolving plotline but also the evolving setting. The setting becomes a force in the story, influencing characters and the plot just as, say, an antagonist might. In historical fiction, for example, readers need to construct a timeline of historical events as well as a timeline of the protagonist's main events, and more than that, to see the two timelines intersect. An event happens in the world, and that event becomes part of the chain of cause and effect that motors the story's plot. In books within this band of difficulty, characters continue to be complex, and now their character traits are often not explicitly stated. Readers need to infer these from their actions. Often in books at this level, readers may realize something about a character that the character does not know about himself or herself. Also at this level, a character's changes are often left for the reader to infer (whereas in the earlier band, the character's inner thinking essentially told the reader those changes).

Some of your readers will be reading in the U/V levels of text difficulty. These texts often contain chunks—even chapters—that are confusing, and readers need to realize that they are supposed to be confused and to be able to read on, trying to puzzle through their confusion. At this level, the setting and the plot, too, often further more abstract meanings. The changes in the weather, for example, are apt to be externalized indicators of changes that are internal as well. Characters are much more complex—they may say one thing and mean another, or be one way in one relationship and another way in another relationship. Readers are expected to read in a much more interpretive fashion.

Consider the Results of a Spelling Inventory—Synthesizing Data across Assessment Measures

Another window into students' reading is the spelling inventory designed by Donald Bear et al. This spelling inventory is not about getting the word right. It indicates the *spelling features* that students control, such as beginning and ending consonants, long and short vowels, the variety of suffixes, and so on. The spelling inventory reveals a

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child's developmental level on graphophonics and also suggests the level of text at which a student will be successful. You can use this as a source of information to draw upon when determining students' reading levels. More importantly, this information will suggest the word study work that will most benefit this reader. It is the act of reading across this information that is most important. You may refer to the assessment section of the TCRWP website (www.readingandwritingproject.com) to access more information about spelling inventories.

Maintaining Reading Logs

We recommend that schools establish and implement policies so that each child in the school (grades 2 to 8) maintains a daily record of the books he or she reads in school and at home. This log must contain the title, author, the level of difficulty (for example, level P), the numbers of minutes the child spent reading, and the starting and ending page numbers. Some people question whether it is necessary to include the level of difficulty (when it is available). Our response is that this provides the teacher with vitally important information—information that exponentially increases the usefulness of the tool. For example, if a child devotes a week to reading *The Stolen Pony*, and we know that book is level M (the level of the *Magic Treehouse* books), then we know that the child has done an alarmingly small amount of reading during that week. On the other hand, if the book is level Z, then we would draw a different conclusion.

These logs are not places for responses to reading, nor do children write book summaries in them. They are simply records of time spent reading and volume of reading accomplished. You may ask, "How can a teacher be sure that the log accurately reflects the reading that the child has done?" We've found that if both logs and books are out on the table every day, this transparency brings a huge amount of accountability to logs.

We suggest that every day during reading time, every child should always have his or her log out on the table. The first thing the child does at the start of reading is to enter the starting time and page number; the last thing the child does before moving from reading to talking is to enter the ending time and page number. We also encourage teachers to refer to logs often in reading conferences: "I see you have been reading this book especially slowly. You galloped through that last book—why is this one progressing so differently for you?" "You seem to be skipping between books a lot lately—why do you think it has been hard for you to stay engrossed in one book?" "I notice this book is easier than the ones you have been reading—do you find your reading process is different now, when you are reading a lighter text?"

After a few weeks, we suggest you encourage children to study their own reading logs to articulate their reading habits. Children can work analytically with their partners to notice and think about changes in the average number of pages they've read. Children can also notice the genre choices they have made across time and the

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relationship between genres or levels and volume. They can discuss patterns by studying the time they spend reading at home versus at school. The logs provide an irreplaceable window into students' reading lives. It is helpful to gather logs across one grade after a month, or across several grades, to compare how much students are reading and how they are moving through books.

School leaders, as well as teachers, must collect, save, and study these critical records. For example:

- A general rule of thumb is that a child should read approximately three-quarters of a page a minute. (This rule of thumb works across texts of varying levels because generally, as the pages become denser, the reader's abilities also become stronger.) A teacher and/or a principal will want to take notice if a child is reading a book at a dramatically slower rate than this. For example, alarms should go off if a child reads eight pages in thirty minutes. Why is the child not reading closer to twenty-four pages in that length of time? There may, of course, be good reasons.

- If a child reads an amount—say, thirty-four pages—during a half-hour in school, then brings that same book home and claims to read a much smaller amount—say, eight pages—within half an hour of reading time at home, alarms should go off. Is the child actually making enough time for reading at home?

- If you suggest the child reads books that are level T, and she instead reads many books that are far easier, this discrepancy must be researched and addressed. Perhaps the easier books are nonfiction texts and the child has wisely found that when reading nonfiction, she needs to search for books she can read with meaning. Perhaps the child recently completed a very taxing book and wants some easier reads. Then too, perhaps the child simply can't find other books that are more challenging and needs your help.

- It is crucial to let parents know if the volume of reading their child is doing is high, fairly high, quite low, or very low. The wonderful thing about this information is that parents can do something about it, and progress on this one front will have enormous payoff for every aspect of a child's reading development.

Above all, student logs are a way to be sure that everyone—teachers, principals, and students—keeps their eyes on the volume of reading that children are doing. Dick Allington's research suggests that it takes four hours for a student who reads 200 wpm to complete *Hatchet*. The chart that follows shows how long it should take students to complete different leveled books. Assuming that your students read for thirty minutes in class and thirty minutes at home, at a rate of 200 wpm, then you should expect a

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student to finish reading *Hatchet* in eight days, which seems reasonable. You may find that a particular child takes twice as long to read *Hatchet*. This should prompt some research. Why is this child reading especially slowly? (If the child is reading below 120 accurate wpm, then alarm bells should go off. This child should be reading easier texts. Or perhaps the child is sitting in front of a text, rather than reading it.)

Long Should It Take a Child to Read a Book According to His or Her Reading Level?

Title	Level	Approx # of Words	Reading Rate	# of Minutes per Book
Henry and Mudge (Rylant)	J	800–1000	100 wpm	10 minutes
Horrible Harry (Kline)	L	4,500	100 wpm 200 wpm	45 minutes 25 minutes
Magic Tree House Series (Osborne)	M	6,000	100 wpm 200 wpm	60 minutes 30 minutes
Henry Series (Cleary)	O	25,000	100 wpm 200 wpm	4 hours 2 hours
Howliday Inn (Howe)	P	30,000	100 wpm 200 wpm	5 hours $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours
Stone Fox (Gardiner)**	P	12,000	100 wpm 200 wpm	2 hours 1 hours
Hatchet (Paulsen)**	R	50,000	100 wpm 200 wpm	8 hours 4 hours
Missing May (Rylant)**	W	24,500	100 wpm 200 wpm	4 hours 2 hours

***Allington (2000)*

Getting Time to Assess at the Start of the Year

Years ago, the Project suggested that a teacher start the year by putting crates of mixed-level texts at the center of each table in the classroom, then asking kids to graze through those crates, reading whatever appealed to them while the teacher circled quickly about the room, assessing. Once a child was assessed, the teacher would give that reader a magazine box for his or her books. This child would no longer read from the mixed-level bin but would instead choose a few just-right, leveled books, storing the short stack of these books in his or her private bin. Visitors to the room in mid-September could see at a glance the percentage of kids who had been launched into just-right reading because these children had magazine boxes containing their books. The aim was to get everyone to this point within two weeks from the start of school.

By this time, however, the entire school has been working for a year or two to match readers to books. Therefore, it should no longer be necessary for you to begin the year with children in the holding pattern of reading through a random collection

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of books from a crate at the center of the table. Instead, your class roster will convey the level of just-right book that each child was reading at the end of the previous school year. Ideally, children will also keep logs of the books they read during the summer so you can estimate whether a child's reading progressed or took a dive during those crucial months. If a child did not read over the summer, she will lose several levels during the summer, and so if you ascertain from the summer log that this child read only a few books, then you will move her back two levels from where she ended the previous school year. If a child did a lot of just-right reading during the summer, that child can resume reading at the level he or she was reading in June. In this way, you can rely on reading records to start the year off with each child reading from a short stack of appropriate books.

Of course, the fact that you start children reading books you've been told will be just right for them does not mean you won't reassess their reading; you will. But you can weave this assessment into your reading workshop once it is going full-swing. You could either do running records a week or two after school starts and then again right before your first report card or, if your school agrees, you could rely on informal assessments for now, watching kids with leveled books rather than doing running records, relying on June assessment levels and these informal observations. You may find that after two or three weeks with tons of reading, summer rustiness wears off and kids are already ready for another level of text difficulty. You could, then, wait to do your more formal assessments prior to fall report cards. This, of course, is a decision your school will need to make.

No matter what, it will be a huge priority to assess any reader who seems to not actually be reading. Watch for signs of disengagement: the head that revolves, the child who is always losing his or her place in a book, the youngster who uses reading time as a chance to get a drink of water or go to the bathroom.

When you do begin to do running records, we suggest you call three children over to you at a time, each carrying a book. Get one child started on the TCRWP formative assessment. While you listen to his or her reading, the other two can read independently. The assessed child needn't finish the passage before you ascertain whether it is too hard; and if it is, move to another passage right away. Once one child has read aloud 100 words and you have recorded the child's miscues, he or she can read the rest of the passage silently while you get the second child—who will already be right beside you—started reading aloud to you.

The Components of Balanced Literacy

The term *balanced literacy* comes, in part, from the recognition that readers need a variety of different opportunities to learn. The reading workshop provides children with time to read, with a mentor who is a passionately engaged reader and wears his or her love of reading on the sleeve, with opportunities to talk and sometimes write about reading, and with explicit instruction in the skills and strategies of proficient

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reading. All of this is incredibly important, but alone, it is not sufficient. Children also need the opportunities to learn from other components of balanced literacy.

They need, above all, to write. We assume that the reading workshop, as described in these pages, is balanced by a daily writing workshop, and we assume Teachers College Reading and Writing Project teachers will refer to the writing curricular calendar for help with writing. Children also need to study the conventions of written language, including writing with paragraphing, punctuation, and syntactical complexity. Either as part of this or separately, children need time to learn about spelling patterns and to study words—both their meanings and their spellings. Then, too, children also need daily opportunities to hear wonderful literature read aloud and frequent opportunities to participate in book talks around the read-aloud text. We expect teachers to read aloud and to lead interactive read-aloud sessions several times a week. Children need opportunities to read texts within content-area disciplines and to receive instruction in reading those texts well. Finally, children who struggle with fluency (that is, children who read slowly and robotically) need opportunities to participate in shared reading and in repeated oral readings.

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is crucial even in instances where the teacher does nothing more than read spectacular literature aloud in such a way that children listen with rapt attention, clamoring for more. The payoff for reading aloud becomes even greater when teachers read from a wide range of genres, which generally happens when teachers comb reading aloud into all parts of the days, including science, social studies, math, and so on.

The best way to tap into the potential power of reading aloud, however, is to use the read-aloud and book talk time to explicitly teach the skills of higher-level comprehension. To do this, a teacher first reads the upcoming section of the read-aloud book to himself or herself, noticing the mind-work that he or she does while reading. Then the teacher decides whether to use the upcoming read-aloud to help children draw upon their full repertoire of reading strategies or whether to angle the read-aloud in such a way as to support the development of a particular comprehension skill. Based on this decision, the teacher decides to demonstrate and then scaffold children in using either one or many skills and strategies.

If you decide, for example, to highlight envisionment, then insert Post-its in a couple places during the first pages of the read-aloud, as a reminder to pause as you read, to lower the book, and to muse a bit. Perhaps you can say, "I'm just picturing this. I can see Artie in the lead, walking down the path in the woods. It's a narrow path, so Cleo is a few steps behind—there's just room for one of them. The sun is filtering through the canopy of leaves overhead." Of course, the teacher's envisionment could spin on and on and on—it is important to stay brief! After demonstrating in such a manner for thirty seconds, tuck in a comment that names what has been done, like "Readers, I don't really know that the path is narrow—the book hasn't said that. But I

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draw on all the forest trails I've ever seen, adding details from my own experiences. When I read on, though, sometimes I need to revise my picture. Let's see." Once the teacher has demonstrated the skill (in this case, envisioning) a few times, across perhaps three or four pages of the read-aloud, the teacher is apt to pause in the midst of reading and scaffold the children in envisioning. "I can just see the river, can't you? I'm picturing it—the colors. I'm hearing stuff too, aren't you? Use all the rivers you've ever stood beside to help you imagine the river." Sometimes these pauses are followed with, "Tell the person beside you what you are seeing, hearing," and sometimes they lead to the prompt, "Stop and jot what you see, what you hear." Either injunction can, a moment or two later, be followed with specific tips: "Make sure you are talking/writing in details. Are you using specific words to make your mental movie real?"

Of course, you could alter the sequence described above to show children how to develop theories about characters, think across texts, predict, or a host of other reading skills.

If you choose carefully, the read-aloud text can support the independent reading work your students are doing. For example, if the class is engaged in the unit of study on character (and students are thinking about characters as they read independently), you'd be wise to read aloud a chapter book with strong characters who change over the course of the text. If, on the other hand, the class is working on nonfiction, and some of the children's independent reading involves nonfiction texts, you will want to read aloud nonfiction texts that allow you to show children how nonfiction readers talk and think about (and between) texts.

Whatever skill you aim to teach, it's essential that you read in ways that not only demonstrate skills but that above all bring stories to life. Read with expression, fluency, intonation, and good pacing so that children feel like they are a part of the story and understand that this is what good reading sounds and feels like.

Supporting Children's Vocabulary

Teachers are wise to recognize that we need to model not only a love of books and of writing but also a fascination with words themselves. If you wear your love of language on your sleeve, exuding interest in words and taking great pleasure in them, you'll help your children be more attentive to vocabulary.

Research is clear: the single most important thing you can do to enhance your children's knowledge of words is to lure your children into lots and lots and lots of reading. If children read a diverse range of books, they'll encounter a wider range of words. The vocabulary in historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, and nonfiction will often be richer than vocabulary in realistic fiction and mysteries.

Teach children that when they come to unfamiliar words in a text, it really helps to pronounce the word as best the reader can, trying it out one way and then another to see if any pronunciation sounds familiar. Then ideally, the reader reads on past that word for just a bit before pausing to reread the section, thinking, "What might this

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word mean?" The good reader substitutes a reasonable synonym—thus, the "ominous" clouds become the "rainy" clouds—and reads on. Some teachers tape an index card to each child's desk so that children can collect a few such words throughout the day, with page numbers for references. The children and teacher should aim to use these same words in conversations with each other and the class.

There will also be times for a teacher to lead the whole class into word inquiries, and that work will certainly involve the class exploring prefixes and suffixes and using these to alter the meaning of a base word. The key word is *explore*. Word study will be vastly more helpful if it is engaging to youngsters.

Finding Great Literature to Refresh or Fill Up Libraries

One of the key factors in helping to make any reading unit of study exciting, rigorous, and independent is the interface between the unit and books. This year we interviewed wonderful educators across the country to develop book lists of recommended books. We understand the responsibility involved in this work and did not put a single book on the list unless that book was recommended by more than one person and unless these were people whose judgments we trust. The lists are carefully organized—for historical fiction, for example, there will be a time (say, Colonial America) and leveled books we recommend around that time. Similarly, the social issue list is organized around social issues and leveled books we recommend for each social issue. All the books on the lists are leveled, either with Fountas and Pinnell's levels, if those exist, or with Scholastic Book Wizard levels. If neither source existed, we noted the lexile level that you can use to create levels by converting this lexile level to an approximation of Fountas and Pinnel levels (take those with a special grain of salt). The books are all available through Booksource, and we're assured that their price is the lowest available price for books of comparable production quality.

The following lists have been created to support the different reading workshop units of study: Anthologies, A Special List of Mentor Texts to Use When Teaching Writing that Also Make for Great Read-Alouds, Books Students Want on the Shelves Now, Biography, Expository Nonfiction, Fantasy, Historical Fantasy, Historical Fiction, Multicultural, Mystery, Narrative Nonfiction, and Social Issues.

For more information about these lists, along with many others, please visit our website at www.readingandwritingproject.com. To order from the lists referenced above, choose from one of the following options:

1. Call Booksource Publishing at 1-800-444-0435 and reference Lucy Calkin's TCRWP booklists.

2. Visit www.readingandwritingproject.com to download the lists and mail your orders to 1230 Macklind Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63110.

3. Email Booksource Customer Service at service@booksource.com.

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The Logistics of the Workshop: Establishing Routines and Expectations

Reading is a skill that requires practice. Just as a student learns to swim by swimming, and to play the piano by playing the piano, students need protected time to read to get better as readers. In every classroom, teachers will probably want to spend a bit of time at the start of the year stressing the importance of stamina and encouraging students to read for longer stretches of time, both in school and at home. Just as runners have goals to reach, readers also have goals. Students may learn that when they begin to lose stamina in their books, they can reread or look back over their Post-its for a moment before continuing. Readers can take brief breaks to think and then continue reading. They can set goals for themselves, as runners do. If students worked last year to develop stamina, you may make student testimonials central to your teaching. You may want to speak about the transformation of a particular reader from the previous year, or invite past students to come in and speak about their growth and attitude shift in reading. Consider the role of your prior students as transformational speakers! You may also emphasize the power of finding stolen moments throughout the day to read by highlighting that the readers carry books with them everywhere they go.

During the first few days of school, you will want to establish clear routines and expectations. You'll want to remind (or teach) students to gather quickly and efficiently for whole-class instruction, teaching this bit of management in a way that upholds the joy of reading. "We won't want to waste one precious moment of reading time, so this year, let's get really good at gathering efficiently for the minilesson." Similarly, if you want to emphasize the importance of students listening (and not constantly interrupting) during the minilesson, you could say, "This year, I want to be sure you have lots and lots of time to read the incredible books we have in this room, so let's try to keep our minilessons efficient. How about if you save your questions until the minilesson is over?"

This is a good time, too, for you to consider whether you have planned minilessons that are too long or complicated, that are usurping too much of students' reading time. Most teachers use the strategy of demonstration and, more specifically, of thinking aloud, in reading minilessons. If you do this, try to make the reading and thinking *feel* like *reading*, which usually means holding the book in your lap, reading aloud from the book, not from the overhead projector. You will want your thinking aloud to be very brief—usually no more than three sentences. Avoid rambling; if you see students start to tune out, take this as a cue. After watching you once or twice, students get the idea of what you are trying to show them, and they'll want a chance to try whatever you have demonstrated. You'll see the written story of scores of minilessons in *Building a Reading Life*, as well as a DVD containing four hours of snippets from classroom life, so you may want to lay your teaching up against that resource. Teach students to expect that although the minilesson will be an occasion to learn a new reading skill or strategy, during any one day's reading time, they will hopefully draw on *all* the skills and strategies they have been taught up to and including that day.

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Of course, at the heart of your teaching will be the work that students do. Your teaching of reading won't amount to much until students are choosing just-right books and reading them with stamina. Unless students are reading books they can read with *at least* 96% accuracy, fluency, and strong comprehension, it is superfluous to worry about minilessons that teach strategies for identifying with characters or developing theories!

As mentioned earlier, if students have not yet been assessed and matched to books, and if you do not have the previous year's records to draw upon, you may need to put a bin of easier, high-interest books at the center of each table and set to work assessing your readers. Increasingly, though, teachers are sending students into classrooms with zippered bags of books in hand, selected in June of the previous year. If your students come to you with books they selected, with input from their prior teacher, you may want to bypass the start-of-the-year formal assessments for all but your strugglers, realizing that even if you do assess readers now, they tend to be rusty and they can probably progress pretty soon. You may, then, instead devote these first weeks to rigorous teaching and intimate conferences, keeping kids reading books that either were selected with support from their last year's teacher or books that match those, and then conduct in-book running records by the end of September to see if you can perhaps already move kids up a notch. Most of you will conduct formal running records in October, before parent-teacher conferences and before data needs to be entered into software that tracks student growth over time.

Either way, once you've determined books that are just right for a particular reader, you'll give that student a personal bin or bag in which he or she can keep a few just-right books. It helps to get the student started enjoying these books if you rave about a few you believe will be perfect for that student.

The books a student keeps in his or her bin will all be equivalent in level, except in two instances. First, an English language learner who is literate in his or her first language will read difficult books in the native language and easier books in English. Second, when a student is transitioning to a new book level, that student's book bin will contain books at both the comfort level and the new instructional level. Ideally, the latter will be books the teacher has introduced to the student; this works especially well if you introduce the first book in a series of two or three books because one book provides an introduction to the next. If a reader is working with a slightly more difficult text (96%, not 98% accuracy) this is an important time to be sure that the student's partner is reading the same slightly more challenging book, so the two partners can support each other.

You will also want to teach students procedures for keeping track of their volume of reading. Earlier we described the cumulative reading log, which is absolutely essential for you and for the reader. You will need to make sure these logs become integral to the reading workshop. Every day during reading time, each student needs to get his or her log out along with his or her book. Many September conferences will reference these logs. You might say, "I notice you've been reading faster. Has it been hard to hold onto the story as you read faster?" If a student's pace has slowed, you

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might ask, "What's slowing you down? I notice you read less today. What got in the way?"The log will also influence your observations. If you see from a glance at a student's log that the student is making slow progress through a book, observe the student as she reads silently, checking for any noticeable reading behaviors that might be slowing the student's pace. Does the student move her lips while reading, move her head from side to side, point at words as she reads, use a bookmark to hold her place as she reads, or read aloud to herself? If the student does any of these things, you will want to intervene. Tell her that she has graduated and no longer needs to engage in those behaviors. You may need to tell students that they should only read aloud when they come to tricky words. Or devise other strategies to help them get into the habit of reading silently.

It's helpful to know how many pages a student can actually get through in half an hour of reading time. If, for example, we know that a student can read twenty pages of a 120-page *Amber Brown* book in half an hour of reading time, then we'd expect that student to read that much at home each night. At this rate, the student should finish this book after three days and nights of reading.

Usually teachers design systems for take-home reading. If nothing else, each student has a take-home book bag. The important thing is that the student needs to read the same book in home and at school, carrying the book between places. Often teachers suggest that in a partnership discussion, students give themselves assignments in school, such as: "Let's read to page 75."

Few things matter more in teaching reading than students progressing through books. To encourage slow readers, you might walk around at the beginning of the reading workshop, marking kids' starting page numbers. Then you survey again during the middle of the workshop to jot down how many pages students have read. Lean in and encourage students to push themselves by saying, "Push your eyes across the page," or "I love the way you read seven pages. See if you can read eight more." Mostly, make sure they have books they love that they can understand. Kids who are holding books they adore get a lot of reading done.

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UNIT SIX

Interpretation Text Sets

FEBRUARY/MARCH
(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: T/U)

We could not agree more with the Common Core State Standards' recommendation that we teach readers at this level to determine central ideas or themes of a text as well as analyze the development of these themes. By now, your students have already been doing some interpretation, of course. They have interpreted the motivations for characters' actions and feelings, and they have constructed theories about events, places, and people in their novels. In this unit of study, you will sharpen your students' analytical skills even further, teaching them to study texts deeply to grow big ideas as they read. In this unit, you'll help your readers to sharpen their analytical skills as you teach them that the stories they are reading are also about ideas. You'll move your students to think and talk about the ideas their chapter books suggest. Then you'll show them, pretty much immediately, that good books are about more than one idea, and you'll teach them to keep more than one idea afloat in their minds. All the time, you will be training your students to be analytical and persuasive as you teach them to back up their ideas with evidence from the texts. Pretty early on in the unit, you'll teach your readers that just as their books are about more than one idea, ideas live in more than one book—we call those ideas *themes*. Once your students are recognizing themes, you'll teach them to compare how themes are developed in different texts. You'll have them hone their reading and the ideas they are growing as they read to be more nuanced, deliberate, and finely calibrated.

You'll know your students are ready for this teaching if, as you look over their Post-its and listen to their partner conversations, you see that they are regularly inferring about the characters in their stories and are synthesizing the narrative elements in the

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stories they read. If, for instance, a student is reading *Because of Winn-Dixie* and has no trouble keeping track of the characters, figuring out where the story is taking place, and understanding the nature of the town at the beginning and end of the story, that student is ready to also realize that *Because of Winn-Dixie* is the kind of novel that suggests important themes—it's a book that teaches us how to live. If, on the other hand, when you talk to that same student about *Because of Winn-Dixie*, he or she seems to talk only about what is happening right now in the book, without connecting that action to earlier events, and as you check in with another student, you see that same reading-for-plot-and-constantly-surprised-by-the-plot kind of reading, then you may want to turn to Unit Two: "Following Characters into Meaning" in this curricular calendar or in the *Units of Study for Teaching Reading 3–5*. This interpretation unit makes the most sense for readers who are reading books, at minimum, at level P and above and who are regularly inferring about the characters' emotions, traits, and changes in their books. Ideally, the bulk of your readers will be level T and above when you embark on this unit.

Unit Overview

The unit has three main parts, each one leading students toward increasingly more nuanced thinking, while also leading students in steps, so that they can do the work independently, not merely follow their teacher's thinking. It's an easy job to tell young readers what the ideas are in a novel. It's easy to tell them a theme and have them find evidence for that theme in a text. It's easy, that is, to hand over a piece of literature as content to your students and have them hunt and peck for answers to questions you devise. It is much more challenging to teach young people to think for themselves and to be dissatisfied with easy, literal, undisputed reading and thinking. They'll need some specific strategy instruction in analytical reading practices, or else they will remain ever dependent on collaborative, teacher-led, coauthored understandings.

Part One begins with students revisiting familiar texts, thinking about the ideas these texts suggest. You'll teach students to reconsider and "reread" prior events and texts. You'll teach them that stories are never about just one idea, showing them that the way that the Common Core State Standards analyze nonfiction texts, for more than one idea, is also relevant for fiction. And then pretty quickly, you'll show your readers that ideas live in more than one text. In Part Two, you'll move students to more nuanced reading and thinking, by teaching them to lay texts that are united thematically alongside of each other and really investigate how an author develops a theme. Rarely are the settings, characters, or events exactly matched, and it is in these fine details that students, with your instruction, will learn to illuminate complexity, really analyzing how ideas that at first glance appear the same may be different either in their development or in their details. Imagine how this thinking will help your students in later life, as they learn to ask colleagues, leaders, and co-citizens,

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"Wait, I think that these ideas are similar, but somewhat different in their implications or applications."

Finally, in Part Three, you'll offer your students analytical lenses for interpretation that focus on symbolism and literary craft, so that students are alert to the metaphors in the texts that they encounter. This ability to think metaphorically enriches students' experience of literature, it hones their thinking in new directions, and it will enhance their own language and expressiveness. Your students will emerge from this unit more alert to the metaphoric allusions and rhetoric in the texts they encounter, whether it is the idea that the dog is a pivotal character in *Because of Winn-Dixie* or that the suitcase is more than a suitcase in *Tiger Rising*.

Getting Started: Preparing Your Classroom Library

This unit will not require any special new texts. Universal ideas (i.e., literary themes) are universal because they are important in a great many stories. You will not need specially constructed text sets for readers to think about how different authors convey the same theme. So you don't have to make a basket of books labeled "struggle against nature" and fill it with *Skylark, Little House on the Prairie*, and *Out of the Dust*. The unit is going to lead students to do much more intellectual work than simply find evidence of a prenamed theme. Your students will, though, want to do this work collaboratively, in partnerships and small clubs—so you and they should gather texts of which you have multiple copies. They'll range back over the fantasy and historic fiction you had already gathered for club units. Some students may reread these books, with more comparative thinking, during this unit. Others of your readers should be at higher reading levels now than when you were in those units of study, and so they can reach for harder texts.

You may, though, make it easier to tackle this work by having copies available of your prior read-aloud texts, by gathering some baskets of poetry and nonfiction that students may investigate if they become preoccupied with certain themes, and of course, by having at hand as many rich, dense chapter books at appropriate levels as possible for each reader. Students simply can't do the higher-level work of the Common Core State Standards if they are reading one text and thinking about that text in isolation. During the reading workshop, members of a book club will read books together—say, for example, four students will read *Hatchet*. Within a week of the start of this unit, you'll be encouraging readers to make connections between the one book that they are reading—in this instance, *Hatchet*—and other books the class has read. How is *Hatchet* like (and unlike) *My Side of the Mountain*? How is it like (and unlike) *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*? Readers will create their own text sets by looking across books they've read and plan to read and finding ones that address similar themes.

Check that your lower-level readers have access to books that they can read that are just difficult enough for them to be striving and achieving while still being within what they can actually read. It's often easier to do analytical thinking, in higher-level

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texts, because the texts themselves are so complex. So make sure that you've gathered narratives that are as suggestive and complicated as possible for your lower-level readers. Dragon Slayers' Academy, for instance, at levels N/O, offers wild complexities and provocative themes, whereas it may be hard (but not impossible) to develop thematic understanding in Magic Treehouse. They are both terrific series, but you may highlight one over the other in this unit of study. Look over your library with that lens, and imagine yourself doing the work of this unit in the books that are available.

It will be important for your class to have a set of shared texts to mine in this unit—and presumably those will be the books and short texts (picture books) you have read aloud all year, combined with books that students know from previous years. If you have not done much reading aloud and your class does not have a shared repertoire of texts, then begin reading aloud now!

As with any unit, teachers need to first decide upon the skills that will be forwarded. We recommend using the performance assessment aligned to the curricular calendar to glimpse what your kids can do with analyzing across two texts and articulating their ideas about texts in writing, with substantive evidence gathered and cited from the texts. Chances are very good that all your students need considerable help with these skills, in which case, you will be wise to teach this unit with a lot of heft, using your small groups and individual conferring and book clubs as forums for supporting your students' progress toward being able to read analytically.

Once students can see that texts often address the same theme, then you can help students notice differences in nuance of the message or in each author's treatment of the message. Students will be able to contrast how authors present or develop a meaning, theme, or character—first in conversation and then in writing. Meanwhile, you can teach a parallel unit in the writing workshop on writing literary essays, using some of the reading workshop (as well as other short-text work) as grist for their writing mills.

Part One: Considering the Implications of Stories

To begin the unit, you'll offer your students an invitation to interpretation work, teaching them that events in our lives are open to analysis, just as events and characters in books will be. You'll teach all your students how to return to critical moments in their lives and learn more from those moments. The unit begins with what the Common Core State Standards suggest are the "applications" of more complex thinking—the ability to analyze any experience. Students will have an opportunity to revisit moments in their lives and then to revisit favorite texts. Then they'll quickly move to other texts, while their interpretive zeal is strong.

The goal of the first two days is to give kids (and ourselves) lots of repeated practice interpreting so that over the two days, everyone becomes fluent with this sort of thinking, more aware of text interpretations that exist out there in the world and more accustomed to speaking in this analytical, idea-based "language." We also want kids

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to realize that they are interpreting all the time and that any one event or story can have lots of different interpretations. An important thing to realize is that sometimes we have taught interpretation as the One Big Idea that a text teaches, channeling kids to think about this only when they are two-thirds of the way through a text or done with it or after a teacher has suggested an idea, thus channeling them toward the interpretation that we have decided is the best one. The problem is that when we do this, we put interpretation on a high-up shelf, out of reach from kids' sticky fingers—and we take away the thinking work, leaving kids in the role of miners looking for diamonds that will belong to someone else. As a result, lots of kids (and frankly, lots of teachers) feel uncomfortable with the "correctness" of their own interpretation. There is a feeling that this is literary criticism and we are not sure we're entitled to have a go at it, when in fact, any interpretation, just like any text, is open to debate and needs to be validated, examined, and justified.

So this part of the unit aims to reverse or avoid that damage, helping kids know that interpretation is what thoughtful people do all throughout our lives, and it is within grasp of us all. By inviting kids to feel at home interpreting, we expect they'll become accustomed to this way of thinking and this way of talking about texts, and their interpretations will get far better just from immersion. So please, during this first part of the unit, issue a generous invitation to kids, welcome much of what they say, don't get bent out of shape by what may seem like shallow interpretations, and know that your students' room for growth stems largely from unfamiliarity with doing this work independently.

First, you may teach a lesson that begins in your life and then moves to familiar stories. You'll tell your readers that good readers don't read just to find out what characters do or what happens in stories. Powerful readers also realize that the stories we read are about ideas—they literally teach us how to live. Then you'll invite your students to first consider how, in their own lives, there have been experiences that have taught life-lessons. You'll probably want to model on a real-life story that seems significant in your own life—perhaps one that you have already modeled with in writing workshop. Right from the start, then, you'll be teaching that we're not searching for one idea, but that analytical thinkers develop ideas about events and experiences.

In the same session, you can have your readers revisit the narratives they've written in their writer's notebooks and analyze them for ideas or life-lessons they see in them. Then they can turn to the stories they've read and talk with a partner or club members, sharing their ideas about stories they've read this year so far. Coach into how kids support their ideas with evidence, and teach them to listen closely to each other and to add on to the ideas that are brought up, so that they build a cornucopia of ideas together. If this teaching seems like too much for one lesson, you could break it into two lessons—the first where you teach students that moments in our lives are open to interpretation, and you and your students reconsider real-life moments for the ideas or life-lessons they suggest, and a second lesson where you teach that moments in books also teach life-lessons, and you and your students reconsider favorite stories you've read so far this year.

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For homework, you might invite students to do this same work on the television programs they watch or the books they are reading on their own or the events that happen in their days. Students will love the invitation to watch a TV show, each of them, thinking, "What does this character learn? What can the character teach?" You can help students ask this question using other phrases or terms as well, which is a wise thing to do because eventually standardized tests will ask them this same question, and there are a lot of different ways to work the question. Alternately, students could be invited to think about the people in their families who are always drawing life-lessons from things that happen. Perhaps it is a grandparent who comes from an event saying, "See what I mean? I always tell you—families have to stick together." That's interpretation.

If your kids have a lot of trouble interpreting, you will want to do a lot more work reading aloud and show them how you begin to think interpretively. We recommend you watch Kathleen Tolan's work with *The Giving Tree* on the DVD that accompanies *Units of Study for Reading* and watch the active moves Kathleen makes as she demonstrates and supports kids to move from reading actively to reading interpretively. Notice that she slows down the process of thinking interpretively, saying, "Hmmm . . . I'm just wondering . . . what *could* this be teaching me? Hmmm . . . I'm thinking about. . . ." (Then she recalls, rereads.) "What *could* that mean? Could it maybe mean. . . ? Or could it mean. . . ?" You can do similar work, stretching out and slowing down the process of interpreting so that kids begin to climb up on their knees, saying, "I know! I got an idea!" And then, if their ideas are not particularly strong, try to accept them anyhow, listen to them, and find better ideas within those flawed ones.

In your next lesson, you may turn your readers to pivotal moments in stories, showing them how to pay attention to moments in stories when characters experience strong emotions and/or make critical choices. These moments are also ones where readers have an opportunity to learn from the decisions characters make. Again, you'll reteach that at each of these moments in a story, readers can make more than one interpretation and construct more than one idea that may turn out to be significant. You'll want to alert your readers, as well, to how powerful readers remain open as they keep moving through a book, seeing how their ideas play out. Probably, you'll demonstrate this work on a read-aloud text that is familiar to your kids, so your students will probably also want to return to favorite texts. There is value in giving students opportunities to reread texts, and here they'll have a chance to revisit favorites, thumbing through the pages for remembered moments, reconsidering those more analytically, jotting down ideas those parts suggest, and then arguing and defending those ideas with their partners and club members. As readers talk to each other, teach them to listen carefully not for if they agree with an idea but if the author of that idea justifies it well—that is, do your readers assemble textual evidence for their arguments?

In what's probably lesson three, you may find it helpful to begin with a chart that students coauthor of the ideas and lessons that students are gathering from their revisiting of prior stories. Immediately, students will begin to see that just as stories

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are about more than one idea, an idea may also appear in more than one story. This, you may explain to them if they do not know already, is the notion of *theme*—an idea that appears in more than one story. If your students have already been in the historical fiction unit of study described in this calendar and in *Tackling Complex Texts* of the *Units of Study for Teaching Reading*, then they have bridged themes across texts before. If that's the case, then make this lesson one in which you remind them that readers call on their prior reading practices, such as being alert to how more than one text may suggest similar themes. If that seems fuzzy to your readers, then use your chart to visibly articulate themes that seem as if they appear in more than one of your read-alouds. The idea, for instance, that even a child may make a tremendous difference in a community is suggested by *Because of Winn-Dixie*. It is also suggested by *The Other Side* and Harry Potter. Demystifying "theme" so that young readers can analyze texts for their thematic implications themselves, rather than awaiting a sacrosanct, preconceived theme, may be among the most important, and early, work that happens in this unit of study. In later years, when one of your students is "told" what the theme of a novel is, that young intellectual will probably say, "Perhaps, though I also see other possibilities such as. . . ." In the same manner, your students will need to be convinced, with evidence, of the integrity of ideas that they are presented with. Reading is how we train our minds.

It may also be helpful to chart some phrases readers sometimes use when they are talking about interpretations, such as:

> When I first read this story, I thought it was just about . . . but now that I think deeper about it, I realize that really, it is also about. . . .
>
> Often people . . . but this story shows that it's possible people should. . . .
>
> I used to think . . . but now after reading this I think . . . because. . . .
>
> I learned from (the character, the event) that in life, it can be important to. . . .
>
> This story teaches us not only about . . . but also about. . . .

As students engage in this work, coach into their work by showing them that they always need to support their ideas with evidence from the text. If they select passages from the text that seem tangentially related to the main idea, then say, "Does the connection between that and your idea hit you over the head, seem totally obvious, or is it a bit hard to see? If it is not hit-you-over-the-head obvious, usually it helps to think of another example from the text or to say more about why this example seems so relevant. Perhaps your idea is more complicated than you thought at first."

So far, students have been analyzing stories they have lived and stories they have already read. For the following lessons, club members need to be in new books, so have them choose a book at the end of this session, if they haven't done so already, and get started reading it for homework.

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Because your students have been revisiting familiar texts, they'll mostly be thinking *after* they've finished the book. Now, in what's probably lesson four, you'll want to teach your readers that we don't wait until we're done with a book to begin constructing ideas and designing reading plans to investigate these ideas. You may want to go to your current read-aloud text and talk about some of the ideas the text is suggesting so far. Teach your readers to jot these down, to substantiate them by giving a little boxes-and-bullets speech to club members, and to be ready to read on, gathering evidence for these ideas. Then give them an opportunity to do the same work in their own books. Remind them that good books are about more than one idea as well, so teach them to follow more than one idea as they go forward.

Finally, in lesson five, you'll want to teach your students that powerful readers revise our ideas as we keep reading. Show them how sometimes ideas develop into more complicated ideas. Sometimes ideas we had about a text, as we keep reading, simply are no longer true—the text diverges and the story suggests alternative ideas, so readers have to remain flexible and alert. And sometimes ideas that seemed important come to seem smaller next to more significant ideas. What's important is that your readers remain alert and responsive and that they expect to keep validating their ideas and revising them. You might show students that at first *Because of Winn-Dixie* seems to be the story of a lonely girl who makes friends with a dog—teaching us, perhaps, that a dog can be a best friend. But then the story takes a new turn, and it tells about how Opal's relationship with her dog seems to change her relationship with her father, leading one to think that the story may be about how learning to love a dog can help people learn to love people, too. Readers can learn to talk about how the book's message unfolds over time by saying, "First when I started to read this, I thought that deep down, it was maybe about . . . but now as I read on, I'm finding that it is also about. . . ."

For example, if you were to read aloud *The Tiger Rising*, you might find yourself thinking aloud when Rob makes the choice to save Sistine from the group of kids who are beating her up at lunch. You might say, "Wow, Rob really surprised me by standing up for Sistine and saving her from that gang of kids. This is such a contrast to Rob who, up until this point, has shown us that he has become an expert at 'not-thinking' about anything that bothers him. Remember how earlier in the story, Rob's 'not-thinking' strategy made us grow some ideas about how a really terrible loss, like Rob losing his mom, can make people shut down? And some of us even wondered if shutting down, like Rob does, is just something that grieving people have to do to protect themselves from all the hurt. Well, after watching Rob take on Sistine's attackers and then sit with her on the bus, my thinking is starting to change a bit. Rob may be good at shutting down his feelings about everything and everyone, but I realize it's not really working for him. Rob enjoys the 'thrill' of saving Sistine, but then he's terrified of talking to her, of letting his feelings show. Maybe this story is beginning to be more about how after a terrible loss, somehow people have to learn to trust again and to let themselves grow close to others. We'll have to see if and how Rob does that."

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Part Two: Themes May Be the Same across Books, but They're Usually Developed Differently

You'll probably notice that your readers eagerly jumped in to show that an idea that is true in one text may be true in another. In fact, you can expect that they'll begin to see themes everywhere and that they'll lapse into cliché, or even into proverbs, that they'll overstate and simplify. Donna Santman, author of *Shades of Meaning: Teaching Comprehension and Interpretation*, reminds us that what is cliché to us as adults is remarkably original to a young reader. So you have to keep your face straight and be impressed when they notice that *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* and *The Other Side* both show that it's okay to be different! "It takes all kinds," as my grandmother says, one student will say. Then her club will apply that idea to all their texts eagerly. That said, our next job will be to teach students the Common Core State Standards work of analyzing *how* a text makes a theme visible—how that theme is developed, where and how you see it becoming more visible in the text, and how that development is undoubtedly different in different texts. Oliver Button and Clover from *The Other Side* are not, in fact, the same in every way. They are similar in how they tackle trouble with fortitude. They are similar in how they hold onto their dreams. They are similar in how they are lonely. But they are dissimilar in many other ways. Oliver tackles differences in gender expectations, whereas Clover tackles the color line. Oliver acts alone, whereas Clover carries others into her scheme. The time, the place, the characters, and the kind of trouble they face, are different.

In lesson one of this part, therefore, you'll praise your readers for noticing how themes live in more than one text, and you'll study the classroom charts that document these themes intently, perhaps holding up some of your read-aloud texts as you demonstrate. "You know," you may say, "I'm realizing that while some of these stories have the same theme, there's also a lot of differences in these stories. It seems to me that it would be fascinating to investigate what's *different* about stories that have the same theme. I know that when I think *people* are the same, it turns out that I can usually learn a lot from how we're different as well. For instance, I'm drawn to Dylan because he's such as avid reader—he's a lot like me. But he reads different kinds of books, and now I've learned to love a lot of those books too. Or Sarah and I share a love for the kings of England—but she loves the modern ones and I love the historical ones, so we learn a lot from each other when we pore over what's different in our knowledge. I'm thinking, for instance, of how we said, when we studied historical fiction, that a lot of our stories showed that war makes kids grow up fast. And that's true. But the war that Annemarie endures in *Number the Stars* is really different than the one that Ishmael Beah suffers in *Long Way Gone*, which I've been reading. In *Number the Stars*, the war came somewhat slowly to Annemarie, and she changed rapidly for a child, but she still had time to make sense of what was happening around her. She grew up fast, but she could do it. Whereas in *Long Way Gone*, the war comes overnight to Ishmael's village, and it all happens at such a rapid-fire pace that it's almost as if he can't grow fast enough—there's no way to make sense of what is

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happening. All this is making me realize that it will be worth studying what's *different* in stories that are linked thematically and seeing what it makes us realize. One way to study those differences is to study what's different about the setting."

You may need a lesson on some of the practicalities that help readers study and compare texts. Your readers, now, will continue to read the books they are choosing for their clubs, but they'll analyze and talk about those books in the context of other books they've read before, putting ones alongside each other that they think are related and learning now to analyze the nuances in how these stories are different as well as similar. There is more on support for clubs, for how they choose their books, for how they interact with each other, and for how they document their work, below. It may be helpful to have a student-made chart up with the titles, characters, places, and themes or issues that occur in your read-aloud texts from this year and old favorites that your class remembers. Or make color copies of the covers and hang them on the bulletin board—any kind of visible reminder helps students recall earlier texts and work with them. You can also demonstrate how to leaf through the pages of your reader's notebook, if your kids are keeping them, reminding yourself of earlier books you've read and of ideas you had in those books. And just as when you showed your students how to revisit their writer's notebooks to see new ideas in old stories, you can show them how, as you revisit and remind yourself of stories you read before, in the light of your new thinking, you have new understandings and insight.

In your third lesson of this part, you'll teach your students that just as we can study how the settings of stories that share themes are usually different, and that difference has implications for how the theme develops in the story, there are usually differences also in the characters—in their backgrounds, their perspectives and points of views, and their traits. If you examine how Oliver Button responds to trouble, for instance, in *Oliver Button Is a Sissy*, he is quiet, almost silent, about his determination. He acts in open defiance of his father's urge that he play "any kind of ball"—but he does it not by arguing, but by asking for something different—dance lessons. He doesn't ask for help when the boys bully him. He forges quietly ahead, and it is his silent fortitude that wins over some in his community, such as his father. Clover, on the other hand, also wants to be different. She too doesn't believe the same things her mother does. So both books share a similar theme (and probably several themes) that kids don't always believe the same things as their parents. But the characters show those beliefs somewhat differently. Neither child speaks in defiance, but Clover immediately enlists other children into her actions. She assumes that kids share beliefs, and in fact, the children she meets rise to those expectations, whereas Oliver is teased and bullied by his peers.

Expect that your readers will *like* to study texts deeply and to engage in intellectual work—and you'll find that they enjoy analyzing and arguing the nuances of how their stories are different. And all the time, they are training their minds. The same kind of thinking that allows lawyers to prepare defenses and researchers to create new vaccines is this paying attention to detail, poring over material, and honing ideas with intellectual zeal.

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If your students need more support with finding places in their texts where characters demonstrate how they help develop a theme in similar and different ways, point them to the moments in their narratives when characters face trouble, and coach them to analyze how characters respond to trouble. You may want, especially if your students are engaged in the parallel writing workshop unit, "Interpretive Essays," to remind them that one reason we read is not just to study themes as an intellectual exercise, but to learn how to live from the characters in stories. Bronwyn Davies, the great gender researcher, writes that children learn about possibility from the stories they encounter in school. Teach your students, thus, that readers draw conclusions about characters' traits from how they respond to trouble and then teach them to compare those traits with their own. Teach them that our characters, like our ideas, are revisable—we can at any moment choose to try to respond differently, to be different. Our own selves are a constant process of revision.

In what's probably your fifth lesson of this part of the unit, you'll teach a repertoire lesson—that is, rather than laying out a new strategy, you'll show your students how they have increased their repertoire of reading practices, and you'll show them how to access that repertoire with fluency and delight. So you may teach your students that, just as a basketball player who has been practicing dribbling and throwing drills finds in a game that he or she does all that work automatically, while simultaneously processing who is where on the court, the amount of time left in the quarter, and where the ball is going, a reader takes on all the parts of the story as it comes in, now with increased alertness and expertise and thus increased responsiveness. For example, we begin to ask ourselves early on, "What is this story beginning to be *about*?" We begin to track ideas; we collect moments along the way that support those ideas; we recall other stories we've read, and we think and talk about how the story we are reading compares to those; we weigh our own lives and decisions with those characters make; we have epiphanies where we are struck with possible life-lessons that books leave us with. Moreover, as the books we read get more complicated, things are not always what they seem. Characters who appeared trustworthy may not be, and thus their relationship to themes and lessons they demonstrate will shift. Any reader of Harry Potter knows this. But with our training, we are that basketball player, weaving with grace and power through complicated courts of deception, ruse, and opposition.

Part Three: Symbolism and Literary Devices and Their Relationship to the Meanings and Themes of Stories

Students take great joy in being introduced to symbolism and in exploring symbolism as an analytical lens. Again, remember what Donna Santman says about cliché. The notion that the fence in *The Other Side* is more than a wooden fence, that it is a metaphoric fence, is an absolute epiphany to readers who haven't investigated the history of the color line in this country. "Wait," they'll say. "This fence . . . it's not just in Clover's backyard." Investigating and articulating symbolism has tremendous

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intellectual potential for young readers. Because that fence wasn't just in Clover's yard, and that fence manifests itself differently in different places, times, and situations. Teach your students, therefore, that one way readers are moved by literature is that we are moved by the symbols that seem significant. We can begin to see and say that objects, for instance, have symbolic importance. Usually, you simply need to give a stream of examples and invite students to add to this stream during your lesson for students to grasp how symbolism works: the fence in *The Other Side* and fences in anyone's lives, the dragon in *The Paper Bag Princess* and the dragons that any of us face in our lives. Move from these obvious, explicit symbols to ones that may be less obvious and more metaphoric—the hat that symbolizes gang acceptance in Eve Bunting's *Your Move*, the chess game in that same story, the dog in *Because of Winn-Dixie*—each of these objects is laden with potential meaning.

As has been your mantra in this unit, refrain from telling your students what these symbols mean, and instead issue an invitation to explore symbolism. Your students will return to old favorites and begin to dig into the texts they are reading. Show them how to use their pencils and notebooks to articulate their ideas about symbols. Expect sketches and excitement. Expect your students to notice first the grand and obvious symbols. Expect to lament that they seem to miss the smaller, more subtle ones—and then decide whether to alert them to some of these, perhaps through disguised book club conversations: "I'm just wondering about the pitcher of water, too. Have any of you wondered about that?" Or by showing how readers sometimes return to old favorites and pore over them again, reconsidering the significance of objects and moments that seemed mysterious before. It does help to teach students that in good stories, details matter.

In your second lesson of this part, you'll turn to another symbolic element that may be surprisingly new to students—the notion that titles can be symbolic as well. You'll teach your readers that often a moment comes in our reading when we realize that the title may have significance. Sometimes it is at the end of the story, and sometimes earlier in the story, when we'll come upon a line, or a scene, that seems to directly refer back to the title. Invite your readers to consider what "the other side," and "fly away home," and "tiger rising" mean in the context of the stories. Invite them to consider why it's *Because of Winn-Dixie* and not simply *Winn-Dixie*. Your book clubs will hopefully be zealous about returning to their conversations and arguing and defending what the titles of books they have read might mean. Usually titles have metaphoric significance, often deeply related to possible meanings of the story—what the story may be *about*. Robb gains courage; he emerges from a deeply hidden self; he is a tiger rising; he shows us that we, too, can become tigers rising.

In the following couple of sessions, you have some choices about how to increase your students' flexibility and skill with analytical thinking and synthesis in complex texts. One option is to teach them about literary devices, such as foreshadowing, repetition, and perspective, and how these devices help an author develop and complicate themes. Essentially, for students this age, we teach them that powerful readers know that in good stories, details matter, and we ask ourselves about details that seem to be

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in the text without other context. For example, if there is a cat, and you are wondering why the cat is in that scene, that is the same literary device as Chekov's gun—if there's a gun in Act One, you can expect it to go off in Act Three. It's probably there as *foreshadowing*. Often, we understand how events have been foreshadowed when we *finish* a text—so you may demonstrate how we return to the beginning of a story sometimes, seeing more and delighting in how clever the author was to lay down a trail of breadcrumbs. Harry Potter readers are expert at this kind of synthesis—they can connect clues and events across literally thousands of pages of texts, and they are alert to twists. Small scenes along the way alerted Harry Potter readers to the theme that characters are not always what they seem, that Snape might be cruel but also heroic, that small character flaws may not mean the impossibility of greatness.

Return to the beginning of *Tiger Rising* and you'll find so many clues there about Robb's character, troubles, and potential, which didn't really make that much sense when we read the chapter the first time. It's only later that we recall them or revisit them. *Edward's Eyes* also demonstrates the significance of foreshadowing beautifully. Even before you begin the story, you're pretty sure there's something special about Edward. And you're pretty sure that he's dead. There are two aspects of understanding foreshadowing that help readers navigate more complex texts. One aspect is that it teaches a discipline of rapid, on-the-run rereading. Anyone who has tackled a complicated text knows that we often turn back quickly, recalling something that seems connected, that was perhaps foreshadowed earlier, and that we now recognize as being significant. So we turn back, rapidly. A second aspect of understanding the potential significance of foreshadowing is that we are alert to details that might otherwise seem random. It's the Chekov's gun syndrome. If the author inserts a detail that seems somewhat unexplained, chances are that the reader will find that it matters later, both to what happens in the story and to what the story may mean or be about. Analyzing foreshadowing well means that readers must synthesize across many, many pages of texts and that they must be comfortable holding on to some unexplained questions as they read, having faith that later, the answers will be revealed.

Another literary device that is worth teaching not just in poetry but in reading and analyzing literature is repetition. Teach your readers, for instance, that it's not just objects that may be repeated in a text. Sometimes it is lines, and sometimes there are parallel scenes, or moments—when things are almost the same but perhaps slightly different. In *Number the Stars*, for instance, the moment comes in the text when that actual line appears—more than once. An alert reader realizes that there is probably significance in that repetition. You might return to familiar read-alouds to show your readers that sometimes, a bell goes off in the reader's head, and we say to ourselves—this is here more than once. I wonder if it's important? In *Fly Away Home*, for instance, the narrator speaks repeatedly about the blue clothes they wear—the blue shirts, the blue jeans, the blue bags. The character is, clearly, not just wearing blue clothes, he *is* blue. But it's the repetition that alerts us to the character's mood—that the author chooses to make so many things blue, in repetition that alerts the reader that blue may matter. Ultimately the boy perhaps shows us that we may feel blue, but we can still hold onto hope.

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Finally, you've undoubtedly taught your students before to analyze characters' perspectives and points of view, but this may be an apt time to return to that teaching and show them how to analyze and compare the significance of characters' perspectives to the possible meanings of a story. For instance, the narrator in *Fly Away Home* has a different perspective on airports than the other travelers in the story do—and thus he teaches us that places can seem very different, based on your condition. New Yorkers, for instance, know that on any given day the city may feel very different to different characters in it. If this is new teaching to your students, you'll want to teach them how to really articulate characters' perspectives by laying down their own and trying to say what it must be like for the character in the story, even to try speaking in that character's voice about their emotions and point of view. If it is reteaching, make this a repertoire lesson, and show your students now how to use what they know about analyzing characters' perspectives to say more about potential meanings and themes of the story.

Coaching into Clubs

Some of your clubs may need some coaching in choosing books. They may, for instance, think that as they finish one book, in which they have talked long about a theme such as kids sometimes crack under family pressures, they may begin to search for a second book by expecting that theme to be listed on the back cover! You'll want to remind your students that good books are about many ideas and that they should trust that as they begin a second book, pretty much any good book is going to be full of ideas, and some of those ideas will turn out to be related to those in their first book. If you know that there are one or two books that will undoubtedly turn up some of the same ideas, of course, you could steer some of your club members in that direction—especially a club of more struggling readers, who may benefit from seeing obvious links between their two novels. Check in with club members as they finish their first novel and are about to begin their second novel. The more readers are tracking multiple ideas, rather than one single idea, the more they'll be ready to see thematic connections across novels.

You may also find that readers move easily into seeing that books are related by theme, but they then don't seem to expect that the books will also have many differences, and these differences will also affect the meaning of the story. Visit with clubs as they are having conversations, and if needed, push them to look at the ways in which the time or place of the novels they are discussing are different, or the characters' traits are different, and how those differences affect the ideas these books suggest.

To scaffold some of our students in their club conversations, you might try using a large index card that on one side says *talk*, and on the other side says *essayists*. This tool can be placed in between the club to support them as they reach to talk like essayists. Readers might begin talk by sharing out lots of ideas, and once they reach a place where they think, "Oh! That's it, we need to talk long about this one," readers

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can flip over the card to a series of prompts that support talking like essayists. Some prompts might include:

> One idea this book suggests is. . . .
>
> One example that shows (this idea) is . . . because. . . .
>
> Another example that shows (this idea) is . . . because. . . .
>
> This makes me realize/think that. . . .

Or

> I used to think this book was about . . . because. . . .
>
> Now I think this book is about . . . because. . . .
>
> This makes me realize/think that. . . .

Or

> These two books are similar because they both teach that. . . .
>
> On the one hand, though, in the first book. . . .
>
> On the other hand, in the second book. . . .
>
> This makes me realize/think that. . . .

A Big Question for readers to ask in club conversations is, "How do two or three different books advance the same theme differently?" These conversations will help when you have readers rehearsing and writing multiple fast-draft compare-and-contrast essays on books that seem to address similar themes. Authors may send their characters on strikingly (or at least somewhat) different journeys toward addressing and resolving a similar issue or have them (and readers through them) learn variations of the same life-lesson. In both *Those Shoes* and *Fly Away Home* the main characters must learn to go without something they desperately want. Both belong to families that struggle financially. And both boys learn to give up—at least for now—the dream of having something. For one boy it's a pair of designer shoes; for the other it's a home. The latter may seem a much larger want, but to Jeremy, those shoes mean so much more than a pair of shoes. And yet the paths these two boys follow toward dealing with not having what others around them have diverge. Jeremy comes close to getting what he wants, only to discover that it isn't really possible to use the shoes himself (they are a size too small) and instead, gives them to his friend, for whom the shoes are a perfect fit. We might say that Jeremy learns (and

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we learn, too) that making someone else's dream come true may not take away our own longing but can fill something else inside of us. Meanwhile, in *Fly Away Home*, Andrew never comes close to getting out of the airport; he and his dad scrape together money for small things, like food, but aren't anywhere near to having the money to rent an apartment. But Andrew finds hope in a little bird that manages, after many tries, to free itself from the airport, and he begins to take small steps toward helping his dad save. One lesson here might be that working toward a dream is sometimes enough to keep you going. The point is that both of these stories address some of the same themes, but the journeys the characters take are different. Rehearsing and writing fast-draft essays will help your students become adept at this kind of thinking, reading, and writing work.

Additional Resources

This unit is a good match for your students if they have learned to read between the lines and infer about characters' emotions and traits, if they pay attention to the settings in their stories, and if they use strategies they know to figure out unfamiliar words and difficult parts of their texts as they read. If any of that work seems like it still challenges your readers, you may want to return to Unit Two: "Following Characters into Meaning" and perhaps the book club unit on historical fiction, which precedes this unit. In those units, you'll find more teaching points to support inferring about characters and navigating complex fiction. You might involve your students in assessing their readiness for this unit of study by inviting them to demonstrate a rich partner discussion about their books—and then listen for how they talk about characters' changes and about the storylines in their novels. If they're doing that work well, onward!

By this time of year, students should be choosing books wisely, using their pens to jot and keep track of characters and events in their stories, and monitoring their comprehension and stamina independently. That is, they shouldn't need you to be constantly checking on how reading is going for them—they should know how to do that for themselves. Nevertheless, you'll want to keep an eye on these essentials as your class moves into the heady intellectual work of interpretation. Kids love to talk about ideas in their stories—often more than they love to keep track of how much they are actually reading. Sometimes, as they read within book clubs, especially, they'll begin to slow down as readers. If one of your goals was to slow down your readers, because you have avid "plot junkie" readers who speed through books, then fine. If you have readers who need to keep reading at a steady pace, with lots of time for eyes on print, keep an eye on reading logs and make time for kids to look over their logs with their club members to make sure they are getting enough reading done.

As your kids begin to develop ideas about the novels they are reading, you may find that they are quick to submit ideas and slower to provide evidence, defend, and track those ideas. They love to call out a theme but need support in showing how that theme develops across a novel or across texts. You'll see that the unit offers many

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strategies for finding the parts of texts that are often worth lingering in, and you'll want to look at your students' reader's notebooks and/or Post-its and listen to their conversations, to make sure they are using what they know about argument to investigate, analyze, and defend their thematic hypotheses.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Considering the Implications of Stories

- "Today I want to teach you that powerful readers know that reading is much more than finding out what characters do or what happens in stories. We know that stories are about ideas, and those ideas have the power to teach us life-lessons. We may, therefore, reconsider stories we've lived or read and rethink them in terms of the lessons or ideas they suggest. We keep in mind that good stories are about more than one idea. There may be many possible meanings of a story."

- "Today I want to teach you that as a reader, it is especially worth paying attention to moments where characters experience strong emotions or where characters make critical choices. These are the places where we as readers may learn significant lessons."

- "Today I want to teach you that as readers, we revise our original ideas as the story develops. We expect to back up our ideas with evidence from the text, and we mark, collect, and ponder moments in the text that support our ideas."

- "Today I want to teach you that just as stories are about more than one idea, ideas live in more than one story. We can find the same idea across different texts—stories, nonfiction, and even our life stories. Readers begin to compare texts that share similar themes, recalling texts we've already read and remaining alert to new texts, both literary and nonfiction, that seem to deal with similar ideas, issues, or themes."

Part Two: Analyzing Differences: Becoming a More Detailed Reader

- "Today I want to teach you that readers realize that while stories may share the same theme, there are still many differences between stories that are worth studying. One difference we may focus on is setting—differences in the time and place where stories happen. Readers understand that these differences affect the meaning."

- "Today I want to teach you that as readers begin to compare texts, we often need to develop some systems to help us recall the texts we've read. Sometimes

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making charts that list the titles, issues or themes, and characters helps us to quickly recall texts so that we can move to analyzing them. This supports us as we revisit important parts of a text we've read before and place these parts against ones we are reading now. We think across these parts by noting what's similar, what's different, and how this affects our ideas."

- "Today I want to teach you that just as we may analyze the differences in the settings of stories that are linked by theme, powerful readers often analyze the differences in characters as well. We may pay attention to their backgrounds, relationships, pressures, perspectives, and how they respond to trouble. We study how those characteristics affect our ideas about the themes."

- "Today I want to teach you that just as we can compare how different characters respond to trouble in thematically linked texts, we can compare ourselves to the characters we are studying. Doing this highlights a powerful truth that just as characters in literature often change in response to trouble, we too can change in response to our reading. That is, we can allow the characters in our stories to change how we think, feel, and act in the world."

- "Athletes access all their skills from the moment a competition begins, and so do readers. We access all our reading practices from the moment we start reading. Today I want to teach you that as we read, we try to process what is happening in the story, at the same time as we ask ourselves, 'What is this story starting to be about?' And then we keep adding in new information and having new insights, as we read."

Part Three: Literary Devices and Their Effect on How We Are Affected by Texts

- "Today I want to teach you that powerful readers allow the texts we read to affect us in powerful ways. We pay attention to the objects that repeat in our texts, working to understand the deeper significance these objects may hold. We understand that physical objects may act as symbols for themes and ideas."

- "Today I want to teach you that another part of the text that is often symbolic is the title. Readers often think and talk about the potential meanings of titles. We do this work part way through our reading and as we finish a text."

- "Today I want to teach you that readers know that in good stories, details matter. We read with a special alertness to the details of our texts. We work to figure out the possible meanings of perplexing or unexplained details."

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- "Today I want to teach you that readers also pay special attention to repetition—to lines or scenes that feel parallel. Usually there will be significance in those repeated moments, and readers think, talk, and write about their potential meaning."

- "Today I want to teach you that readers analyze characters' perspectives and points of view as a way to find deeper meanings in texts. One way they might do this is to think about the significance of characters' perspectives on the possible meanings of a story. Readers might ask themselves, 'How does the story go because this character is telling it? Would it go differently if a different character was telling the story?' "

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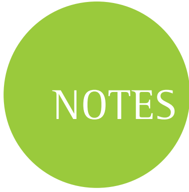
NOTES

COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Reading Workshop

GRADE 6

LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT

An imprint of Heinemann
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801–3912
www.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

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"Dedicated to Teachers" is a trademark of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

ISBN-13: 978-0-325-04312-8
ISBN-10: 0-325-04312-4

EDITORS:
Kate Montgomery and *Teva Blair*

PRODUCTION:
Vicki Kasabian

TYPESETTER:
Publishers' Design and Production Services, Inc.

COVER AND INTERIOR DESIGNS:
Jenny Jensen Greenleaf

COVER PHOTOTOGRAPHY:
Peter Cunningham, www.petercunninghamphotography.com

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Overview of the Year for Sixth-Grade Readers

SEPTEMBER	Unit 1: Agency and Independence: Launching Reading Workshop with Experienced Readers
OCTOBER	Unit 2: Investigating Characters across Series
NOVEMBER	Unit 3: Nonfiction Reading: Navigating Expository, Narrative, and Hybrid Nonfiction
DECEMBER	Unit 4: Nonfiction Research Clubs: Developing Analytical Lenses for Informational Reading
JANUARY	Unit 5: Historical Fiction Book Clubs: Tackling Complex Texts
FEBRUARY/MARCH	Unit 6: Developing Analytical Reading Practices: Interpretation
MARCH/APRIL	Unit 7: Test Preparation
MAY	Unit 8: Social Issues Book Clubs
JUNE	Unit 9: From Author Studies to Independent Projects: Launching a Summer of Reading

This year we have differentiated the reading calendar for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, so that we give extra support in learning to read closely and with high volume and stamina in sixth grade and move toward more interpretive reading and independence in seventh and eighth grade, and culminating in some "reading for high school" experiences in eighth grade. You'll notice the influence of the

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Common Core State Standards throughout. This year, we move sixth graders right into series books in October. Series reading aims to get kids reading with high volume and at a steady rate. All our research shows that kids who are devoted to a series get more reading done. They move more rapidly through books, and they also move rapidly toward higher-level synthesis work. Just think of Harry Potter readers, who synthesize events across literally thousands of pages of text. We follow this work with two units of study in nonfiction reading, and we incorporate nonfiction in the historical fiction and interpretation units as well. We think that all this reading work will set your sixth graders up to become tremendously strong readers who know authors and genres, who are adept at reading closely, and who are ready to dive into the deep interpretation work that awaits them in more complex novels.

We strongly urge you to give the nonfiction reading units to your science and social studies teachers, so that students get additional instruction and opportunities for repeated practice in nonfiction reading.

This year's curricular calendar has especially been designed with the new Common Core State Standards in mind. These standards call for a thinking curriculum that will prepare learners for the twenty-first century. The standards call for a greater emphasis on higher-level comprehension skills. The standards also led us to spotlight poetry, fairy tales, folk tales and myths, and cross-text work. The other biggest change that informed this curricular calendar is that after almost two decades of research and development work, *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* is available, and we're sure the units will be useful to sixth-grade teachers. This document incorporates a great deal of the thinking and writing that went into those units. We're also eager, as always, to help share resources among teachers. If you devise a new unit of study that you are willing to share with other teachers, please send it to us at contact@readingandwritingproject.com.

The calendar starts with an overview of essential structures and assessment tools. Following that is a description of each unit of study. The narrative for each unit should give you enough information for you to plan ahead. It will recommend some touchstone texts, for instance, and it will help you foresee and have a deep understanding of the probable arcs of your teaching. At the end of the unit, you'll also find a toolkit of teaching points for the unit, followed by some sample lessons written out in full. The teaching points fit within an overarching path, within which are some "bends in the road," which are basically the smaller parts of the unit. For almost all units, we offer two or three possible paths teachers and students might follow, so that you may differentiate your teaching for the kinds of readers in your care. Our website, www.readingandwritingproject.com, has many book lists to support the units.

We are aware that there are scores of ways in which a yearlong reading and writing curriculum could unfold for any one grade level and that this is just one possible plan. The Reading and Writing Project cannot support every conceivable journey of study, and so we put forth one recommended path, which we will support with curricular materials and a calendar of conference days. Although we hope and expect that the teachers in schools linked to the Project will study our recommended curricular calendar with great care, we do not expect that you necessarily follow all of the recommendations in this document. We encourage you to gather your own sources of

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information, tap into your own passions and interests, and devise a plan that incorporates and also adapts the collective wisdom in this document. We also highly recommend the following texts that will help middle school teachers understand the teaching of reading and adolescent literacy: Lucy Calkins and colleagues' *Units of Study for Teaching Reading: A Curriculum for the Reading Workshop, Grades 3–5*; Donna Santman's *Shades of Meaning: Comprehension and Interpretation in Middle School*; Kylene Beers' *When Kids Can't Read What Teachers Can Do*; *Adolescent Literacy*, edited by Kylene Beers, Robert Probst, and Linda Rief; and Richard Allington's *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers*.

Our emphasis is on fostering a reading environment within which students set independent reading goals and strive to meet them. In *Outliers,* Malcolm Gladwell's study of conditions that allow for extraordinary success, Gladwell states that the single most important condition is that the person be allowed an opportunity to work hard. Without that opportunity, all else is for naught. This curriculum above all creates an opportunity for students to work hard on their reading. It is a demanding reading curriculum. It emphasizes personal responsibility and self-initiation on the part of students, and it demands reading expertise and a passion for literature on the part of the teacher. We think these qualities are crucial aspects of students' becoming the kinds of young adults who have agency in their educational futures.

Bands of Text Complexity

A word about the readers in your class, the books in your library, and bands of difficulty. Within the units of study, you'll see references to bands of levels—for sixth grade, in particular, R/S/T, which some of your more struggling readers may be reading in; U/V/W, which many sixth graders will be reading; and X/Y/Z, which some of your stronger readers will be reading. We have found that it is useful for teachers and readers to study the complexity of texts within these bands, usually by studying some prototypical texts within a band (*The Tiger Rising* for R/S/T, *The Lightning Thief* for U/V/W, and *The Hunger Games* for X/Y/Z). This kind of study particularly helps teachers differentiate their instruction in conferences, small-group work, and unit planning, so that they teach toward the complexities of the books the kids are actually holding.

At levels R/S/T, for instance, students will find that holding on to the central plotline becomes increasingly difficult because seemingly minor characters may end up being important to the plot. This means that readers need to hold minor characters and subordinate plots in mind. Readers' predictions, for example, might include the expectation that a character who made a somewhat fleeting appearance or a plotline that seemed unrelated to the main storyline could return to play a more important role. At this level of text difficulty, readers need to follow not only the evolving plotline but also the evolving setting. The setting becomes a force in the story, influencing characters and the plot just as, say, an antagonist might. In historical fiction, for example, readers need to construct a timeline of historical events as well as a timeline of the protagonist's main events, and more than that, to see the two timelines intersect. An

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event happens in the world, and that event becomes part of the chain of cause-and-effect that motors the story's plot. In books within this band of difficulty, characters continue to be complex, and now their character traits are often not explicitly stated. Readers need to infer these from their actions.

Some of your readers will be reading at the U/V/W levels of text difficulty, which means that the storylines are becoming increasingly complicated. Characters will face more than one problem, some problems aren't resolved by the end of the story, relationships change, and some characters may even be unreliable. There are often twists and turns in time, and the character is affected by things that happened long ago. Sometimes the reader even infers ahead of the character, gathering up clues that the main character hasn't yet put together. Things that happen are often separated by many pages as well, so that discerning cause-and-effect and character motivation challenges the reader more. Take a look at what levels or what kinds of books your kids are mostly reading, and tailor your unit so that you do, in fact, teach them to read, with depth and complexity, the books they are holding.

Some of your readers will also be reading X/Y/Z books, such as *The Book Thief* and *The Hunger Games*. In these books, the characters are increasingly complex. They may bump into social issues and discourse that are outside their control. Their lives are shaped by their environments, their family circumstances, their internal flaws—and all of these will have consequences on their emerging, shifting characters. The books at this level also expect that the reader has accumulated some cultural and historical knowledge, since many of the books have historical and allegorical references. There's also a way in which the narratives operate at a symbolic level—they are often implicit social commentary.

Assessment

We all know the joy of finding a book that is "just-right" for us. When we are well matched with a book, reading can be one of life's greatest joys; on the other hand, when a book is "all-wrong" instead of "just-right" for us, reading can feel interminable, humiliating, and tedious. There will never be a single litmus-paper test that can accurately match a student with books, but as teachers we can make some progress toward this goal if we provide each student with four things: (1) the opportunity to choose books that he or she wants to read; (2) a community of other readers who promote and summarize and talk about books with enthusiasm; (3) books that are easy enough for the reader that he or she will be given lots of opportunities for highly successful reading; and (4) encouragement to occasionally read a text that is just a little challenging, and the scaffolding to make the experience fruitful.

Assessing reading is enormously complex. Reading is every bit as rich, multilayered, and invisible as thinking itself. Anyone who aspires to separate one strand of reading from all the rest and then to label and measure that one strand or aspect of reading must approach this effort with proper humility. No number, no label, no indicator, is adequate for the task. Still, as responsible people, teachers need to assess

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students' reading in ways that give us as full a view as possible. Many middle school teachers assess readers using the books they are holding in their hands. Simply assess their accuracy, their fluency, and their comprehension, right in the text, and you'll have a window into how well they are matched to books. Also, by middle school we want to teach kids to monitor their own comprehension. That said, some of your kids, notably any who did not pass the state test, read below grade level, and you need to know what level they do read, so that you know if you have books for them.

On our website, you'll find an assessment to gauge your readers' levels when necessary. This tool contains two passages at each text level (A–Z and early adult texts), ranging in length from 20–400 plus words, followed by literal and inferential comprehension questions for each passage. Students read the text at one level aloud to teachers, who record reading behaviors and miscues. Teachers record miscues for 100 words; if the student reads with 95%–100% accuracy, the student reads the remainder of the passage silently and then answers questions (ideally answering at least three of the four questions correctly). Through this assessment, a teacher can ascertain the general level of text difficulty that a student is able to read with ease and comprehension.

If your school chooses to use the TCRWP reading level assessment, you'll conduct an independent reading inventory of a student's work with leveled texts in order to learn the text level that the student can read with 96% accuracy and strong comprehension. The truth is that using a short passage and a handful of questions to ascertain whether a child can read, say, a T or a V level text is not perfect. We've also been using some book-length assessment tools, and these are described in the Assessment Interludes sections of the units of study. But the system of tracking readers' progress along a gradient of text difficulty does provide an infrastructure for your reading workshop and allows you to have some handle on kids' progress, especially the kids who read below grade level. Most middle school teachers can't really assess all our kids formally in the limited time most of us have with them, so you'll want to focus on those who will most benefit from a formal assessment.

If you'd like to see the chart of benchmark levels for each grade, visit our website at www.readingandwritingproject.com.

You'll also want to track each student's reading rate and note the way this changes over time. Here's a table that shows *targeted* reading rates (words per minute), by grade level:

General Range of Adequate Reading Rates by Grade Level

Grade	**WPM**	**Grade**	**WPM**
5	170–195	8	235–270
6	195–220	9	250–270
7	215–245	12	250–300

Harris and Sipay (1990)

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Organizing the Library

Many middle school reading workshops in which students are choosing books rapidly, getting a lot of reading done, and following up on series, genres, and authors they come to love, look like this: the books are arranged in baskets by series, authors, and genres and then either leveled within those baskets or marked by band on the outside of the basket. By eighth grade, you may be able to use baskets that are just devoted to authors, series, and genres. A basket might be devoted, for instance, to the Demonata series, the Spiderwick Chronicles, the Chronicles of Narnia, the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series, as well as to Judy Blume, Jacqueline Woodson, Walter Dean Myers, Sharon Draper, Maya Angelou, and so forth. Most series are within a range of a few levels. Organizing the library this way makes it easy for readers to do more powerful reading work. You want your students to read all of Judy Blume's novels if they love her. You want them to read the entire Narnia series once they get started. Here's the thing—you also want them to be able to read them in order, if possible. It is incredibly interesting to read all of Judy Blume's novels, for instance, in the order in which they were written—it's almost like reading social history. Much more important, though, is that the series be available in order. If students read series books randomly, they can't do the higher-level inferring we want them to. They can't track character changes or infer cause and effect or character motivation. They're almost relegated to reading for plot. So take a look at your libraries and do the best you can to have students reorder them into interesting and engaging baskets of series, genres, and authors, while maintaining levels or bands of levels that help kids move along as readers. By seventh and eighth grade they may no longer need to pay much attention to levels, but in sixth grade, many young readers often find levels helpful when choosing books rapidly.

Maintaining Reading Statistics

We recommend that schools establish and implement policies so that each student in the school maintains a daily record of the books he or she reads in school and at home. There are a variety of ways this log can be kept, including using digital forms. The log might contain the date, the title, the numbers of minutes the student spent reading, and the number of pages, for instance. These logs are not places for responses to reading, nor do students write book summaries in them. They are simply statistics such as a baseball player or a marathon runner might keep. When people work at getting better at something, they almost always keep statistics. Some middle school teachers are also having great success asking students to keep track of their reading online, at www.goodreads.com: teachers create a closed classroom site, and kids record the books they have read and want to read and can write reading responses on their own books and to each other if they desire—it's a social networking site for readers. As you might imagine, it's more work for a teacher to launch and supervise this site, but then adolescent readers show that they *want* to record and respond to their reading, which is

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great. Some readers are also using the calendar feature on their phones to track their reading.

The most important thing is that you give students opportunities to *reflect* on their statistics, asking themselves: "How is reading going for me? What conditions seem to help me get the most reading done? What fix-it strategies might I use to improve my reading?" Students can work analytically with their partners to notice and think about changes in the average number of pages they read. Students can also notice the genre choices made over time and the relationship between genres or levels and volume. They can also discuss patterns revealed by the time they spend reading at home versus at school. The logs are an irreplaceable window into students' reading lives. It's also helpful to gather logs across a grade after a month, or across grades, and compare how much students are reading and how they are moving through books.

School leaders, as well as teachers, should save and study these critical records. For example:

- A general rule of thumb is that a student should usually be able to read approximately three quarters of a page to a page a minute. (This rule of thumb works for texts of varying levels because generally, as the pages become denser, the reader's abilities also become stronger.) A teacher and/or a principal will want to take notice if a student seems to be reading a book at dramatically slower paces than three quarters of a page a minute. For example, alarms should go off if a student reads eight pages in thirty minutes. Why is the student not reading closer to twenty-four pages in that length of time? There may, of course, be good reasons, but this should raise a flag that something in the student's reading is not "just right."
- If a student reads an amount—say, thirty-four pages during half an hour—in school, then brings that same book home and claims to read a much smaller amount—say, eight pages during half an hour—alarms should go off. Is the student making enough time for reading at home? Does the student need support finding places and times to continue his or her reading?

Above all, student logs are a way to be sure that everyone—teachers, principals, and students—is aware of the volume of reading that students are doing. Dick Allington's research suggests that it takes a student reading two hundred words per minute eight hours to read *Hatchet*. Assuming that your students read for thirty minutes in class and another thirty to sixty minutes at home and they read at a rate of two hundred words per minute, you should expect a student to finish reading *Hatchet* in five to eight days, which seems entirely reasonable. You may find that a particular student takes twice as long to read *Hatchet*. This should prompt some research. Why is this student reading especially slowly? If the student is reading below 120 accurate words per minute, alarm bells should go off. This student should be reading easier texts! Or perhaps the student is sitting in front of a text rather than reading it.

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Finding Time to Assess at the Start of the Year

At the start of the year, teachers need to confer with readers. We are not saying that you have to start with a formal assessment. You do, though, have to ensure that every student is holding a book he or she can actually read. If you know students' reading levels from a prior year, then assume they can read at least at those levels and have them choose within those levels. Letting them choose authors, series, and titles they're confident they can finish within a week helps keep them within reasonable levels as well. If you don't know their levels, have them choose books they can read at a quick pace to start and watch their reading habits for a few days. See if they are making progress through their books. Watch their body language: are they engaged? If they seem distracted, ask them to read aloud a small part to you and/or talk a little about the book. You'll quickly get a sense of which kids are reading a book that is too hard or way too easy.

Your first priority will be to assess any reader who seems not to be reading. Watch for signs of disengagement: the head that revolves, the student who is always losing his or her place, the adolescent who uses reading time as a chance to get a drink of water or go to the bathroom. Then move to the readers who seem to be reading slowly and see what's going on with them. Pretty soon, you'll have an idea of what your readers are doing. Ask them to jot some Post-its with their thoughts as well, and you'll see what kind of thinking work they're doing for a few days—another window into their understanding of their novels.

At some point, probably in late October, you'll want to take some time to deeply assess the readers who are not clearly at or above grade level.

The Components of Balanced Literacy

The term *balanced literacy* comes, in part, from the recognition that readers need a variety of opportunities to learn. The reading workshop provides students time to read with a mentor who is a passionately engaged reader and wears the love of reading on her or his sleeve, one who offers opportunities to talk and sometimes write about reading, a mentor who offers explicit instruction in the skills and strategies of proficient reading. All of this is incredibly important, but alone it is not sufficient. Students also need the opportunities to learn that can be provided by the other components of balanced literacy.

They need above all to write. We assume that the reading workshop, as described in these pages, is balanced by a daily writing workshop, and we assume TCRWP teachers will refer to the writing curricular calendar for help with writing. Then, too, students also need opportunities to hear wonderful literature read aloud and frequent opportunities to participate in book talks about the read-aloud text. We hope teachers read aloud and lead interactive read-aloud sessions several times a week. Students need opportunities to read texts within content areas and to receive instruction in reading those texts well. And students who struggle with fluency (that is, students who read

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slowly and robotically) need opportunities to participate in shared reading and in repeated oral readings.

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is crucial even in instances where the teacher does nothing more than read spectacular literature aloud in such a way that students listen with rapt attention, clamoring for more. The payoff for reading aloud becomes even greater when teachers read aloud from a wide range of genres, which generally happens when teachers comb reading aloud into all parts of the days, regarding reading aloud as a terrific resource during science, social studies, math, and so on. This can be done by creating a schoolwide read-aloud schedule.

If you are fortunate enough to have a schedule that allows for a one-hour reading workshop, then it is possible to work in a read-aloud, a minilesson, and independent reading each day. If you have only forty or forty-five minutes for reading workshop, you probably can't work all pieces in each day; you might consider creating a schedule like this:

Monday	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**
Read-aloud and talk (about 20 minutes) Independent reading (about 25 minutes)	Minilesson (about 10 minutes) Independent reading (about 30 minutes) Share and/or partner talk (about 5 minutes)	Read-aloud and talk (about 20 minutes) Independent reading (about 25 minutes)	Minilesson (about 10 minutes) Independent reading (about 30 minutes) Share and/or partner talk (about 5 minutes)	Independent reading and small-group work (about 45 minutes)

If you are working within forty- or forty-five-minute periods, we encourage you to rally your colleagues in joining you in a study of the benefits of reading aloud. Current research supports the tremendous benefits of daily read-alouds and their relationship to promoting growth in independent reading. Perhaps you might get the science and social studies teachers to read aloud for twenty minutes just one time a week from a piece that connects to their current unit of study. It might be that ELA teachers read aloud to students on Mondays and Wednesdays, science teachers read aloud once a week on Tuesdays, and social studies teachers read aloud once a week on Thursdays. With just a bit of planning, you could ensure that your students are engaging with both narrative and non-narrative texts each week across many topics and subjects. The content-area teachers may be amazed at how the read-aloud supports their units of study and increases student interest and knowledge.

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The best way to tap into the potential power of reading aloud, however, is to use the read-alouds and book talks as ways to explicitly teach the skills of higher-level comprehension. To do this, a teacher first reads the upcoming section of the read-aloud book to himself or herself, noticing the mind-work that he or she does while reading. Then the teacher decides whether to use the upcoming read-aloud to help students draw on their full repertoire of reading strategies or to angle the read-aloud to support the development of a particular comprehension skill. Based on this decision, the teacher decides to demonstrate and then scaffold students in using either one or many skills and strategies.

If you choose carefully, the read-aloud text can support the independent reading your students are doing. For example, if the class is engaged in the unit of study on character (and students are thinking about characters as they read independently), you'd be wise to read aloud a chapter book with strong characters who change over the course of the text. This means that the read-aloud book will offer opportunities for deep talk about characters. If, on the other hand, the class is working on nonfiction, and some of the students' independent reading involves nonfiction texts, you will want to read aloud nonfiction texts that allow you to show students how nonfiction readers talk and think about and across texts.

Whatever skill you aim to teach, it's essential that you read in ways that not only demonstrate skills but above all bring stories to life. Read with expression, fluency, intonation, and good pacing so that students feel as if they are a part of the story and understand that this is what good reading sounds and feels like.

Supporting Students' Vocabulary

Teachers are wise to recognize that we need to model not only a love of books and of writing but also a fascination with words themselves. If you wear your love of language on your sleeve, exuding interest in words and taking great pleasure in them, you'll help your students be more attentive to vocabulary.

Research is clear: the single most important thing you can do to enhance your students' knowledge of words is to lure your students into lots and lots and lots of reading. If students read a diverse range of books, they'll encounter a wider range of words. The vocabulary in historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, and nonfiction will often be richer than vocabulary in realistic fiction and mysteries.

We have found this last year that word study based on Donald Bear et al.'s *Words Their Way* has helped a lot of middle school students who struggle with reading learn the spelling and word patterns they, for whatever reason, may have missed when they were younger. You may want to assess your middle school students for high-frequency words and spelling stage to see if some of them would benefit from this kind of word study. Those assessments are available on our website.

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UNIT FOUR

Nonfiction Research Clubs

Developing Analytical Lenses for Informational Reading

DECEMBER

As we have found in fiction book clubs, our middle school students often outgrow themselves very quickly when reading and talking in the company of their peers. Book clubs support both the social aspects of "getting things done" as well as analytical muscles that lead students to read in more thoughtful ways, pushing them to see and think things about their books that they have not before. This year we are suggesting that you draw on some of that enthusiasm and steer it toward the nonfiction reading work your students will be doing. In this unit, you'll build on all the essential nonfiction comprehension reading skills you taught in the prior unit, and you'll add new work that teaches students to compare and contrast texts, analyze their claims and arguments, investigate authors' points of view, critique, and design their own independent analysis of urgent nonfiction research topics that they'll pursue in small research groups.

The Common Core State Standards emphasize students' abilities not only to restate the information a text teaches but also to analyze the author's claims and the validity of the argument presented, as do Norman Webb's "depth of knowledge" levels. To do that kind of high-level, critical analytical work, students need to read more than one text on a subject. In effect, they must become expert at gathering information *and* at analyzing how that information is conveyed, so that they can, indeed, evaluate texts rather than simply summarize them. It's exciting intellectual work that you'll embark on with your students—and they'll surprise you with how critical they can be as readers and thinkers given the opportunity, the expert instruction, and the resources to develop their own stances on important subjects.

It's also important for their academic and professional success that students learn to do rapid, on-the-run research and synthesizing rather than pore for days over the

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illustrations in a book or the few paragraphs of text in a short article. The days when students or adults spent weeks or months finding resources and more weeks or months sifting through the parts of those resources that would most help their research have shifted to a time now when students and adults need to be able to do research quickly and efficiently. All it takes today to look up the latest genome project or find the number of polar animals displaced by the melting of ice caps is the click of a button; the world is coming to think of the Internet as an eight-billion-page encyclopedia. Yet even the most cursory research requires certain literacy muscles: the ability to pick the key words to search, the ability to pick one source of information to trust over many others, the ability to make up our own mind about aspects of a topic once we've read enough about it. Moreover, these muscles need to be deployed with automaticity. Information changes now in the blink of an eye. If a student takes six weeks to research the political system of Egypt, for instance, the information gleaned at the start of the six weeks may no longer be valid by the end of the six weeks!

Most of our students, of course, will be researching more stable topics, about which they can find lots of information in a few well-chosen books and articles, as well as on a couple of websites—but you'll be teaching them, in this unit, to read rapidly, evaluate and compare resources, and construct in-depth, critical understandings of research topics that feel urgent in their fascination and their application.

It is also of note that this unit, like the one before it, feeds the work your students will do not only in English language arts but in their content-area classes. You might decide, then, that you will share one or both of these units with your science and social studies colleagues and then consider how you will pace this work during the year. Will you tackle this research club work first, and then the following month your science colleague will pick it up and then later social studies? Or perhaps while you launch the year and move into a narrative study in October, your content-area counterparts could be doing some initial nonfiction reading so it is not a "from scratch" exercise when you begin these units of study in November and December. Whatever your choices, the Common Core State Standards expect that reading and writing instruction are infused across the entire school day, so this may be a great time to pull your team together and support one another.

Have a Sense of the Entire Unit while Planning

This unit will take students through two progressive parts. In Part One, you'll begin with a research project that you will initiate as a demonstration and continue through your read-aloud and all-class lessons. This study will serve as a scaffold for the students' own studies, which they will embark on in collaborative small groups, just as researchers work and study collaboratively now in almost every field. As you choose the topic and the texts with which to model, you may decide to choose a complex subject and high-level texts, and your modeling might aim to support the highest level of reading for which you think your students can strive. Or you may choose to model with an accessible subject and text set that you will then hand over to a group of more

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emergent readers, thus launching them into their independent work. In *Navigating Nonfiction*, you'll see that the texts on penguins used as a model are lively and accessible and support your more emergent readers, while your small-group work and conferences will extend your lessons with your highest readers. You can, of course, try to do both by inserting some high-level texts into your read-aloud text set and getting to those further into the unit of study or after prereading the texts with some of your students.

In Part One, you will also emphasize the power of becoming expert on a subject by reading across texts and comparing information with fellow researchers. You'll emphasize skills that help students acquire and apply technical vocabulary and you'll teach them note-taking strategies and skills that help them write to develop their thinking as they read, gather information from multiple sources, keep track of those sources, and develop the essential skills of researchers.

Then in Part Two, you'll work on enhancing your students' critical analytical skills, showing them how to compare authors' claims and the validity of their arguments, as well as *how* authors convey information. You'll also teach students to make connections across texts, draw conclusions, design their own informed opinions, and apply their newfound knowledge by creating instructional material for their peers and communities.

Preparing for the Unit

This unit revolves around thinking and learning derived from reading multiple texts on a single topic, so you'll need to prepare (ideally with your students) text sets on specific topics, ones for which there are already plenty of available books (in your room, school library, or neighborhood library). Ask students to bring in books and journals from home, trade books with other teachers, visit the library, bookmark trusted websites such as www.pbs.org and www.scholastic.com, and let your students in on the work it takes to assemble texts on a subject. Much of the work of research lies in realizing that information is available all around us, so invite your students to help you sort books and other texts into baskets and to visit libraries and museum websites. If a few students want to pursue an arcane subject that you don't have resources for, ask whether they have any books at home. And they can bring in more than books—they may have model cars from different eras or model WWII planes. Tactile objects can help engage our researchers and convert our classrooms into multimedia research sites.

For the shared topic you'll use to demonstrate your lessons and read-alouds, gather two or three short books and an article or two; you may also want to compile a few primary documents to share with students on an overhead projector screen or via a document camera or just by opening your laptop. These primary sources are easy to search for online—they might include some photographs or videos, an interview, or images of artifacts or archaeological materials retrieved from a trustworthy site. As a way to supplement their understanding of a common research topic, students will benefit from collectively studying primary sources that report directly on a topic. Then do

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your best to build parallel collections with your students on topics they can study in clubs. All of this work happens before you begin teaching the research process, so take a couple of days to let students browse the text sets you have available, communicate their interests and bring in any resources they find on their own, and perhaps visit a local library, so they can share in the act of gathering texts. Pay attention to which students you think could work together well, probably keeping groups small, even if more than one group takes on the same topic. You'll be talking up the upcoming work, inviting students to share their passions and give voice to their urgent musings, and ultimately forming research groups that feel as if they were chosen by the students even if you have been doing some of what Kathleen Tolan calls "behind the scenes engineering." If you're low on the number of texts available for each subject, students might research first one subject and then a second, applying your teaching with increased expertise as they begin their second study.

Part One: Synthesizing Complex Information across Diverse Texts and Working in the Company of Fellow Researchers

Before the first lesson, you'll have coached students into work groups that make sense, using what you know of their reading levels, their friendships, their work habits, and their interests and expertise. In your first lesson, then, you'll probably want to teach your students that when researchers embark on a learning project, it's helpful to gather and preview a collection of texts, mapping out the lay of the land in order to plan a learning journey.

You'll probably want to invite your students to use their pens as they work, making flowcharts or a table of contents or other visible plans for the order of the texts they'll read, the categories of information they'll want to tackle, and perhaps some of their burning questions. Remind your readers of the skills you taught in the prior unit, such as previewing a text. Show them how to use the headings and subheadings, but also show them how to range across more narrative or dense texts, imagining what some of the headings could be. Now is not the time for researchers to simply dive into a single book—it's the time for them to make a plan for their research. Remind them that they know that readers usually begin with a more accessible text—which could be because it is an easier reading level or has more background information. More specific texts, or ones that tackle a narrower subtopic, might be delayed until researchers have constructed some shared knowledge.

An important aspect of your teaching in this unit is reminding students to use the repertoire of comprehension strategies they already know. "Remember earlier when we started reading nonfiction together, we learned that nonfiction readers rev up our minds for reading by previewing the text," you'd say, recalling this teaching point. "We looked at the titles and subtitles, the pictures and charts to make a map in our head of all the smaller parts that make up this topic." You might recruit four or five students to help model this work before the rest of the class. Hand this group some of the books on a topic and ask them to read aloud chapter names from each to note some of the

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categories that repeat—and call out some of the more common or overlapping topics, jotting them down as a list on a whiteboard or chart.

The list your readers generate will be specific to your own whole-class topic. If you've chosen "Antarctic Exploration" as a topic, your list might include *the tundra*, *effects of global warming*, *food chains*, and so on. What is important at this starting-out stage is that you teach students to review several books about one topic to generate a list of subtopics. Once they have such a list, teach students that we make plans for which topic to read first and which to read next. You might even create a large display (e.g., a chart) on which these categories are listed as headings, asking students to jot a couple of bullets under each heading as they read about it.

In the following lesson, you'll teach your readers to speak as experts and teach their fellow researchers what they are learning, in order to compare information and ideas. You might set some time aside each day when students teach what they've read to members of their research group, encouraging them to pick out the bigger boxes and supporting bullets from texts and to "teach" in a boxes-and-bullets format. "Use the illustrations, diagrams, and charts in your books to teach from," you might add, requiring that students open their books to pages containing particularly fascinating or informative illustrations and refer and point to their various features as they "teach" their topics to partners. Teach students also that nonfiction readers have certain habits that make us experts. "A very important one," you might tell them, "is to use the special lingo, or technical vocabulary, of this topic." Call their attention to the technical words that are written in bold or italics—and often defined in a sidebar or in the glossary. Explain that just as an expert gardener's vocabulary would have words like *compost*, *nitrates*, *dead-heading*, *pruning*, *perennials* and an expert on skateboarding's vocabulary would probably be full of words like *pivot*, *wheelie*, *slalom*, *kick flip*, *long board*, they too need to read to pick up the lingo, or technical vocabulary (what the Common Core calls "domain language"), that will make them *sound* like experts on their topic.

Next, you'll probably want to teach your readers that researchers don't just *take information in* while reading. We also think about whatever we've read—we wonder at this, we think deeper about that, we make connections, we ponder, we consider the *implications* of what we read. Usually, you'll teach, it is important to take some of what we're thinking, jot it down, and then write more deeply about it. You'll want your readers to literally "write to think," showing them that rewriting something fascinating in their own words (starting a sentence with prompts such as "in other words" or "stated differently" or "this matters because") can spur bigger ideas if they just keep their pens moving. You might teach certain thought prompts: "this makes me realize," "this is interesting because," "this makes sense because," or "this reminds me of" can all be powerful ways for students to extend a point they've read about. To read about how students might be taught (and supported in their efforts) to respond to their nonfiction reading by "writing to think," refer to Session XVI of *Navigating Nonfiction*.

As your readers move to a second and a third text about a topic, it will become important to bring in cross-text comparisons. You'll want readers to move across texts, cumulatively adding to their understanding of a topic: "This book taught me ____, and

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this book adds to this information by telling me ____." "This book introduces the point that ____, and this book provides *more detail* on this by saying ____." Teach students that they don't have to start whole new pages of notes for each book, but instead they may make charts and diagrams that let them gather evidence for a few important ideas and categories of information. Teach them as well to teach their fellow researchers about the significance of each new text by highlighting the particular contribution that text makes to their shared knowledge.

You also want readers moving between texts, catching any conflicting information that they chance to find: "In this book it says ____, but in this other book it says ____." Teach that they might read a third book to judge which information they trust more. This can also be the time to teach students to "read" primary sources and to contrast them with secondhand accounts on their topics. With some effort, one can find primary texts on the unlikeliest of topics. If the topic is "Ancient Egypt," for example, one might share tomb inscriptions translated from the original hieroglyphs, or the notes or writings of an archaeologist explaining how he stumbled upon a previously unknown tomb or what enabled him to identify a certain mummy. You might teach students the difference between a primary and a secondary source of information on a topic, adding that true expertise means not merely reading accounts written by other experts but actually chasing a topic to its first and most basic sources of information.

Many nonfiction texts contain primary documents such as original photographs taken at a site or images showing manuscripts or artifacts related to the topic. Teach students to pay specific attention to these images, identifying why they qualify as primary sources and what one might learn or interpret from studying them closely. Teach that to distinguish between primary and secondary sources, readers ask ourselves, "Was the author present at the event being written about?" We also consider whether a nonfiction text relates a personal experience or an eyewitness account (in which case it is a primary source) or whether it reports other texts or other people's experiences (in which case it is probably secondary).

As your students develop their expertise as researchers, help them develop their expertise as collaborative club members as well. Teach clubs to talk often about their topic, retelling the boxes-and-bullets they've read on a particular day to club members, sharing illustrations and charts that reveal more information about a topic, comparing and contrasting illustrations from different texts, and sharing the deeper thoughts they uncover as they "write to think" about their reading. If their text sets contain primary as well as secondary sources, encourage club members to distinguish between and compare them. You will want to help clubs remember the protocols that make for good membership: to listen carefully, to take turns talking, to plan and divide roles.

If you want to establish a close connection to writing—to teach students to convey the ideas they are speaking about in writing—you may push clubs toward planning and mentally drafting opinion pieces dealing with their topic. Writing opinion pieces requires a level of familiarity with a topic—one can't really form independent opinions about topics that one has little or no knowledge of. This could be the perfect time, therefore, to harness students' reading and thinking about topics that they are having

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active discussions about—and pushing them to state (and defend) their opinions. During their club conversations, teach students that each member might state an opinion as a "thesis statement" or "claim"—for example, "Cleopatra was a more effective ruler than King Tut"—and then supply two or three examples of evidence for this claim by citing information from the books in the club's text set. Teach other club members to listen carefully to a claim and see whether they can add evidence in support of it—or provide evidence that challenges this claim. Though this work will be done orally, this is the essential foundation for opinion writing (and in case of a challenge to the claim, argument writing). You might ask students to "record" the opinion essays they've generated through club conversations by flash-drafting them on papers to place within club folders.

Part Two: Critiquing Texts with Analytical Lenses and Sharing Our Research

In this part, you'll teach clubs to look more critically at the texts in their text set, asking the questions that experts automatically consider: "What is the author trying to make the reader feel about this topic?" Students will tune themselves to notice whether a particular text evokes pity, anger, admiration, or some other emotion for a topic. One text might inspire fear at the bloodthirsty nature of gorillas, while another inspires remorse and concern for their endangered status, and a third might make us feel terribly sad at the stories of what poachers do to gorillas in the wild. So your first lesson in this part will demonstrate how to ascertain what an author gets us to *feel* about a subject, through the images, stories, and information that author chooses to include. You'll push researchers to identify their emotional response to their subject as they reconsider the texts they've read so far, naming that this one got them to sympathize with polar animals, that this one made them outraged at greenhouse gases, and that this one, on the other hand, made them somewhat afraid of polar bears.

A second element of this lesson, which you can do in the same or in the next session, is to help students note craft moves—*how* exactly the author engineered a certain response from a reader, whether a particular choice of words or particular illustrations contribute to making us feel a certain way. An important lesson to teach students during this process is that "nonfiction" texts may claim a truth but that they are authored by people who have their own perspectives, angles, motives, and lenses. This may be news to some students, the idea that any nonfiction text is simply one author's perspective on the truth. Since your readers have multiple nonfiction sources on an identical topic to consider, they'll be better placed to evaluate the different ways these texts approach, deal with, and present this topic. It's always easier to evaluate an author's claims and perspectives when you have another author's text to lay alongside the first. One text might present Roman gladiators as tough heroes, for example, while another presents them as poor victims of a cruel social order. One text might present sharks as bloodthirsty killers, while another presents them as intelligent animals that don't attack

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nearly as often as people think. One text will present penguins as hapless fodder for polar bears and humans, while another will emphasize their complex social structures. You'll have to demonstrate this concept multiple times if your students are new to reading analytically for author point of view rather than as consumers of information.

Your readers will gradually find that some of their burning questions cannot be answered by their texts or that they are ready to outgrow their current text set and find more resources. This is where you can teach them that passionate researchers go on; they do more. They show agency as readers and thinkers. Some of your students will be scientists and historians and social activists one day—and the first step to achieving in any field is to be willing to work hard, as Gladwell shows again and again in *Outliers*. Take the opportunity, therefore, to teach your students here how to differentiate websites that end in .org (not-for-profit), .gov (government), and .edu (educational institutions) from those with .com, which might be for profit or highly biased. Teach them how to do library searches, how to talk to librarians, how to seek local experts, how to visit museums. Teach them to look inside and outside books to pursue their interests and seek knowledge.

As the well-deserved celebration at the conclusion of this invigorating scholarship, you might set students up to teach others in the school community what they have learned from their research and thinking, especially the angle on their learning that they consider most significant. Partners and club members who have read many books on a topic can come together and plan a presentation that they'll make to the rest of the class or to another class on the shared topic they studied. Club members might each take one part of their studied topic and teach that part to others. They may make a poster including diagrams or charts. They may choose to read a part and act it out or make a model or put together a PowerPoint presentation or create some social action artwork to educate their community. These presentations are meant to be simple and fairly quick but can help solidify what students have learned and add interest and investment to the topic studied.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

The two parts of this unit are detailed in the book *Navigating Nonfiction* from the *Units of Study for Teaching Reading: A Curriculum for Reading Workshop*. We decided to begin with the third part of that book because we assume that your class has just spent the last month reading voraciously through nonfiction texts, determining importance, synthesizing, and using text structures to comprehend the text.

You'll know your students are ready for this unit if they are able to access a single nonfiction text at their level with some ease, using the text features to navigate the material, reaching for a pen to quickly jot down a main idea or two, and turning to a partner to talk about what they've learned as they finish reading. If your kids need more support with this work, such as determining the main ideas and making meaning out of their texts, then you will want to refer to the write-up for Unit Three: Nonfiction Reading: Navigating Expository, Narrative, and Hybrid Nonfiction. If most of your kids

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do that well, they're ready to start reading more than one text on a subject. If you have just a handful of readers who struggle with nonfiction, these resources can inform your conferring and small-group work with those children.

By the end of this unit of study, you should see a marked improvement in your students' ability to read across nonfiction texts and analyze them for meaning, craft, and perspective. You may decide that students should have an opportunity to do this work again in social studies and science, so that kids get repeated practice with this work.

As in the last unit of study on nonfiction, maintaining reading volume will be critical during this time. Resources can be hard to find and it is likely that you will not have enough just-right nonfiction for your class to sustain just-right reading throughout reading workshop. If this is the case, have your students also read fiction independently during the unit.

You may want to adapt these plans, depending on the particular needs of your students. If you decide to forge your own pathway, think about how to make the parts of your unit seem coherent and logical, so that readers feel as if they are on a journey that will inevitably help them emerge as more powerful and independent readers and thinkers.

Part One: Synthesizing Complex Information across Diverse Texts and Working in the Company of Fellow Researchers

- "Readers, right now, you can choose topics that will become your areas of expertise. To embark on a learning project, you gather and preview a collection of texts, mapping out the lay of the land between those texts much as we mapped out the lay of the land within a text. This then can help you plan your learning journey."

- "Readers, today I want to teach you that when you are reading—whether it is about penguins or hurricanes, insects or castles, or anything else—you can dig because you've been forced to do so, or you can dig because you're digging for treasure! Someone watching nearby might not be able to decipher the difference, but there's a world of difference between the two. So, readers, dig for treasure. Read for treasure."

- "Readers, today I want to give you a tip to help you go from good to great in your reading and research. When you become an expert on a topic, it is important to begin using the technical vocabulary of that subject. Even if you're really just beginning to learn about a subject, you can accelerate your learning curve by 'talking the talk.'"

- "We don't do research just to become 'fact combers,' collecting facts like a beachcomber might collect pretty shells. We cup our hands around one bit of the world—and for our class as a whole and for one of your groups, that bit has been penguins—because we want to become wiser about the world. Specifically, today

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I want to teach you that researchers not only need to collect but also need to think."

Part Two: Critiquing Texts with Analytical Lenses and Sharing Our Research

- "Readers, today I want to teach you that researchers don't just take in knowledge. We also construct mental models that represent our ideas about a topic. And the mental models that we construct influence what information we notice, what we decide to record, and what we think as we read our nonfiction texts. Since we are building mental models, things become significant to us that we wouldn't ordinarily even notice."

- "Today I want to teach you that as we identify what authors make us *feel* about a subject, we also investigate *how* the author caused those feelings to get stirred up. Readers pay close attention, for example, to the images, the stories, and the choice of information the authors include and how those things stir up emotional responses in us as readers."

- "Today I want to teach you that once you have your burning questions or hunches and you can't answer them on your own, you can look inside or outside a book for the answers."

- "Today I want to teach you that eventually research leads to a burning urge to teach others. We decide what we want to say and organize what we know, and we decide how to share information and ideas with our communities through presentations, artwork, and multimedia."

- "Readers, today, on the day before our celebration, on the day when we say goodbye to this unit on nonfiction reading, let's remember that when we finish reading a nonfiction text, that text lives with us. It walks down the street with us. We carry our nonfiction reading with us, using it to find direction in our world."

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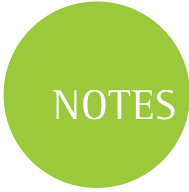
NOTES

COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Reading Workshop

GRADE 7

LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT

An imprint of Heinemann
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801–3912
www.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

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ISBN-13: 978-0-325-04314-2
ISBN-10: 0-325-04314-0

EDITORS:
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PRODUCTION:
Sonja S. Chapman

TYPESETTER:
Publishers' Design and Production Services, Inc.

COVER AND INTERIOR DESIGNS:
Jenny Jensen Greenleaf

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY:
Peter Cunningham, www.petercunninghamphotography.com

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Overview of the Year for Seventh-Grade Readers

SEPTEMBER	Unit One: Agency and Independence: *Launching Reading Workshop with Experienced Readers*
OCTOBER	Unit Two: Investigating Characters across Series
NOVEMBER	Unit Three: Nonfiction Reading: *Using Text Structures to Comprehend Expository, Narrative, and Hybrid Nonfiction*
DECEMBER	Unit Four: Nonfiction Research Clubs: *Developing Analytical Lenses for Informational Reading*
JANUARY	Unit Five: Historical Fiction Book Clubs: *Tackling Complex Texts*
FEBRUARY/MARCH	Unit Six: Developing Analytical Reading Practices: *Interpretation*
MARCH/APRIL	Unit Seven: Test Preparation
MAY	Unit Eight: Social Issues Book Clubs
JUNE	Unit Nine: Author Studies to Independent Projects: *Launching a Summer of Reading*

This year we have differentiated the reading calendar for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, so that we give extra support in learning to read closely and with high volume and stamina in sixth grade and move toward more interpretive reading and independence in seventh and eighth—culminating in some "reading for

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high school" experiences in eighth grade. You'll notice the influence of the Common Core State Standards throughout. This year, we launch seventh graders with an emphasis on agency and independence and then move them right into series in October. Series reading aims to get kids reading with high volume and at a steady rate. All our research shows that kids who are devoted to a series get more reading done. They move more rapidly through books, and they also move rapidly toward higher-level synthesis work. Just think of Harry Potter readers, who synthesize events across literally thousands of pages of text. We follow this work with two units of study in nonfiction reading, and we incorporate nonfiction in the historical fiction and interpretation units as well. We do think that all this reading work will set your seventh graders up to become tremendously strong readers who know authors and genres, who are adept at reading closely, and who are ready to dive into the deep interpretation work that awaits them in more complex novels.

We strongly urge you to give the nonfiction reading units to your science and social studies teachers, so that students get additional instruction, and opportunities for repeated practice, in nonfiction reading.

This year's curricular calendar has been especially designed with the new Common Core State Standards in mind. These standards call for a thinking curriculum that will prepare learners for the twenty-first century. The standards call for a greater emphasis on higher-level comprehension skills. The standards also led us to spotlight poetry, fairy tales, folktales and myths, and cross-text work. The other biggest change that informed this curricular calendar is that after almost two decades of research and development work, *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* are available, and we're sure they'll be useful to seventh-grade teachers. This document incorporates a great deal of the thinking and writing that went into those units. We're also eager, as always, to help share resources between teachers. If you devise a new unit of study that you are willing to share with other teachers, please send it to us at contact@readingandwritingproject.com.

The calendar starts with an overview of essential structures and assessment tools. Following that is a description of each unit of study. The narrative for each unit should give you enough information for you to plan ahead. It will recommend some touchstone texts, for instance, and it will help you foresee and have a deep understanding of the probable arcs of your teaching. At the end of the unit, you'll also find a new toolkit of teaching points for the unit, followed by some sample lessons written out in full. The teaching points fit within an overarching path, within which are some "bends in the road," which are basically the smaller parts of the unit. For almost all units, we offer two or three possible paths teachers and students might follow, so that you may differentiate your teaching for the kinds of readers in your care. Our website, www.readingandwritingproject.com, has many book lists to support the units.

We are aware that there are scores of different ways in which a yearlong reading and writing curriculum could unfold for any one grade level and that this is just one possible plan. The organization of the project cannot support every conceivable journey of study, and so we put forth one recommended path, which we will support with curricular materials and a calendar of conference days. Although we hope and expect that

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the teachers in schools linked to the project will study our recommended curricular calendar with great care, we do not expect that they necessarily follow all of the recommendations in this document. We encourage you to gather your own sources of information, tap into your own passions and interests, and devise a plan that incorporates and also adapts the collective wisdom in this document. We also highly recommend some texts that will help middle school teachers understand the teaching of reading and adolescent literacy: Lucy Calkins's and colleagues' *Units of Study for Teaching Reading: A Curriculum for the Reading Workshop, Grades 3–5*; Donna Santman's *Shades of Meaning: Comprehension and Interpretation in Middle School*; *When Kids Can't Read, What Teachers Can Do*, edited by Kylene Beers, Robert Probst, and Linda Rief; *Adolescent Literacy*; and Richard Allington's *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers*.

Our emphasis is on fostering a reading environment within which students set independent reading goals and strive to meet them. In *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell's study of conditions that allow for extraordinary success, Gladwell states that the single most important condition is that the person be allowed an opportunity to work hard. Without that opportunity, all else is for naught. This curriculum, most importantly, creates an opportunity for students to work hard on their reading. It is a demanding reading curriculum. It places an emphasis on personal responsibility and self-initiation on the part of students, and it demands reading expertise and a passion for literature on the part of the teacher. We think these qualities are crucial aspects of students becoming the kinds of young adults who have agency in their educational futures.

Bands of Text Complexity

A word about the readers in your class, the books in your library, and bands of difficulty. Within the units of study, you'll see references to bands of levels. For seventh grade, in particular, the levels are R/S/T, which some of your seriously struggling readers and ELL students may be reading in; U/V/W; and X/Y/Z, which will include your stronger readers. We have found that it is useful for teachers and readers to study the complexity of texts within these bands, usually by studying some prototypical texts within a band (*The Tiger Rising* for R/S/T, *The Lightning Thief* for U/V/W, and *The Hunger Games* for X/Y/Z). This kind of study particularly helps teachers to differentiate their instruction in conferences, small-group work, and unit planning, so that they teach toward the complexities of the books the kids are actually holding. (Note that newly arrived ELL students and some students with IEPs will be reading below R/S/T, and it's helpful for teachers of these students to know lower bands of complexity as well.)

At R/S/T, for instance, students will find that holding on to the central plotline becomes increasingly difficult because seemingly minor characters may end up as important to the plotline. This means that readers need to hold minor characters and subordinate plots in mind. Readers' predictions, for example, might include the expectation that a character who made a somewhat fleeting appearance or a plotline that seemed unrelated to the main storyline could return, playing a more important role

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than might have been expected. At this level of text difficulty, readers need to follow not only the evolving plotline but also the evolving setting. The setting becomes a force in the story, influencing characters and the plot just as, say, an antagonist might. In historical fiction, for example, readers need to construct a timeline of historical events as well as a timeline of the protagonist's main events—and more than that, to see the two timelines intersect. An event happens in the world, and that event becomes part of the chain of cause and effect that underlies the story's plot. In books within this band of difficulty, characters continue to be complex, and now their character traits are often not explicitly stated. Readers need to infer these from their actions.

Some of your readers will be reading in the U/V/W levels of text difficulty, which means that the storylines are becoming increasingly complicated. Characters will face more than one problem, some problems aren't resolved by the end of the story, relationships are changeable, and some characters may even be unreliable. There are often twists and turns in time, and the character is affected by things that happened long ago. Sometimes the reader even infers ahead of the character, gathering up clues that the main character hasn't yet put together. Things that happen are often separated by many pages as well, so that discerning cause and effect, and character motivation, challenges the reader more. Take a look at what levels or kinds of books your kids are mostly reading, and tailor your unit so that you do, in fact, teach them to read the books they are holding, with depth and complexity.

Some of your readers will also be reading X/Y/Z books, such as *The Book Thief* and *The Hunger Games*. In these books, the characters are increasingly complex. They may bump into social issues and discourse that are outside their control. Their lives are shaped by their environments, their family circumstances, their internal flaws—and all of these will have consequences on their emerging, shifting characters. The books at this level also expect that the reader has accumulated some cultural and historical knowledge, as many of the books have historical and allegorical references. There's also a way in which the narratives operate at a symbolic level—they are often implicit social commentary.

Assessment

We all know the joy of finding a book that is "just right" for us. When we are well matched to a book, reading can be one of life's greatest joys—and on the other hand, when a book is "all wrong" instead of "just right" for us, reading can feel interminable, humiliating, and tedious. There will never be a single litmus test that can accurately match a student to books, but as teachers, we can make some progress toward this goal if we provide each student with four things: 1) the opportunity to choose books that he or she wants to read, 2) a community of other readers who promote and summarize and talk about books with enthusiasm, 3) books that are easy enough for the reader that he or she will be given lots of opportunities for high-success reading, and 4) encouragement to occasionally read a text that is just a little challenging and the scaffolding to make the experience fruitful.

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Assessing reading is enormously complex. Reading is every bit as rich, multilayered, and invisible as thinking itself. Anyone who aspires to separate one strand of reading from all the rest, and then to label and measure that one strand or aspect of reading, must approach this effort with proper humility. No number, no label, no indicator is adequate for the task. Still, as responsible people, teachers need to assess students' reading in ways that give us as full a view as possible. Many middle school teachers assess readers in the books they are holding in their hands. Simply assess their accuracy, their fluency, and their comprehension—right in the text—and you'll have a window into how well they are matched to books. Also, by middle school we want to teach kids to monitor their own comprehension. That said, some of your kids, notably any who did not pass the state test, read below grade level—and you need to know at what level they do read, so that you know if you have books for them.

On our website, you'll find an assessment to gauge your readers' levels when necessary. This tool contains two passages at each text level (A–Z and early adult texts), ranging in length from twenty to more than four hundred words, followed by literal and inferential comprehension questions for each passage. Students read the text at one level aloud to teachers, who record reading behaviors and miscues. Teachers record miscues for one hundred words; if the student reads with 95–100% accuracy, then the student reads the remainder of the passage silently and then answers questions (hopefully answering at least three of the four questions correctly). Through this assessment, a teacher can ascertain the general level of text difficulty at which a student is able to read with ease and comprehension.

If a school chooses to use the TCRWP reading-level assessment, you'll conduct an independent reading inventory of a student's work with leveled texts in order to learn the text level that the student can read with 96% accuracy and strong comprehension. The truth is that using a short passage and a handful of questions in order to ascertain whether a child can read, say, a T- or a V-level text is not perfect. We've also been using some book-length assessment tools, and these are described in the assessment interludes within *Units of Study for Teaching Reading*. But the system of tracking readers' progress along a gradient of text difficulty does provide an infrastructure to your reading workshop and allows a teacher to have some handle on kids' progress, especially the kids who read below grade level. Most middle school teachers can't really assess all kids formally in the limited time they have with them—so you'll want to focus on those who will most benefit from a formal assessment.

If you'd like to see the chart of benchmark levels for each grade, visit our website at www.readingandwritingproject.com.

Reading Rate

You'll also want to track each student's reading rate and note the way this changes across time. Here's a table that shows *targeted* reading rates (words per minute), by grade level:

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General Range of Adequate Reading Rates by Grade Level			
Grade	**WPM**	**Grade**	**WPM**
5	170–195	8	235–270
6	195–220	9	250–270
7	215–245	12	250–300

Harris and Sipay (1990)

Organizing the Library

Many middle school reading workshops where students are choosing books rapidly; getting a lot of reading done; and following up on series, genres, and authors they come to love look like this: the books are arranged in baskets by series, authors, and genres and then either leveled within those baskets or marked on the band on the outside of the baskets. By eighth grade, you may be able to use baskets that are just devoted to authors, series, and genres. A basket might be devoted, for instance, to *Demonata Series*, *Spiderwick Chronicles*, *Narnia*, and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*; another basket to Judy Blume, Jacqueline Woodson, Walter Dean Myers, Sharon Draper, Maya Angelou, and so forth. Most series are within a range of a few levels. What's helpful about organizing the library this way is that it makes it easy for readers to do more powerful reading work. You want your students to read all of Judy Blume's novels if they love her. You want them to read the entire *Narnia* series once they get started. Here's the thing—you also want them to be able to read them in order, if possible. It is incredibly interesting to read all of Judy Blume's novels, for instance, in the order in which they were written—it's almost like reading social history. Much more important, though, is that the series be available in order. If a student reads series books randomly, he or she actually can't do the higher-level inferring work that we want. Students can't track character changes or infer about cause and effect or character motivation. They're almost relegated to reading for plot. So take a look at your libraries, and do the best you can to have students reorder them into interesting and engaging baskets of series, genres, and authors, while maintaining levels or bands of levels that help kids move along as readers. By seventh and eighth grade, they will not be concentrating as much on moving up individual text levels, as there will be much comprehension work to practice, and moving from X to Y will not be a matter of a few weeks' work. Labeling bins with book levels may not be as relevant, then, for your grade-level readers. However, if you have many readers who are in lower levels of books, you may find it helpful to reference levels in labeling your baskets so that readers can easily find books that are right and so that they can notice as they outgrow levels.

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Maintaining Reading Statistics

We recommend that schools establish and implement policies so that each student in the school maintains a daily record of the books he or she reads in school and at home; there are a variety of ways this log might look, including using digital forms for middle school readers. This log might contain the date, the title, the number of minutes the student spent reading, and the number of pages, for instance. These logs are not places for responses to reading, nor do students write book summaries in them. They are simply statistics, such as a baseball player or a marathon runner might keep. When people work at getting better at something, they almost always keep statistics. Some middle school teachers are also having great success with students keeping track of their reading online at www.goodreads.com, a social networking site for readers where teachers can create a closed classroom site and kids can record the books they have read and want to read and can write reading responses on their own books and to each other. As you might imagine, it's more work for a teacher to launch and supervise this site, but then adolescent readers show that they actually *want* to record and respond to their reading, which is great. Some readers are also using the calendar feature on their phones to track their reading.

The most important thing is that you give students opportunities to *reflect* on their statistics, asking themselves: "How is reading going for me? What conditions seem to help me get the most reading done? What fix-it strategies might I use to improve my reading?" Students can work analytically with their partners to notice and think about changes in the average number of pages they read. Students can also notice the genre choices made over time and the relationship between genres or levels and volume. They can also discuss patterns seen by studying the time they spend reading at home versus at school. The logs provide an irreplaceable window into students' reading lives. It's also helpful to gather logs across a grade after a month, or across different grades, to compare how much students are reading and how they are moving through books.

School leaders, as well as teachers, should save and study these critical records. For example:

- A general rule of thumb is that a student should usually be able to read approximately three-quarters of a page to a page a minute. (This rule of thumb works across texts of varying levels because generally, as the pages become denser, the reader's abilities also becomes stronger.) A teacher and/or a principal will want to take notice if a student seems to be reading a book at dramatically slower paces than three-quarters of a page a minute. For example, alarms should go off if a student reads eight pages in thirty minutes. Why is the student not reading closer to twenty-four pages in that length of time? There may, of course, be good reasons, but this should raise a flag that something in the student's reading is not "just right."

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- If a student reads an amount (say, thirty-four pages during a half hour in school) and then brings that same book home and claims to read a much smaller amount (say, eight pages within half an hour of reading time at home), alarms should go off. Is the student actually making enough time for reading at home? Does the student need support finding places and times to continue his or her reading?

Above all, student logs are a way to be sure that everyone—teachers, principals, and students—keep their eyes on the volume of reading that students are doing. Dick Allington's research suggests that it takes a student reading at 200 wpm eight hours to read *Hatchet*. Assuming that your students read for thirty minutes in class and another thirty to sixty minutes at home, and that they read at a rate of 200 wpm, then you should expect a student to finish reading *Hatchet* in five to eight days, which seems entirely reasonable. You may find that a particular student takes twice as long to read *Hatchet*. This should prompt some teacher research. Why is this student reading especially slowly? (If the student is reading below 120 accurate wpm, then alarm bells should go off. This student should be reading easier texts! Or perhaps the student is sitting in front of a text, rather than reading it.)

Getting Time to Assess at the Start of the Year

At the start of the year, teachers need to confer with readers. We are not saying that you have to start with a formal assessment. You do, though, have to ensure that every student is holding a book he or she can actually read. If you know students' reading levels from a prior year, then assume they can read at least at that level, and have them choose within levels they know, or authors, series, and titles they're confident they can finish within a week (this helps keep them in reasonable levels). If you don't know their levels, have them choose books they can read at a quick pace to start, and watch their reading habits for a few days. See if they are making progress through their books. Watch their body language—are they engaged? Notice if they seem distracted. If so, ask them to read aloud a small part to you and/or talk a little about the book. You'll quickly get a sense of which kids are in a book that is too hard or too easy.

Your first priority will be to assess any reader who seems to not be actually reading. Watch for signs of disengagement: the head that revolves, the student who is always losing his or her place in a book, the adolescent who uses reading time as a chance to get a drink of water or go to the bathroom. Then move to the readers who seem to be reading slowly, and see what's going on with them. Pretty soon, you'll have an idea of what your readers are doing. Ask them to jot some Post-its with their thoughts as well, and you'll see what kind of thinking work they're doing for a few days—another window into their understanding of their novels.

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At some point, probably in late October, you'll want to take some time to deeply assess the readers who are not clearly at or above grade level.

Components of Balanced Literacy

The term *balanced* literacy comes, in part, from the recognition that readers need a variety of different opportunities to learn. The reading workshop provides students time to read with a mentor who is a passionately engaged reader and wears his or her love of reading on their sleeve, who offers opportunities to talk and sometimes write about reading, and who offers explicit instruction in the skills and strategies of proficient reading. All of this is incredibly important—but alone, it is not sufficient. Students also need the opportunities to learn that can be provided by the other components of balanced literacy.

They need, above all, to write. We assume that the reading workshop, as described in these pages, is balanced by a daily writing workshop, and we assume TCRWP teachers will refer to the writing curricular calendar for help with writing. Then, too, students also need opportunities to hear wonderful literature read aloud and frequent opportunities to participate in book talks around the read-aloud text. We hope teachers read aloud and lead interactive read-aloud sessions several times a week. They need opportunities to read texts within content-area disciplines and to receive instruction in reading those texts well. And students who struggle with fluency (that is, students who read slowly and robotically) need opportunities to participate in shared reading and in repeated oral readings.

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is crucial even in instances where the teacher does nothing more than read spectacular literature aloud in such a way that students listen with rapt attention, clamoring for more. The payoff for reading aloud becomes even greater when teachers read aloud from a wide range of genres, which generally happens when teachers combine reading aloud into all parts of the day, regarding reading aloud as a terrific resource during science, social studies, math, and so on. This can be done by creating a schoolwide read-aloud schedule.

If you are fortunate enough to have a schedule that allows for a one-hour reading workshop, then it is possible to work in a read-aloud, a minilesson, and independent reading each day into reading workshop. If you have only forty-two or forty-five minutes for reading workshop, you probably can't work in all ways each day. You might consider creating a schedule like this for your reading workshop:

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Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Read-Aloud and Talk (about 20 min) Independent Reading (about 25 min)	Minilesson (about 10 min) Independent Reading (about 30 min) Share and/or Partner Talk (about 5 min)	Read-Aloud and Talk (about 20 min) Independent Reading (about 25 min)	Minilesson (about 10 min) Independent Reading (about 30 min) Share and/or Partner Talk (about 5 min)	Independent Reading (about 45 min) Small-Group Work

If you are working within forty-two- or forty-five-minute periods, we encourage you to rally your colleagues in joining you in a study of the benefits of read-alouds. Current research supports the tremendous benefits of daily read-alouds and their relationship to promoting growth in independent reading. Perhaps you might get the science and social studies teachers to read aloud for twenty minutes just one time a week from a piece that connects to their units of study. It might be that ELA teachers read aloud to students on Mondays and Wednesdays, science teachers read aloud once a week on Tuesdays, and social studies teachers read aloud once a week on Thursdays. With just a bit of planning, you could ensure that your students are engaging with both narrative and non-narrative texts each week across many topics and subjects. The content-area teachers may be amazed at how the read-aloud supports their units of study and increases student interest and knowledge.

The best way to tap into the potential power of reading aloud, however, is to use the read-aloud and book talk times as ways to explicitly teach the skills of higher-level comprehension. To do this, a teacher first reads the upcoming section of the read-aloud book to herself, noticing the mind-work that she does while reading. Then the teacher decides whether to use the upcoming read-aloud as a means to help students draw upon their full repertoire of reading strategies or to angle the read-aloud in such a way as to support the development of a particular comprehension skill. Based on this decision, the teacher decides to demonstrate and then scaffold students in using either one or many skills and strategies.

If you choose carefully, the read-aloud text can support the independent reading work your students are doing. For example, if the class is engaged in the unit of study on character (and students are thinking about characters as they read independently), you'd be wise to read aloud a chapter book with strong characters who change over the course of the text. This means that the read-aloud book will offer opportunities for deep talk about characters. If, on the other hand, the class is working on nonfiction, and some of the students' independent reading involves nonfiction texts, you will want to read aloud nonfiction texts that allow you to show students how nonfiction readers talk and think about (and between) texts.

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Whatever skill you aim to teach, it's essential that you read in ways that not only demonstrate skills but bring stories to life. Read with expression, fluency, intonation, and good pacing so that students feel like they are a part of the story and understand that this is what good reading sounds and feels like.

Supporting Students' Vocabulary

Teachers are wise to recognize that we need to model not only a love of books and of writing but also a fascination with words themselves. If you wear your love of language on your sleeve, exuding interest in words and taking great pleasure in them, you'll help your students be more attentive to vocabulary.

Research is clear: the single most important thing you can do to enhance your students' knowledge of words is to lure your students into lots and lots and lots of reading; if students read a diverse range of books, they'll encounter a wider range of words. The vocabulary in historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, and nonfiction will often be richer than vocabulary in realistic fiction and mysteries.

We discovered last year that Donald Bear's *Words Their Way* work has helped a lot of middle school students who struggle with reading learn the spelling and word patterns that, for whatever reason, they may have missed when they were younger. You may want to assess your middle school students for high-frequency words and spelling stage, to see if some students would benefit from Bear's word study work. Those assessments are available on our website.

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UNIT SIX

Developing Analytical Reading Practices

Interpretation

FEBRUARY/MARCH

By now, your students understand that reading is more than comprehending what is happening in the stories they read. It is considering why events occur the way they do; it is inferring about characters' motivations, desires, and emotional states; it is analyzing the impact of settings—and it is doing all of that intellectual work on the run, as the story unfolds. Your instruction has kept pace with the increasing complexity of the books your students have been reading, which means you have taught them to delve ever deeper into more complex narratives and have developed their analytical skills, and your students have (while immersed in stories) become sharper thinkers. They have become so by living through literature and among the storylines of characters who come to shape their lives and thinking—just as the literary characters and language of Langston Hughes and Sojourner Truth and other authors shaped the heritage and thinking of Martin Luther King and other important Americans.

In this unit of study, you will sharpen your students' analytical skills even more, teaching them to notice more in the texts they read—and to become more nuanced in their language, sharpening their minds for any kind of analytical thinking. You will teach them to observe closely, to understand some of the craft of literature, to articulate their ideas with finely grained evidence, and to remain open to contradictory ideas. The Common Core State Standards emphasize students' ability to hold one argument up for evaluation while also being able to articulate the counterargument. Deep interpretation is that process of developing an argument, remaining aware of and influenced by counterarguments, and ultimately illuminating your reading and your own life with new and more complex understandings.

Essentially, you'll teach your students that the stories they are reading are also about ideas. You'll move your students to think and talk about the ideas their chapter books

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suggest. Then you'll show them, pretty much immediately, that good books are about more than one idea, and you'll teach them to keep more than one idea afloat in their minds. All the time, you will be training them to be analytical and persuasive by teaching your students to back up their ideas with evidence from the text. Pretty early on in the unit, you'll teach your readers that just as their books are about more than one idea, so ideas live in more than one book—we call those ideas *themes*. Once your students are recognizing themes, you'll teach them to compare how themes are developed in different texts. You'll have them hone their reading and their arguments (as in defending their ideas, not fisticuffs!) to be more nuanced and deliberate and finely calibrated.

You'll know your students are ready for this teaching if, as you look over their Post-its and listen to their partner conversations, you see that they are regularly inferring about the characters in their stories and are synthesizing the narrative elements in the stories they read. If, for instance, a student is reading *The Lightning Thief* and has no trouble keeping track of the characters, figuring out where the story is taking place, and what kind of boy Percy is at the beginning and end of the story, that student is ready to also realize that *The Lightning Thief* is the kind of novel that suggests important themes—it's a book that teaches us how to shape our own character. If, on the other hand, when you talk to that same student about *The Lightning Thief*, he or she seems to talk only about what is happening right now in the book, without connecting that action to earlier events—and as you check in with another student, you see that same "reading for plot and constantly surprised by the plot" kind of reading, then you may want to turn to Unit Two "Developing Ideas about Characters," in the sixth-grade curricular calendar, or to *Units of Study for Teaching Reading—Following Characters into Meaning*. This interpretation unit makes the most sense for readers who are reading books at level R and above and who are regularly inferring about the characters' emotions, traits, and changes in their books.

Have a Sense of the Entire Unit While Planning

The unit has three main parts, each one leading students toward increasingly more nuanced thinking—while also leading students in steps so that they can do the work independently, not merely follow their teacher's thinking. It's an easy job to tell young readers what the ideas are in a novel. It's easy to tell them a theme and have them find evidence for that theme in a text. It's easy, that is, to hand over a piece of literature as content. It is challenging to teach young people to think for themselves and to be dissatisfied with easy, literal, undisputed reading and thinking. They'll need some specific strategy instruction in analytical reading practices, or else they will remain dependent on collaborative, teacher-led, coauthored understandings.

Part One will teach students to analyze moments in their lives and in literature for what we can learn from them—because our ability to learn from experience is what makes us human, and what, ultimately, helps us rise above current conditions and experiences. You'll teach students to reconsider and "reread" prior events and texts. You'll teach them that stories are never about just one idea, showing them how the way

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that the Common Core State Standards analyze nonfiction texts for more than one idea is also relevant for fiction, and you'll show them that ideas live in more than one text. In Part Two, you'll move students to more nuanced reading and thinking by teaching them to lay texts that are united thematically alongside of each other to really investigate how an author develops a theme. Rarely are the settings, characters, or events exactly matched—and it is in these fine details that students (with your instruction) will learn to illuminate complexity, really analyzing how ideas that at first glance appear the same may be different either in their development or in their details. Imagine how this thinking will help your students in later life as they learn to tell colleagues, leaders, and co-citizens, "Wait, I think that these ideas are similar but somewhat different in their implications or applications."

Finally, in Part Three, you'll offer your students analytical lenses for interpretation that focus on symbolism and literary craft, so that students are alert to the metaphors in the texts that they encounter. This ability to think metaphorically enriches students' experience of literature, hones their thinking in new directions, and enhances their own language and expressiveness. Martin Luther King's ability to write, "I have a dream"; Lincoln's understanding that "three-score and seven years ago" is more poetic, and therefore more memorable, than "sixty-seven"; Jefferson's articulation of "we hold these truths to be self-evident" all reflect thinkers who have been steeped in literary language and metaphor. Your students will emerge from this unit more alert to the metaphorical allusions and rhetoric in the texts they encounter, whether it is the idea that the dog is a pivotal character in *Because of Winn Dixie*, that the suitcase is more than a suitcase in *The Tiger Rising*, or that President Snow is a symbol for historical totalitarian leaders in *The Hunger Games*.

This unit will not require any special new texts. Universal ideas (i.e., literary themes) are universal because they are important in a great many stories. You will not need especially constructed text sets in order for readers to think about how different authors convey the same theme. So you don't have to make a basket of books labeled "struggle against nature" and fill it with *Skylark, Little House on the Prairie*, and *Out of the Dust*. The unit is going to lead students to do much more intellectual work than simply find evidence of a prenamed theme. Your students will, though, want to do this work collaboratively in partnerships and small clubs—so you and they should gather the texts of which you have multiple copies. They'll range back over the fantasy and historical fiction you had already gathered for club units. Some students may reread these books, with more comparative thinking, during this unit. Other readers should be at higher reading levels now than when you were in those units of study, so they can reach for harder texts. And some clubs may pass books around a club, talking across texts while reading different ones.

You may, though, make it easier to tackle this work by having copies available of your prior read-aloud texts, by gathering some baskets of poetry and nonfiction that students may investigate if they become preoccupied with certain themes, and (of course) by having at hand as many rich and dense chapter books at appropriate levels as possible for each reader. Students simply can't do the higher-level work of the Common Core State Standards if they are reading one text and thinking about that

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text in isolation. During the reading workshop, members of a book club will read books together. Say, for example, four students read *Hatchet*. Within a week of the start of this unit, you'll be encouraging readers to think between the one book that they are reading (*Hatchet*) and other books the class has read. How is *Hatchet* like (and unlike) *My Side of the Mountain*? How is it like (and unlike) *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* or *The Maze Runners*? Readers will create their own text sets by looking across books they've read, and plan to read, and finding ones that address similar themes.

Check that your lower-level readers have access to books that they can read—that are just difficult enough for them to be striving and achieving while still within what they can actually read. It's often easier to do analytical thinking in higher-level texts because the texts themselves are so complex. So make sure that you've gathered narratives that are as suggestive and complicated as possible for your lower-level readers. *Dragon Slayer Academy*, for instance, at levels N/O, offers wild complexities and provocative themes—whereas it may be hard to develop thematic understanding in *Magic Treehouse*. They are both terrific series, but you may highlight one over the other in this unit of study. Look over your library with that lens, and imagine yourself doing the work of this unit in the books that are available.

It will be important for your class to have a set of shared texts to mine in this unit—and presumably those will be the books and short texts (picture books) you have read aloud all year (combined with books that students know from previous years). If you have not done much reading aloud and your class does not have a shared repertoire of texts, then begin reading aloud now!

As with any unit, teachers need to first decide upon the skills that will be forwarded. We recommend using the performance assessment aligned to the curricular calendar to glimpse what your kids can do with analyzing across two texts and articulating their ideas about texts in writing, with substantive evidence gathered and cited from the texts. Chances are very good that all your students need considerable help with these skills, in which case you will be wise to teach this unit with a lot of heft—using your small groups and individual conferring and book clubs as a forum for supporting your students' progress toward being able to read analytically.

Once students can see that texts often address the same theme, then you can help students notice differences in nuance of the message or in each author's treatment of the message. Students will be able to contrast how authors present or develop a meaning, theme, or character—first in conversation, and then in writing. You can meanwhile teach a parallel unit in the writing workshop on writing literary essays, using some of the reading workshop (as well as other short-text work) as grist for their writing mills.

Part One: Analyzing Our Lives and Literature

To begin the unit, you'll offer your students an invitation to interpretation work, teaching them that events in our lives are open to analysis—just as events and characters in literature will be. You'll teach all your students how to return to critical moments in their lives and learn more from those moments—because their lives do matter, and

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they matter most as the set of experiences through which our students will become principled, reflective, powerful adults. So the unit begins with what the Common Core State Standards suggest are the "applications" of more complex thinking—the ability to analyze any experience. Students will have an opportunity to revisit moments in their lives and then to revisit favorite texts. Then they'll quickly move to other texts, while their interpretive zeal is strong.

The goal of the first two days is to give kids (and ourselves) lots of repeated practice interpreting so that over the two days everyone becomes fluent with this sort of thinking—more aware of text interpretations that exist out there in the world, more accustomed to speaking in this analytical, idea-based "language." We also want kids to realize that they are interpreting all the time and that any one event or story can have lots of different interpretations. In your first lesson, you may invite readers to reconsider experiences in their lives from a more analytical view than anyone can have while in the middle of those experiences. First, you'll tell them that good readers don't read just to find out what characters do or what happens in stories. Powerful readers also realize that the stories we read are about ideas—they literally teach us how to live. Then you'll invite your students to first consider how, in their own lives, there have been experiences that have taught life-lessons. In the lesson that is attached at the end of the unit, you'll see that we model on a real-life story—and then show how that one story can be interpreted to support several ideas about life-lessons. Right from the start, then, you'll be teaching that we're not searching for one idea but that analytical thinkers develop ideas about events and experiences.

In the same session, you can have your readers revisit the narratives they've written in their writer's notebooks and analyze them for ideas or life-lessons they see in them. Then they can turn to the stories they've read and talk with a partner or club members, sharing their ideas about stories they've read so far this year. Coach kids to support their ideas with evidence, and teach them to listen closely to each other and to add on to the ideas that are brought up, so that they build a cornucopia of ideas together. If this teaching seems like too much for one lesson, you could break it into two lessons—the first where you teach students that moments in our lives are open to interpretation, and you and your students reconsider real-life moments for the ideas or life-lessons they suggest, and a second lesson where you teach that moments in books also teach life-lessons, and you and your students reconsider favorite stories you've read so far this year.

For homework, you might invite students to do this same work on the television programs they watch, or the books they are reading on their own, or the events that happen in their days. Students will love the invitation to watch a TV show, each of them thinking, "What does this character learn? What can the character teach?" You can help students ask these questions using other phrases or terms as well, which is a wise thing to do as eventually standardized tests will ask them this same question, and there are a lot of different ways to work the question. Alternately, students could be invited to think about the people in their families who are always drawing life-lessons from things that happen. Perhaps it is a grandparent who comes from an event saying, "See what I mean? I always tell you—families have to stick together." That's interpretation.

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If your students have a lot of trouble interpreting, you will want to do a lot more work reading aloud, and show them how you begin to think interpretively. We recommend you watch Kathleen Tolan's work with *The Giving Tree* on the DVD that accompanies *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* and watch the active moves Kathleen makes as she demonstrates and supports kids to move from reading actively to reading interpretively. Notice that she slows down the process of thinking interpretively, saying, "Hmmm . . . I'm just wondering . . . what *could* this be teaching me? . . . Hmmm . . . I'm thinking about . . . (then she recalls, rereads) . . . What *could* that mean . . . Could it maybe mean . . . Or could it mean . . . ?" You can do similar work, stretching out and slowing down the process of interpreting so that kids begin to climb up on their knees, saying, "I know! I got an idea!" And then, if their ideas are not particularly strong, try to accept them anyhow, listen to them, and find better ideas within those flawed ones.

If your students are having trouble interpreting, you can also begin doing this across the whole day. What lessons can be learned from the stories of the discovery of America or from the Revolutionary War? "When the ragamuffin colonists, lying belly down in the leaves of the woods in the manner learned from American Indians, won against the rows of uniformed British soldiers marching in unison down the street, this can become a lesson in how the little guy can topple the mighty, or in the irony of using lessons from those we have conquered to conquer others, or inventiveness can be stronger than mere muscle."

In your second lesson, you'll turn your readers to pivotal moments in stories, showing them how to pay attention to moments in stories when characters experience strong emotions and/or make critical choices. These moments are also ones where readers have an opportunity to learn from the decisions characters make. Again, you'll reteach that at each of these moments in a story, readers can make more than one interpretation and construct more than one idea that may turn out to be significant. You'll want to alert your readers, as well, to how powerful readers remain open as they keep moving through a book, seeing how their ideas play out.

Probably you'll demonstrate this work on a read-aloud text that is familiar to your kids, and so your students will probably also want to return to favorite texts. There is value in giving students opportunities to reread texts, and here they'll have a chance to revisit favorites, thumbing through the pages for remembered moments, reconsidering those more analytically, jotting down ideas those parts suggest, and then arguing and defending those ideas with their partners and club members. As readers talk to each other, teach them to listen carefully not for if they agree with an idea but if the author of that idea justifies it well—that is, do your readers assemble textual evidence for their arguments?

In lesson three, you'll probably find it helpful to begin with a chart that students coauthor of the ideas and lessons that students are gathering from their revisiting of prior stories. Immediately, students will begin to see that just as stories are about more than one idea, an idea may also appear in more than one story. This, you may explain to them if they do not know already, is the notion of *theme*—an idea that appears in more than one story. If your students have already been in the historical fiction unit of

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study described in this calendar and in the *Tackling Complex Texts* volumes from *Units of Study for Teaching Reading*, then they have bridged themes across texts before. If that's the case, then make this lesson one in which you remind them that readers call on their prior reading practices, such as being alert to how more than one text may suggest similar themes. If that seems fuzzy to your readers, then use your chart to visibly articulate themes that seem as if they appear in more than one of your read-alouds. The idea, for instance, that even a child may make a tremendous difference in a community is suggested by *The Hunger Games*—and also suggested by *The Other Side* and Harry Potter. Demystifying theme so that young readers can analyze texts for their thematic implications themselves—rather than awaiting a sacrosanct, preconceived theme—may be among the most important (and early) work in this unit of study. In later years, when one of your students is "told" what the theme is of a novel, that young intellectual will probably say, "Perhaps, though I also see other possibilities such as. . . . " In the same manner, your students will need to be convinced, with evidence, of the integrity of ideas that they are presented with. Reading is how we train our minds.

It may also be helpful to chart some phrases readers sometimes use when they are talking about interpretations, such as:

> When I first read this story, I thought it was just about . . . but now that I think deeper about it, I realize that really it is also about . . .
>
> Often people . . . but this story shows that it's possible for people to . . .
>
> I used to think . . . but now after reading this, I think . . . because . . .
>
> I learned from (the character, the event) that in life, it can be important to . . .
>
> This story teaches us not only about . . . but also about . . .

As students engage in this, coach into their work by showing them that they always need to support their ideas with evidence from the text. If they select passages from the text that seem tangentially related to the main idea, then say, "Does the connection between that and your idea hit you over the head and seem totally obvious, or is it a bit hard to see? If it is not 'hit you over the head' obvious, usually it helps to think of another example from the text or to say more about why this example seems so relevant. Perhaps your idea is more complicated than you thought at first."

So far students have been analyzing stories they have lived and stories they have already read. For the following lessons, club members need to be in new books; have them choose a book at the end of this session, if they haven't done so already, and get started reading it for homework.

So far your students have been revisiting familiar texts so they'll have thought about more than one idea in these texts, but they'll also be doing this analytic thinking *after* they've finished the book. Now, in lesson four, you'll want to teach your readers that we don't wait until we're done with a book to begin constructing ideas and designing reading plans to investigate these ideas. You may want to go to your current read-

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aloud text and talk about some of the ideas the text is suggesting so far. Teach your readers to jot these down, to substantiate them by giving a little boxes-and-bullets speech to club members, and to be ready to read on gathering evidence for these ideas. Then give them an opportunity to do the same work in their own books. Remind them that good books are about more than one idea as well, so teach them to follow more than one idea as they go forward.

Finally, in lesson five, you'll want to teach your students that powerful readers revise our ideas as we keep reading. Show them how sometimes ideas develop into more complicated ideas. Sometimes ideas we had about a text, as we keep reading, simply are no longer true—the text diverges and the story suggests alternative ideas, so readers have to remain flexible and alert. And sometimes ideas that seemed important come to seem smaller next to more significant ideas. What's important is that your readers remain alert and responsive, and that they expect to keep validating their ideas and revising them. You might show students that at first *The Hunger Games* seems to be the story of a solitary girl who makes friends with one other solitary boy—perhaps teaching us the way like-minded people find one another, even in tough situations. But then the story takes a new turn, and Katniss is suddenly thrust into the spotlight, leading one to think that the story may be about the lengths to which people will go to protect the ones they love, too. Readers can learn to talk about how the book's message unfolds over time by saying, "First, when I started to read this, I thought that deep down, it was maybe about . . . but now as I read on, I'm finding that it is also about. . . . "

For example, if you were to read aloud the first chapters of *The Hunger Games*, you might find yourself thinking aloud when Katniss makes the choice to save her sister, Prim, from taking part in the games. You might say, "Wow! Katniss really surprised me by standing in for her sister and basically saving her life. Up until this point, she wanted nothing to do with this place and these people, and now she is choosing to take part in the games that she hates so much. Maybe this story is beginning to be more about the lengths we go to for other people, how no matter what we believe, when we are challenged we will stand up for our family. I still, though, can't get over how terrible these games are. What kind of a place is this that would allow something like this to happen and even televise it? I wonder if this book is about that, too. What could it be trying to say about the world? Turn to your partner and try saying, 'It *could* be . . . or maybe it *could* be. . . . '"

Part Two: Analyzing Differences, Becoming a More Nuanced Reader

You'll probably notice that your readers eagerly jumped to show that an idea that is true in one text may be true in another. In fact, you can expect that they'll begin to see themes everywhere—and that they'll lapse into clichés or even into proverbs, that they'll overstate and simplify. Donna Santman, author of *Shades of Meaning: Teaching Comprehension and Interpretation*, reminds us that what is cliché to us as adults is remarkably original to a young reader. So you have to keep your face straight and be impressed when they notice that *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* and *The Other Side* both show

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that it's okay to be different! "It takes all kinds," as my grandmother says, one student will say. Then her club will apply that idea to all their texts eagerly. That said, our next job will be to teach students the Common Core State Standards work of analyzing *how* a text makes a theme visible—how that theme is developed, where and how we see it becoming more visible in the text, and how that development is undoubtedly different in different texts. Oliver Button and Clover from *The Other Side* are not, in fact, the same in every way. They are similar in how they tackle trouble with fortitude. They are similar in how they hold on to their dreams. They are similar in how they are lonely. But they are not similar in many other ways. Oliver tackles differences in gender expectations, whereas Clover tackles the color line. Oliver acts alone, whereas Clover carries others into her scheme. The time, the place, the characters—and the kind of trouble they face—are different.

In lesson one of Part Two, therefore, you'll praise your readers for noticing how themes live in more than one text, and you'll study the classroom charts that document these themes intently—perhaps holding up some of your read-aloud texts as you demonstrate. "You know," you may say, "I'm realizing that while some of these stories have the same theme, there are also a lot of differences in these stories. It seems to me that it would be fascinating to investigate what's *different* about stories that have the same theme. I know that when I think *people* are the same, it turns out that I can usually learn a lot from how we're different as well. For instance, I'm drawn to Dylan because he's such an avid reader—he's a lot like me. But he reads different kinds of books, and now I've learned to love a lot of those books, too. Or Sarah and I share a love for the kings of England—but she loves the modern ones and I love the historical ones, so we learn a lot from each other when we pore over what's different in our knowledge. I'm thinking, for instance, of how we said, when we studied historical fiction, that a lot of our stories showed that war makes kids grow up fast. And that's true. But the war that Annemarie endures in *Number the Stars* is really different than the one that Ishmael Beah suffers in *Long Way Gone*, which I showed you I was reading. In *Number the Stars*, the war came somewhat slowly to Annemarie, and she changed rapidly for a child, but she still had time to make sense of what was happening around her. She grew up fast, but she could do it. In *Long Way Gone*, the war comes overnight to Ishmael's village, and it all happens at such a rapid-fire pace that it's almost as if he can't grow fast enough—there's no way to make sense of what is happening. All this is making me realize that it will be worth studying what's *different* in stories that are linked thematically and seeing what it makes us realize. One way to study those differences is to study what's different about the setting."

You may need a lesson on some of the practicalities that help readers study and compare texts. Your readers, now, will continue to read the books they are choosing for their clubs, but they'll analyze and talk about those books in the context of other books they've read before—putting ones alongside each other that they think are related, and learning now to analyze the nuances in how these stories are different as well as similar. There is more written below on support for clubs, for how they choose their books, for how they interact with each other, and for how they document their work. It may be helpful to have a student-created chart up, with the titles, characters,

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places, and themes or issues that occur in your read-aloud texts from this year and in old favorites that your class remembers. Or make color copies of the covers and hang them on the bulletin board—any kind of visible reminder helps students recall earlier texts and work with them. You can also demonstrate how to leaf through the pages of a reading notebook, if your kids are keeping them, reminding yourself of earlier books you've read and of ideas you had in those books. And just as when you showed your students how to revisit their writer's notebooks to see new ideas in old stories, you can show them how—as you revisit and remind yourself of stories you read before—in the light of your new thinking, you have new understandings and insight.

In your third lesson, you'll teach your students that just as we can study how the settings of stories that share themes are usually different and that difference has implications for how the theme develops in the story, there are usually also differences in the characters—in their backgrounds, their perspectives and points of views, and their traits. If you examine how Oliver Button responds to trouble in *Oliver Button Is a Sissy*, he is quiet, almost silent about his determination. He acts in open defiance of his father's urge that he play baseball, but he does it not by arguing but by asking for something different—dance lessons. He doesn't ask for help when the boys bully him—he forges quietly ahead, and it is his silent fortitude that wins over some in his community, such as his father. Clover, on the other hand, also wants to be different. She too doesn't believe the same things her mother does. So both books share a similar theme (and probably several themes)—that kids don't always believe the same things as their parents. But the characters show those beliefs somewhat differently. Neither child speaks in defiance, but Clover immediately enlists other children into her actions. She assumes that kids share beliefs, and in fact, the children she meets rise to those expectations—whereas Oliver is teased and bullied by his peers.

Expect that your readers will *like* to study texts deeply and to engage in intellectual work, and you'll find that they enjoy analyzing and arguing the nuances of how their stories are different. And all the time, they are training their minds. The same kind of thinking that allows lawyers to prepare defenses and researchers to create new vaccines is this paying attention to detail—to poring over material, to honing ideas with intellectual zeal.

If your students need more support with finding places in their texts where characters demonstrate how they help develop a theme in similar and different ways, point them to the moments in their narratives when characters face trouble, and coach them to analyze how characters respond to trouble. You may want, especially if your students are engaged in the parallel writing workshop unit *Interpretive Essays*, to remind them that one reason we read is not just to study themes as an intellectual exercise but to learn how to live from the characters in stories. Bronwyn Davies, the great gender researcher, writes that children learn about possibility from the stories they encounter in school. Teach your students, thus, that readers draw conclusions about characters' traits from how they respond to trouble, and then teach them to compare those traits with their own. Teach them that our characters, like our ideas, are revisable—we can at any moment choose to try to respond differently, to be different. Our own selves are a constant process of revision. In this way, you are continuing to teach students the

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Common Core State Standards work of thinking about the *implications* of what we read. And you are continuing the work of all activists, whose thinking and lives and decisions have been informed by the texts they have read.

In what's probably your fifth lesson of this part of the unit, you'll teach a repertoire lesson—that is, rather than laying out a new strategy, you'll show your students how they have increased their repertoire of reading practices, and you'll show them how to access that repertoire with fluency and delight. So you may teach your students that just as a basketball player who has been practicing dribbling and throwing drills finds in a game that he or she does all that work automatically (while simultaneously processing who is where on the court, the amount of time left in the quarter, and where the ball is going), a reader takes on all the parts of the story as it comes in, now with increased alertness and expertise and thus increased responsiveness. For example, we begin to ask ourselves early on, "What is this story beginning to be *about*?" We begin to track ideas, we collect moments along the way that support those ideas, we recall other stories we've read and think and talk about how the story we are reading compares to those, we compare our own lives and decisions with those that characters make, we have epiphanies where we are struck with possible life-lessons that books leave us with. Moreover, as the books we read get more complicated, things are not always what they seem. Characters who appeared trustworthy may not be, and thus their relationship to themes and the lessons they demonstrate will shift. Any reader of Harry Potter knows this. But with our training, we are that basketball player, weaving with grace and power through complicated courts of deception, ruse, and opposition.

Part Three: Analyzing Literary Devices and How We Are Affected by Texts

Students take great joy in being introduced to symbolism and in exploring symbolism as an analytical lens. Again, remember what Donna Santman says about cliché. The notion that the fence in *The Other Side* is more than a wooden fence, that it is a metaphorical fence, is an absolute epiphany to readers who haven't investigated the history of the color line in this country. Wait, they'll say, "This fence . . . it's not just in Clover's backyard." Investigating and articulating symbolism has tremendous intellectual potential for young readers. Because that fence wasn't just in Clover's yard, and that fence manifests itself differently in different places, times, and situations. Teach your students, therefore, that one way readers are moved by literature is that we are moved by the symbols that seem significant. We can begin to see and say that objects, for instance, have symbolic importance. Usually you simply need to give a stream of examples, and invite students to add to this stream during your lesson, for students to grasp how symbolism works: the fence in *The Other Side* and fences in anyone's lives, the dragon in *The Paper Bag Princess* and the dragons that any of us face in our lives. Move from these obvious, explicit symbols to ones that may be less obvious and more metaphorical—the hat that could symbolize gang acceptance in Eve Bunting's *Your*

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Move, the chess game in that same story, the hunting call in *Crow Call* by Lois Lowry that could symbolize a choice about harming others or protecting lives—each of these objects is laden with potential meaning.

As has been your mantra in this unit, refrain from telling your students what these symbols mean, and instead issue an invitation to explore symbolism. Your students will return to old favorites and begin to dig into the texts they are reading. Show them how to use their pencils and notebooks to articulate their ideas about symbols. Expect sketches and excitement, expect your students to notice first the grand and obvious symbols, and expect to lament that they seem to miss the smaller, more subtle ones. Then decide whether to alert them to some of these, perhaps by using disguised book club conversations—"I'm just wondering about the pitcher of water, too. Have any of you wondered about that?"—or by showing how readers sometimes return to old favorites and pore over them again, reconsidering the significance of objects and moments that seemed mysterious before. It does help to teach students that in good stories, details matter.

In your second lesson of this part, you'll turn to another symbolic element that is surprisingly new to students—the notion that titles can be symbolic as well. You'll teach your readers that often a moment comes in our reading when we realize that the title may have significance. Sometimes it is at the end of the story, and sometimes earlier in the story we'll come upon a line, or a scene, that seems to directly refer back to the title. Invite your readers to consider what "the other side" and "fly away home" and "the hunger games" mean in the context of the story. Your book clubs will usually be zealots about returning to their conversations and arguing and defending what the titles of books they have read might mean. Usually titles have metaphorical significance, often deeply related to possible meanings of the story—what the story may be *about*. Robb gains courage, he emerges from a deeply hidden self, he *is* a Tiger Rising—he shows us that we, too, can become tigers rising.

In the following couple of sessions, you have some choices about how to increase your students' flexibility and skill with analytical thinking and synthesis in complex texts. One option is to teach them about literary devices—such as foreshadowing, repetition, and perspective—and how these devices help an author develop and complicate themes. Essentially, for students this age, we teach them that powerful readers know that in good stories, detail matters, and we ask ourselves about details that seem to be in the text without other context. For example, if there is a cat, and you are wondering why the cat is in that scene, that is the same literary device as Chekov's gun—if there's a gun in Act 1, you can expect it to go off in Act 3—it's probably there as *foreshadowing*. Often we understand how events have been foreshadowed when we *finish* a text—so you may demonstrate how we return to the beginning of a story sometimes, seeing more and delighting in how clever the author was to lay down a trail of bread crumbs. Harry Potter readers are expert at this kind of synthesis—they can connect clues and events across literally thousands of pages of texts, and they are alert to twists. Small scenes along the way alerted Harry Potter readers to the theme that characters are not always what they seem, that Snape might be cruel but also heroic, that small character flaws may not mean the impossibility of greatness.

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We can return to the beginning of *The Hunger Games* and find so many clues there about Katniss's character, troubles, and potential that didn't really make that much sense when we read the chapter the first time—it's only later that we recall them or revisit them. *Edward's Eyes* also demonstrates the significance of foreshadowing beautifully. Even before you begin the story, you're pretty sure there's something special about Edward. And you're pretty sure that he's dead. There are two aspects of understanding foreshadowing that help readers navigate more complex texts. One aspect is that it teaches a discipline of rapid, on-the-run rereading. Anyone who has tackled a complicated text knows that we often turn back quickly—recalling something that seems connected, that was perhaps foreshadowed earlier, and that we now recognize as being significant. So we turn back rapidly. A second aspect of understanding the potential significance of foreshadowing is that we are alert to details that might otherwise seem random. It's the Chekov gun syndrome. If the author inserts a detail that seems somewhat unexplained, chances are that the reader will find that it matters later—both to what happens in the story and to what the story may mean or be about.

Another literary device that is worth teaching not just in poetry but in reading and analyzing literature is repetition. Teach your readers, for instance, that it's not just objects that may be repeated in a text. Sometimes it is lines, and sometimes there are parallel scenes or moments—when things are almost the same but perhaps slightly different. In *Number the Stars*, for instance, the moment comes in the text when that actual line appears—more than once. An alert reader realizes that there is probably significance in that repetition. You might return to familiar read-alouds to show your readers that sometimes a bell goes off in the reader's head—and we say to ourselves, "This is here more than once. I wonder if it's important?" In *Fly Away Home*, for instance, the narrator speaks repeatedly about the blue clothes they wear—the blue shirts, the blue jeans, the blue bags. The character is, clearly, not just wearing blue clothes; he *is* blue. But it's the repetition that alerts us to the character's mood—the author chooses to make so many things blue, in repetition that alerts the reader that blue may matter. Ultimately the boy perhaps shows us that we may feel blue, but we can still hold on to hope.

Finally, you've undoubtedly taught your students before to analyze characters' perspectives and points of view, but this may be an apt time to return to that teaching and show them how to analyze and compare the significance of characters' perspectives to the possible meanings of a story. For instance, the narrator in *Fly Away Home* has a different perspective on airports than the other travelers in the story do—and thus he teaches us that places can seem very different, based on your condition. He reminds us as New Yorkers, for instance, that on any given night the city may feel very different to different characters in it. If this is new teaching to your students, you'll want to teach them how to really articulate characters' perspectives by laying down their own and trying to say what it must be like for the character in the story, even to try speaking in that character's voice about his or her emotions and point of view. If it is reteaching, make this a repertoire lesson—and show your students now how to use what they know about analyzing characters' perspectives to say more about potential meanings and themes of the story.

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Coaching into Clubs: Supporting Students and Pushing Them Further across This Unit

Some of your clubs may need some coaching in choosing books. They may, for instance, think that as they finish one book, in which they have talked long about a theme (such as that kids sometimes crack under family pressures), they may begin to search for a second book by expecting that theme to be listed on the back cover! You'll want to remind your students that good books are about many ideas and that they should trust that as they begin a second book, pretty much any good book is going to be full of ideas—and some of those ideas will turn out to be related to those in their first book. If you know that there are one or two books that will undoubtedly turn up some of the same ideas, of course, you could steer some of your club members in that direction—especially a club of more struggling readers, who may benefit from seeing obvious links between their two novels. Check in with club members as they finish their first novel and are about to begin their second novel. The more readers are tracking multiple ideas, rather than one single idea, the more they'll be ready to see thematic connections across novels.

You may also find that readers move easily into seeing that books are related by theme, but they then don't seem to expect that the books will also have many differences and that these differences will also affect the meaning of the story. Visit with clubs as they are having conversations and, if needed, push them to look at the ways in which the times or places of the novels they are discussing are different or the characters' traits are different—and how those differences affect the ideas these books suggest.

In order to scaffold some of your students in their club conversations, you might try using a large index card that on one side says *Talk* and on the other side says *Essayists*. This tool can be placed in between the club members to support them as they reach to talk like essayists. Readers might begin to talk by sharing out lots of ideas, and once they reach a place where they think, "Oh! That's it, we need to talk long about this one," readers can flip over the card to a series of prompts that support talking like essayists. Some prompts might include:

> One idea this book suggests is . . .
>
> One example that shows (this idea) is . . . because . . .
>
> Another example that shows (this idea) is . . . because . . .
>
> This makes me realize/think that . . .

or

> I used to think this book was about . . . because . . .
>
> Now I think this book is about . . . because . . .
>
> This makes me realize/think that . . .

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or

> These two books are similar because they both teach that . . .
>
> On the one hand, though, in the first book . . .
>
> On the other hand, in the second book . . .
>
> This makes me realize/think that . . .

A big question for readers to ask in club conversations is, "How do two or three different books advance the same theme differently?" These conversations will help when you have readers rehearsing and writing multiple fast-draft compare-and-contrast essays on books that seem to address similar themes. Authors may send their characters on strikingly (or at least somewhat) different journeys toward addressing and resolving a similar issue or have them (and readers through them) learn variations of the same life-lesson. This is visible even in picture books and so might make for quick, accessible practice for your students; in both *Those Shoes* and *Fly Away Home*, for example, the main characters must learn to go without something they desperately want. Both belong to families that struggle financially. And both boys learn to give up—at least for now—the dream of having something. For one boy, it's a pair of designer shoes; for the other, it's a home. The latter may seem much larger a want, but to Jeremy those shoes mean so much more than a pair of shoes. And yet the paths these two boys follow toward dealing with not having what others around them have diverge. Jeremy comes close to getting what he wants, only to discover that it isn't really possible to use the shoes himself (they are a size too small) and instead gives them to his friend, for whom the shoes are a perfect fit. We might say that Jeremy learns (and we learn, too) that making someone else's dream come true may not take away our own longing but can fill something else inside of us. Meanwhile, in *Fly Away Home*, Andrew never comes close to getting out of the airport; he and his dad scrape together money for small things, like food, but aren't anywhere near having the money to rent an apartment. But Andrew finds hope in a little bird that manages, after many tries, to free itself from the airport—and he begins to take small steps toward helping his dad save. One lesson here might be that working toward a dream is sometimes enough to keep you going. The point is that both of these stories address some of the same themes, but the journeys the characters take are different. Rehearsing and writing fast-draft essays will help your students become adept at this kind of thinking, reading, and writing work.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

This unit is a good match for your students if they have learned to read between the lines and infer about characters' emotions and traits, if they pay attention to the settings in their stories, and if they use strategies they know to figure out unfamiliar words

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and difficult parts of their texts as they read. If any of that work seems like it still challenges your readers, you may want to return to the unit of study on character and series novels, Unit Two, and perhaps the book club unit on historical fiction, which precedes this unit. In those units, you'll find more teaching points to support inferring about characters and navigating complex fiction. You might involve your students in assessing their readiness for this unit of study by inviting them to demonstrate a rich partner discussion about their books—and then listen for how they talk about characters' changes and about the storylines in their novels. If they're doing that work well, onward!

By this time of year, students should be choosing books wisely, using their pens to jot and keep track of characters and events in their stories, and monitoring their comprehension and stamina independently. They shouldn't need you to be constantly checking on how reading is going for them—they should know how to do that for themselves. Nevertheless, you'll want to keep an eye on these essentials as your class moves into the heady intellectual work of interpretation. Kids love to talk about ideas in their stories—often more than they love to keep track of how much they are actually reading. Sometimes as they read within book clubs, especially, they'll begin to slow down as readers. If one of your goals was to slow down your readers because you have avid "plot junkie" readers who speed through books, then fine. If you have readers who need to keep reading at a steady pace, with lots of time of eyes on print, keep an eye on reading logs—and make time for kids to look over their logs with their club members to make sure they are getting enough reading done.

As your kids begin to develop ideas about the novels they are reading, you may find that they are quick to submit ideas—and slower to substantiate, defend, and track those ideas. They love to call out a theme but need support in showing how that theme develops across a novel or across texts. You'll see that the unit offers many strategies for finding the parts of texts that are often worth lingering in, and you'll want to look at your students' reading notebook and/or Post-its—and listen to their conversations—to make sure they are using what they know about argument to investigate, analyze, and defend their thematic hypotheses.

Part One: Analyzing Our Lives and Literature

- "When we're thinking about possible lessons of stories, readers know that events in our lives are open to analysis, just as events in literature are. Often we are inspired to think about lessons in our lives by how we think about stories, and vice versa—we can learn lessons from characters and moments in stories, not just from characters in our lives or moments in our lives. We may, therefore, reconsider stories we've lived or read and rethink them in terms of the lessons or ideas they suggest. We keep in mind that good stories are about more than one idea. There may be many possible meanings of a story."

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- "Often there are pivotal moments in a story, where the story may suggest ideas to the reader. As we read, therefore, we may keep asking ourselves, 'What is this story starting to be about?' One kind of moment to be alert to as a reader will be where the characters make critical choices. Those moments are ones where we as readers may learn significant lessons about the character traits of the main characters and how those compare to our own. In complicated storylines, those traits may change. . . ."

- "Readers remember that there are many interpretations of any single event in a story. Just as characters in the story have different perspectives on any event, readers will bring different perspectives. One way to open up to more ideas is to consider the various perspectives of characters and readers and the points of view they may bring to what an event means."

- "As readers, we keep asking ourselves, 'What is this story starting to be about?' We also remain open to revising our original ideas as the story develops. We expect to back up our ideas with evidence from the text, and we mark, collect, and ponder moments in the text that support our ideas."

- "Just as stories are about more than one idea, ideas live in more than one story; they live across literature and nonfiction. Readers begin to compare texts that share similar themes, recalling texts we've already read and remaining alert to new texts, both literary and nonfiction, that seem to deal with similar ideas or themes."

Part Two: Analyzing Differences, Becoming a More Nuanced Reader

- "In texts that suggest similar themes, readers often analyze differences in the texts and how those differences affect possible meanings. One difference we may focus on is the differences in setting—in the time and place where stories occur—and how those affect the way a theme or idea develops."

- "As readers begin to compare texts, we often need to develop some systems to help us recall the texts we've read. Sometimes making charts that list the titles, issues or themes, and characters helps us to quickly recall texts so that we can move to analyzing them. Often we return to a text as well, revisiting parts of a text that seem of more importance as we place a text we read before against one we are reading now."

- "Just as we may analyze the differences in the settings of stories that are linked by theme, knowledgeable readers often analyze the differences in characters as well. We may pay attention to their backgrounds, pressures, perspectives, how

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they respond to trouble, and how those characteristics affect the way the text suggests particular aspects of an idea or theme."

- "As we begin to think and talk about the ways in which characters respond to trouble in thematically linked texts, we may compare those choices to ones we make ourselves in our own lives, with the goal of thinking how character traits, whether they exist in the pages of a book or in an article, are always revisable, as are our own traits."

- "Just as an athlete accesses all his or her skills from the moment a competition begins, so readers access all our reading practices from the moment we start reading. We try to process what is happening in the story, and at the same time as we ask ourselves, 'What is this story starting to be about?' And then we keep adding in new information and having new insights, as we read."

Part Three: Analyzing Literary Devices and How We Are Affected by Texts

- "One way readers are moved by literature is we are moved by the symbols that seem significant. Often we may pay attention to objects that are repeated in the text, and those objects may be laden with potential meaning."

- "Another part of the text that is often symbolic is the title. Readers often think and talk about the potential meaning of titles partway through our reading, and as we finish a text."

- "Readers are often alert to foreshadowing, or what is known as 'Chekov's gun.' We know that in good stories, details matter, and we are alert to the potential meanings that reside in otherwise perplexing or unexplained details. Often, we find ourselves doing a rapid rereading of earlier parts of the text, as later moments remind us of something that occurred earlier."

- "Readers are also alert to repetition—to lines or scenes that feel parallel. Usually there will be significance in those repeated moments, and readers think about their potential meaning."

- "We may consider, as well, the various perspectives and points of view that are represented in the text in any given moment, and across the text, and how those affect what meanings are conveyed. We may compare the points of view of various characters with our own and consider as well whose points of view are invisible, or partial, and how that affects the text's meaning."

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- "Readers may consider the literary tradition, especially the archetypes and narrative arcs that usually inform this tradition, and then consider how this text follows or transgresses this tradition and what that may mean for the meaning of the text."

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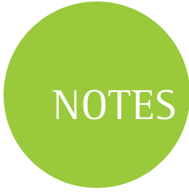
NOTES

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Portsmouth, NH 03801–3912
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ISBN-13: 978-0-325-04316-6
ISBN-10: 0-325-04316-7

EDITORS:
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PRODUCTION:
Victoria Merecki

TYPESETTER:
Eric Rosenbloom, Kirby Mountain Composition

COVER AND INTERIOR DESIGNS:
Jenny Jensen Greenleaf

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY:
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Overview of the Year for Eighth-Grade Readers

September	Unit 1: Making Our Reading Visible and Developing Sustainable Adult Reading Habits
October	Unit 2: Developing Analytical Reading Practices: Interpretation
November	Unit 3: Nonfiction Reading: Navigating Expository, Narrative, and Hybrid Nonfiction
December	Unit 4: Nonfiction Research Clubs: Developing Analytical Lenses for Informational Reading
January	Unit 5: Fantasy Book Clubs
February/March	Unit 6: Reading for High School: Applying Strategies to Challenging Texts
March/April	Unit 7: Test Preparation
May/June	Unit 8: From Author Studies to Independent Projects: Launching a Summer of Reading

This year we have differentiated the reading calendar for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, so that we move toward more interpretive reading and indepen - dence in eighth grade, culminating in some "reading for high school" experi- ences. You'll notice the influence of the Common Core State Standards throughout. This year, we launch eighth graders with an emphasis on developing the habits of life-

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long readers and then move them right into interpretation in October. We follow this work with two units of study in nonfiction reading, and we incorporate nonfiction in the interpretation units as well. We do think that all this reading work will set up your eighth graders to become tremendously strong readers who know authors and genres, who are adept at reading closely, and who are ready to dive into the deep interpretation work that awaits them in more complex novels.

We strongly urge you to give the nonfiction reading units to your science and social studies teachers, so that students get additional instruction and opportunities for repeated practice in nonfiction reading.

This year's curricular calendar has especially been designed with the new Common Core national standards in mind. These standards call for a thinking curriculum that will prepare learners for the twenty-first century. The standards call for a greater emphasis on higher-level comprehension skills. They also led to us to spotlight poetry, fairy tales, folktales and myths, and cross-text work. The other biggest change that informed this curricular calendar is that after almost two decades of research and development work, *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* are available, and we're sure they'll be useful to eighth-grade teachers. This document incorporates a great deal of the thinking and writing that went into those units. We're also eager, as always, to help share resources between teachers. If you devise a new unit of study that you are willing to share with other teachers, please send it to us at *contact@readingandwritingproject.com*.

The calendar starts with an overview of essential structures and assessment tools. Following that is a description of each unit of study. The narrative for each unit should give you enough information for you to plan ahead. It will recommend some touchstone texts, for instance, and it will help you foresee and have a deep understanding of the probable arcs of your teaching. At the end of the unit, you'll also find a new toolkit of teaching points for the unit, followed by some sample lessons written out in full. The teaching points are fit within an overarching path. For almost all units, we offer two or three possible paths teachers and students might follow, so that you can differentiate your teaching for the kinds of readers in your care. Our website, *readingandwritingproject.com*, has many book lists to support the units.

We are aware that there are scores of different ways in which a yearlong reading and writing curriculum could unfold for any one grade level and that this is just one possible plan. The organization of the Project cannot support every conceivable journey of study, and so we put forth one recommended path, which we will support with curricular materials and a calendar of conference days. Although we hope and expect that the teachers in schools linked to the Project will study our recommended curricular calendar with great care, we do not expect that you will necessarily follow all of the recommendations in this document. We encourage you to gather your own sources of information, tap into your own passions and interests, and devise a plan that incorporates and also adapts the collective wisdom in this document. We also highly recommend some texts that will help middle school teachers understand the teaching of reading and adolescent literacy: Lucy Calkins and colleagues' *Units of Study for Teaching Reading: A Curriculum for the Reading Workshop, Grades 3–5;* Donna

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Santman's *Shades of Meaning: Comprehension and Interpretation in Middle School*; Kylene Beers's *When Kids Can't Read What Teachers Can Do; Adolescent Literacy*, edited by Kylene Beers, Robert Probst, and Linda Rief; and Richard Allington's *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers*.

Our emphasis is on fostering a reading environment within which students set independent reading goals and strive to meet them. In *Outliers,* Malcolm Gladwell's study of conditions that allow for extraordinary success, Gladwell states that the single most important condition is that the person be allowed an opportunity to work hard. Without that opportunity, all else is for naught. This curriculum creates an opportunity for students to work hard on their reading. It is a demanding reading curriculum. It places an emphasis on personal responsibility and self-initiation on the part of students, and it demands reading expertise and a passion for literature on the part of the teacher. We think these qualities are crucial aspects of students becoming the kinds of young adults who have agency in their educational futures.

Bands of Text Complexity

A word about the readers in your class, the books in your library, and bands of difficulty—within the units, you'll see references to bands of levels, for eighth grade, in particular: the levels R/S/T, which some of your very struggling readers and ELL students may be reading in; U/V/W, which is still not grade-level for eighth grade; and X/Y/Z, which your grade-level and stronger readers will be reading in. We have found that it is useful for teachers and readers to study the complexity of texts within these bands, usually by studying some prototypical texts within a band (*The Tiger Rising* for R/S/T, *The Lightning Thief* for U/V/W, and *The Hunger Game*s for X/Y/Z). This kind of study particularly helps teachers to differentiate their instruction in conferences, small-group work, and unit planning, so that they teach toward the complexities of the books the kids are actually holding. (Note that newly arrived ELL students and some students with IEPs will be reading below R/S/T, and it's helpful for teachers of these students to know lower bands of complexity as well.)

At R/S/T, for instance, students will find that holding on to the central plotline becomes increasingly difficult because seemingly minor characters may end up as important to the plotline. This means that readers need to hold minor characters and subordinate plots in mind. Readers' predictions, for example, might include the expectation that a character who made a somewhat fleeting appearance or a plotline that seemed unrelated to the main story line could return, playing a more important role than might have been expected. At this level of text difficulty, readers need to follow not only the evolving plotline but also the evolving setting. The setting becomes a force in the story, influencing characters and the plot just as, say, an antagonist might. In historical fiction, for example, readers need to construct a time line of historical events as well as a time line of the protagonist's main events and, more than that, to see the two time lines intersect. An event happens in the world, and that event becomes part of the chain of cause and effect that motors the story's plot. In books

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within this band of difficulty, characters continue to be complex, and now their character traits are often not explicitly stated. Readers need to infer these from the characters' actions.

Some of your readers will be reading in the U/V levels of text difficulty, which means that the story lines are becoming increasingly complicated. Characters will face more than one problem, some problems aren't resolved by the end of the story, relationships are changeable, and some characters may even be unreliable. There are often twists and turns in time, and the character is affected by things that happened long ago. Sometimes the reader even infers ahead of the character, gathering up clues that the main character hasn't yet put together. Things that happen are often separated by many pages as well, so that discerning cause and effect and character motivation challenges the reader more. Take a look at what levels or what kinds of books your kids are mostly reading, and tailor your unit so that you do, in fact, teach them to read, with depth and complexity, the books they are holding.

We hope that the majority of your readers are in X/Y/Z books, such as *The Book Thief* and *The Hunger Games*. In these books, the characters are increasingly complex. They may bump into social issues and discourse that are outside their control. Their lives are shaped by their environments, their family circumstances, their internal flaws—and all of these will have consequences on their emerging, shifting characters. The books at this level also expect that the reader has accumulated some cultural and historical knowledge, because many of the books have historical and allegorical references. There's also a way in which the narratives operate at a symbolic level—they are often implicit social commentary.

Assessment

We all know the joy of finding a book that is "just right" for us. When we are well matched to a book, reading can be one of life's greatest joys. On the other hand, when a book is "all wrong" instead of "just right" for us, reading can feel interminable, humiliating, and tedious. There will never be a single litmus test that can accurately match a student to books, but as teachers, we can make some progress toward this goal if we provide each student with four things: 1) the opportunity to choose books that he or she wants to read, 2) a community of other readers who promote and summarize and talk about books with enthusiasm, 3) books that are easy enough for the reader that he or she will be given lots of opportunities for high-success reading, and 4) encouragement to occasionally read a text that is just a little challenging and the scaffolding to make the experience fruitful.

Assessing reading is enormously complex. Reading is every bit as rich, multilayered, and invisible as thinking itself. Anyone who aspires to separate one strand of reading from all the rest, and then to label and measure that one strand or aspect of reading, must approach this effort with proper humility. No number, no label, no indicator is adequate for the task. Still, as responsible people, teachers need to assess students' reading in ways that give us as full a view as possible. Many middle school

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teachers assess readers by the books they are holding in their hands. Simply assess their accuracy, their fluency, and their comprehension, right in the text, and you'll have a window into how well they are matched to books. Also, by middle school, we want to teach kids to monitor their own comprehension. That said, some of your kids, notably any who did not pass the state test, read below grade level, and you need to know on what level they do read, so that you know if you have books for them.

On our website, you'll find an assessment to gauge your readers' levels when necessary. This tool contains two passages at each text level (A–Z and early adult texts), ranging in length from twenty to four hundred-plus words, followed by literal and inferential comprehension questions for each passage. Students read the text at one level aloud to teachers, who record reading behaviors and miscues. Teachers record miscues for one hundred words; if the student reads with 95% to 100% accuracy, the student reads the remainder of the passage silently and then answers questions (hopefully answering at least three of the four questions correctly). Through this assessment, a teacher can ascertain the general level of text difficulty that a student is able to read at with ease and comprehension.

If a school chooses to use the TCRWP reading-level assessment, you'll conduct an independent reading inventory of a student's work with leveled texts to learn the text level that the student can read with 96% accuracy and strong comprehension. The truth is that using a short passage and a handful of questions to ascertain whether a child can read, say, a level T or V text is not perfect. We've also been using some book-length assessment tools, and these are described in the Assessment Interludes within *Units of Study.* But the system of tracking readers' progress along a gradient of text difficulty does provide an infrastructure to your reading workshop and allows you to have some handle on kids' progress, especially the kids who read below grade level. Most middle school teachers can't really assess all their kids formally in the limited time most of them have with them, so you'll want to focus on those who will most benefit from a formal assessment.

If you'd like to see the chart of benchmark levels for each grade, visit our website at www.readingandwritingproject.com.

Reading Rate

You'll also want to track each student's reading rate and note the way this changes across time. Here's a table that shows *targeted* reading rates (words per minute), by grade level:

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General Range of Adequate Reading Rates by Grade Level			
Grade	**WPM**	**Grade**	**WPM**
5	170–195	8	235–270
6	195–220	9	250–270
7	215–245	10	250–300

Harris and Sipay (1990)

Organizing the Library

Many middle school reading workshops—where students are choosing books rapidly, getting a lot of reading done, and following up on series, genres, and authors they come to love—look like this: the books are arranged in baskets by series, authors, and genres and then either leveled within those baskets or marked by a band on the outside of the basket. By eighth grade, you may be able to use baskets that are devoted just to authors, series, and genres. A basket might be devoted, for instance, to the Demonata series, *Spiderwick Chronicles*, *Narnia, Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, as well as to Judy Blume, Jacqueline Woodson, Walter Dean Myers, Sharon Draper, Maya Angelou, and so forth. Most series are within a range of a few levels. What's helpful about organizing the library this way is that it makes it easy for readers to do more powerful reading work. You want your students to read all of Judy Blume's novels if they love her. You want them to read the entire *Narnia* series once they get started. Here's the thing—you also want them to be able to read them in order, if possible. It is incredibly interesting to read all of Judy Blume's novels, for instance, in the order in which they were written—it's almost like reading social history. Much more important, though, is that the series be available in order. If a student reads series books randomly, he or she actually can't do the higher-level inferring work that we want. Students can't track character changes or infer about cause and effect or character motivation. They're almost relegated to reading for plot. So take a look at your libraries, and do the best you can to have students reorder them into interesting and engaging baskets of series, genres, and authors, while maintaining levels or bands of levels that help kids move along as readers. By seventh and eighth grade, they will not be concentrating as much on moving up individual text levels, because there will be much comprehension work to practice, so moving from X to Y will not be a matter of a few weeks' work. Labeling bins with book levels may not be as relevant then for your grade-level readers. However, if you have many readers who are in lower levels of books, you may find it helpful to reference levels in labeling your baskets, so that readers can easily find books that are right and so that they can notice as they outgrow levels.

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Maintaining Reading Statistics

We recommend that schools establish and implement policies so that each student in the school maintains a daily record of the books he or she reads in school and at home. There are a variety of ways this log might look, including using digital forms for middle school readers. This log might contain the date, the title, the numbers of minutes the student spent reading, and the number of pages read, for instance. These logs are not places for responses to reading, nor do students write book summaries in them. They are simply statistics, such as a baseball player or a marathon runner might keep. When people work at getting better at something, they almost always keep statistics. Some middle school teachers are also having great success with students keeping track of their reading online at www.goodreads.com, where teachers can create a closed classroom site. Kids can record the books they have read and want to read and write reading responses on their own books and to each other—it's a social networking site for readers. As you might imagine, it's more work for a teacher to launch and supervise this site, but then adolescent readers show that they actually *want* to record and respond to their reading, which is great. Some readers are also using the calendar feature on their phones to track their reading.

The most important thing is that you give students opportunities to *reflect* on their statistics, asking themselves: "How is reading going for me? What conditions seem to help me get the most reading done? What fix-it strategies might I use to improve my reading?" Students can work analytically with their partners to notice and think about changes in the average number of pages they read. Students can also notice the genre choices made across time and the relationship between genres or levels and volume. They can also discuss patterns seen by studying the time they spend reading at home versus at school. The logs provide an irreplaceable window into students' reading lives. It's also helpful to gather logs across a grade after a month, or across grades, to compare how much students are reading and how they are moving through books.

School leaders, as well as teachers, should save and study these critical records. For example:

- A general rule of thumb is that a student should usually be able to read approximately three-quarters of a page to a page a minute. (This rule of thumb works across texts of varying levels because generally, as the pages become denser, the reader's abilities also become stronger.) A teacher and/or a principal will want to take notice if a student seems to be reading a book at a dramatically slower pace than three-quarters of a page a minute. For example, alarms should go off if a student reads eight pages in thirty minutes. Why is the student not reading closer to twenty-four pages in that length of time? There may, of course, be good reasons, but this should raise a flag that something in the student's reading is not "just right."
- If a student reads an amount—say, thirty-four pages—during a half-hour in school and then brings that same book home and claims to read a much smaller amount—say, eight pages—within a half-hour of reading time at home, alarms

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should go off. Is the student actually making enough time for reading at home? Does the student need support finding places and times to continue his or her reading?

Above all, student logs are a way to be sure that everyone—teachers, principals, and students—keep their eyes on the volume of reading that students are doing. Dick Allington's research suggests that it takes a student who reads 200 words per minute eight hours to read *Hatchet*. Assuming that your students read for thirty minutes in class and another thirty to sixty minutes at home, and they read at a rate of 200 words per minute, then you should expect a student to finish reading *Hatchet* in five to eight days, which seems entirely reasonable. You may find that a particular student takes twice as long to read *Hatchet*. This should prompt some teacher research. Why is this student reading especially slowly? (If the student is reading below 120 accurate words per minute, then alarm bells should go off. This student should be reading easier texts! Or perhaps the student is sitting in front of a text rather than reading it.)

Getting Time to Assess at the Start of the Year

At the start of the year, teachers need to confer with readers. We are not saying that you have to start with a formal assessment. You do, though, have to ensure that every student is holding a book he or she can actually read. If you know students' reading levels from a prior year, then assume they can read at least at that level. Have them choose within levels they know or choose authors, series, and titles they're confident they can finish within a week—that helps keep them in reasonable levels as well. If you don't know their levels, again, have them choose books they can read at a quick pace to start, and watch their reading habits for a few days. See if they are making progress through their books. Watch their body language—are they engaged? Notice if they seem distracted. If so, ask them to read aloud a small part to you and/or talk a little about the book. You'll quickly get a sense of which kids are in a book that is too hard or way too easy.

Your first priority will be to assess any reader who seems to not be actually reading. Watch for signs of disengagement: the head that revolves, the student who is always losing his or her place in a book, the adolescent who uses reading time as a chance to get a drink of water or go to the bathroom. Then move to the readers who seem to be reading slowly, and see what's going on with them. Pretty soon, you'll have an idea of what your readers are doing. Ask them to jot some Post-its with their thoughts as well, and you'll see what kind of thinking work they're doing for a few days—another window into their understanding of their novels.

At some point, probably in late October, you'll want to take some time to deeply assess the readers who are not clearly at or above grade level.

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The Components of Balanced Literacy

The term *balanced* literacy comes, in part, from the recognition that readers need a variety of different opportunities to learn. The reading workshop provides students time to read with a mentor who is a passionately engaged reader and wears his or her love of reading on his or her sleeve, one who offers opportunities to talk and sometimes write about reading, a mentor who offers explicit instruction in the skills and strategies of proficient reading. All of this is incredibly important, but alone, it is not sufficient. Students also need the opportunities to learn that can be provided by the other components of balanced literacy.

They need, above all, to write. We assume that the reading workshop, as described in these pages, is balanced by a daily writing workshop, and we assume Teachers College Reading and Writing Project teachers will refer to the writing curricular calendar for help with writing. Then, too, students also need opportunities to hear wonderful literature read aloud and frequent opportunities to participate in book talks around the read-aloud text. We hope teachers read aloud and lead interactive read-aloud sessions several times a week. Students need opportunities to read texts within content-area disciplines and to receive instruction in reading those texts well. And students who struggle with fluency (that is, students who read slowly and robotically) need opportunities to participate in shared reading and in repeated oral readings.

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is crucial even in instances where the teacher does nothing more than read spectacular literature aloud in such a way that students listen with rapt attention, clamoring for more. The payoff for reading aloud becomes even greater when teachers read aloud from a wide range of genres, which generally happens when teachers combine reading aloud into all parts of the days, regarding reading aloud as a terrific resource during science, social studies, math, and so on. This can be done by creating a schoolwide read-aloud schedule.

If you are fortunate enough to have a schedule that allows for a one-hour reading workshop, then it is possible to work in a read-aloud, a minilesson, and independent reading each day into reading workshop. If you have only forty-two or forty-five minutes for reading workshop, you probably can't work in all pieces each day. You might consider creating a schedule like this for your reading workshop:

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Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Read-Aloud and Talk (about 20 min) Independent Reading (about 25 min)	Minilesson (about 10 min) Independent Reading (about 30 min) Share &/or Partner Talk (about 5 min)	Read-Aloud and Talk (about 20 min) Independent Reading (about 25 min)	Minilesson (about 10 min) Independent Reading (about 30 min) Share &/or Partner Talk (about 5 min)	Independent Reading (about 45 min) Small-Group Work

If you are working within the forty-two- or forty-five-minute periods, we encourage you to rally your colleagues in joining you in a study of the benefits of read-aloud. Current research supports the tremendous benefits of daily read-alouds and their relationship to promoting growth in independent reading. Perhaps you might get the science and social studies teachers to read aloud for twenty minutes just one time a week from a piece that connects to their units of study. It might be that ELA teachers read aloud to students on Mondays and Wednesdays, science teachers read aloud once a week on Tuesdays, and social studies teachers read aloud once a week on Thursdays. With just a bit of planning, you could ensure that your students are engaging with both narrative and non-narrative texts each week across many topics and subjects. The content-area teachers may be amazed at how the read-aloud supports their units of study and increases student interest and knowledge.

The best way to tap into the potential power of reading aloud, however, is to use the read-aloud and book-talk time as ways to explicitly teach the skills of higher-level comprehension. To do this, a teacher first reads the upcoming section of the read-aloud book to himself or herself, noticing the mind-work that he or she does while reading. Then the teacher decides whether to use the upcoming read-aloud as a means to help students draw upon their full repertoire of reading strategies or to angle the read-aloud in such a way as to support the development of a particular comprehension skill. Based on this decision, the teacher decides to demonstrate and then scaffold students in using either one or many skills and strategies.

If you choose carefully, the read-aloud text can support the independent reading work your students are doing. For example, if the class is engaged in the unit of study on character (and students are thinking about characters as they read independently), you'd be wise to read aloud a chapter book with strong characters who change over the course of the text. This means that the read-aloud book will offer opportunities for deep talk about characters. If, on the other hand, the class is working on nonfiction and some of the students' independent reading involves nonfiction texts, you will want to read aloud nonfiction texts that allow you to show students how nonfiction readers talk and think about (and between) texts.

Whatever skill you aim to teach, it's essential that you read in ways that not only demonstrate skills but that, above all, bring stories to life. Read with expression, flu-

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ency, intonation, and good pacing so that students feel like they are a part of the story and understand that this is what good reading sounds and feels like.

Supporting Students' Vocabulary

Teachers are wise to recognize that we need to model not only a love of books and of writing but also a fascination with words themselves. If you wear your love of language on your sleeve, exuding interest in words and taking great pleasure in them, you'll help your students be more attentive to vocabulary.

The research is clear: the single most important thing you can do to enhance your students' knowledge of words is to lure your students into lots and lots and lots of reading; if students read a diverse range of books, they'll encounter a wider range of words. The vocabulary in historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, and nonfiction will often be richer than vocabulary in realistic fiction and mysteries.

We have found this last year that Donald Bear's *Words Their Way* work has helped a lot of middle school students who struggle with reading learn the spelling and word patterns that, for whatever reason, they may have missed when they were younger. You may want to assess your middle school students for high-frequency words and spelling stage to see if some students would benefit from Bear's word-study work. Those assessments are available on our website.

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UNIT SIX

Reading for High School

Applying Strategies to Challenging Texts

FEBRUARY/MARCH

For many of us, the beauty of reading workshop is that we get to teach our students deeply where they are and lift them higher than anyone expected. Many of you have expressed to us that when you were teaching whole-class novels, you knew that many of your students couldn't read the book and that those who could didn't know how to apply the work they were doing in that book to other books. We had to change our thinking from being teachers of books to teachers of reading. And it has worked. Our students read more than ever before, and we can see how far they have come—we can watch our students move from level to level, and we can watch their reading, talking, and writing bloom under our teaching and their hard work.

But for those of us who teach eighth grade, by the end of the year a familiar anxiety creeps upon us. We know we have taught our students well. We know that they can read powerfully using a multitude of strategies and that they have grown in their ability to articulate their thinking out loud and on the page. But our emphasis has been predominantly on books that were just right for them—books that they chose and that were an appropriate level. We taught toward that level of reading and reader, and we pushed them to the next level, but always at their pace, with our careful differentiated guidance. As eighth-grade teachers, we know that for some of our students, this scenario is going to change.

The Common Core State Standards take into consideration three areas that determine text complexity: the readability of the text; the complexity of meaning, structure, and knowledge demands; and how the reader matches the task. An independent reading curriculum with students matched to texts explicitly takes into account all of these variables and supports students in growing within them. Whole-class text instruction, however, does not take these into account, so it is even more crucial that we

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help our students use what they know already about figuring out tough language, complex structures, and challenging tasks and apply them to reading situations they encounter.

But we still wonder: how will my readers react when they are given a book to read without the choice so integral to our work? How will they connect to texts that sometimes involve characters very different from them, in places that are foreign or from the past, and concerning adult themes or people? Will they remember how to read with an empathetic imagination? Will they read with high volume and intensity? Will they use their notebooks to keep track of their thinking? Sometimes we wince when we think about our still-emerging readers being given books that we know are too hard for them. How will they cope in an English class if most of the text is too difficult?

As a whole, this has not appeared to bring most of our students too much difficulty. Because of the depth of teaching that has come before, most ninth-grade students find the transition to whole-class texts easy to manage—in fact, their whole-class novels form just a small part of their continued independent reading life. For some of our students, however, it is not so simple. And even for the students who use their workshop foundation as a strong base for their high school work, we have to ask ourselves: shouldn't we prepare them for the kind of reading *experience* they will be doing in a year?

This unit attempts to answer that question with a qualified "yes." Yes, because we will begin to examine what a whole-class text unit looks like in workshop, and perhaps more important, because we will be teaching our students in this unit how to deal with challenging texts. But we qualify this "yes" with the knowledge that we have been preparing them for the work of high school already, both by giving them the experience, reading ability, and strategies they need to succeed as readers and by giving them shared text work through read-alouds, shared reading, and guided reading groups. Our kids know what a whole-class text is; they may just need some help learning to cope with it on their own, especially if the text is challenging. They already know the benefit of collective interpretation work from their clubs and our read-aloud texts. In this unit, we'll reinforce that perspective while also preparing students to tackle the challenges of harder texts independently.

In other words, this unit is not a statement that whole-class texts better prepare students for high school. To be clear, we have found this not to be the case at all. Instead, it is a statement that we, as a learning community, should begin to practice ways of exposing our students to the structures in high school without turning our backs on our students when they need us most.

Possibilities for Organizing a Unit on High School Reading

Because this unit will primarily teach students how to deal with unfamiliar and challenging texts, you will want to make some choices about how best to scaffold this work for your students. One way to imagine this unit is that, first, your students are given texts that are challenging for them. For example, you would offer your U/V/W

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readers an X/Y/Z basket of books to choose from, most likely as a book club. They then would learn how to gather everything that they know would be helpful to them as readers to deal with this challenge. Your students would arm themselves with the strategies they know have worked best for them, their club, or their reading partner and any outside materials and texts they might need to help them understand the book deeply. For example, students might remind themselves of the strong character interpretation work they have worked on this year with their club. They might reread reader's notebook pages or glance over conference notes they took down in their notebooks as a way to rev up the reading they are about to tackle. After teaching your students on these "hard but not too hard" texts, you could then move to a *weeklong* whole-class text unit where you guide your readers through a truly difficult book, modeling how you deal with the difficulty and pushing them to do the same (more about these strategies later on in this write-up).

But, of course, you might choose to do the reverse, beginning with a *weeklong* whole-class text as a way to model and teach the moves and methods needed for coping with difficulty. You might then move your students into book clubs where they read challenging books on their own. Whichever way you choose will depend largely on how difficult you want your whole-class text to be—if it is not that hard a book, then you can certainly begin this unit with that experience; however, if you would like to choose a book that is very challenging for your students, then you will probably want to give them some time to try the strategies on a manageable text first.

Getting Ready for the Challenge

Think back to college, or high school, when you were given a book to read that did not make sense to you at first or that you hadn't chosen and weren't engaged in. What did you do? If you were like most readers, you first gathered all of the resources at your disposal to help you read the book more deeply. This probably meant that you made sure there was someone in class who you could read or study with, and with the help of either your teacher or research, you found context to help you understand the text—and to learn to like it.

At the beginning of this unit, you are going to teach your students that when they encounter a tough text, they are not alone and that tough does not mean bad! Lots of things that are difficult are worth doing. First and foremost, they have each other, and you will want to make sure that each reader is partnered up with at least one peer who can help him or her to clarify and discuss the text as they go through the book. While for many students the need to retell what has happened in the book has stopped being overtly necessary, they will want to go back to that strategy now, making sure that after every round of reading, they meet with their partner(s) and see if everyone has the story straight. While partners or clubs will help each other dig deep, unpack lines of text, and interpret the book as they go, the first thing that people can do for each other in a tough text is to simply retell.

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Other people are probably not the only resource we will want to teach our readers to gather in this unit. Most likely we will want to teach kids to find supplemental sources that can help them as they read. In many cases, this will be an easier version of the text that they can read side by side, or in some cases, there will be a movie available and some audio versions to listen to, to gain a good sense of the plot and also to get a sense of how different readers have interpreted scenes. First, it's always interesting to compare interpretations. Also, one of the most important lessons we can teach our readers in this unit is that in challenging texts, so much of what is hard is in the side notes, the little messages along the way, and the poetic use of language and imagery. If, as readers, we can help ourselves by getting the gist of the story—by either reading an easier version or watching a movie—then we allow some room in our minds for these little things that matter so much in tough texts.

Think about how this works in guided reading—the teacher tells the group the content of the book so as to remove literal comprehension from the picture. This is because if the readers are thinking the whole time, "What just happened?" then they will not be able to think about or practice the work that is necessary for them to get better as readers. In a way, you are teaching your students to put themselves through a guided reading group when dealing with challenging texts in high school. First, they must get the external plot down; then they can go back and find the meaning and beauty and trouble in what they have read.

Sometimes readers may want to recall other books they have read that have dealt with similar themes. A reader who has devoured *The Hunger Games*, for instance, is better prepared to read *Lord of the Flies* by comparing the novels. Don't be afraid to show students that readers consider what has already been written about classic texts. They're going to discover CliffsNotes and SparkNotes and online essays—you want to show them how readers might browse these to see what common thinking already exists about a popular book and then to compare their own thinking to what has already been written.

There is a particular way that classic literature and high school novels become harder, and that is there is often tragedy and that the story lines often are wrapped around adults rather than teens. It's just not as intrinsically interesting for a fourteen-year-old to try to understand Willie Loman's life as it is to understand Katniss's or Holden Caulfield's. You might, therefore, introduce adult literature that still has teens in it, such as *Catcher in the Rye*, *The Bluest Eye*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, or *Romeo and Juliet.* You'll also want to teach readers that literature can have parts where terrible things happen, but they can still be beautiful. Show them how writers like Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison force your mind to linger on these haunting images—and what a powerful tool that is for a writer.

Using All of Our Tools

If all we were concerned with is having our students retrieve the plotlines of tough texts, our job would be easy. While our students will need support, determining what

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happened and uncovering a few character traits are not that difficult, even in challenging texts. But we want something very different when we teach our student to read any book. We want our students to read deeply, to infer constantly, and ultimately to be able to think big and interpret the books they are reading.

To do this work on a challenging text is quite, well, challenging. As we said before, partners and clubs will be essential to this work. One thing that we have noticed is that as books get harder, it is more and more important that readers carry with them all of the skills they have learned before. In other words, a reader of a Z level text cannot wait for a teacher to point out that he or she should envision as he or she reads or that a certain scene would be a good place to predict. Instead, readers at this level must be able to envision as they read, notice places that beg for prediction, and stop and infer about their character's personality, relationships, and choices, all along the way without invitation. Your clubs can meet and retell the reading from the night before, clarifying any misunderstandings they have, and then they can pose the question to each other, "So what seemed important from last night's reading?" In this discussion, these clubs can push each other to discuss not only what the important events from the reading are, but also how the book is pushing them as readers—which skills the book is inviting them to employ and what they have gotten out of using those skills—the "And this makes me think . . ." part of every good reading skill.

Challenging books are also challenging because they contain lines with syntax or meaning that is complex. The Common Core State Standards expect that readers moving from eighth grade to ninth will be able to analyze an author's choices around literary devices, orders of events, manipulation of time, and the effects these have on texts. You can encourage your students to pull such lines out from their reading so that they can analyze them more deeply. Often these lines are fraught with meaning in the book, and your readers will want to spend time uncovering that meaning. In this, your students will want to carry with them the work they have done on poetry, where they read small bits of text over and over with different lenses, like imagery, sound, or metaphor. Other times, parts of a story, or even a sentence, are confusing because the author is making an allusion, which might be a mythological, allegorical, or Biblical reference. Teach your readers to ask each other about allusions, to look them up and seek outside sources.

In fact, rereading will need to take prominence in this unit. Even college-level readers need to reread parts of a text that prove too difficult on the first run. You can teach your eighth graders that when we know a text is difficult for us, we read through a part first for what happened and then go back and reread for deeper meaning. This "two-wave" structure of reading can help kids who might feel like they just didn't get it the first time. By modeling, using partners as support, and finding resources to help, we can show kids that most books will become clear if we are willing to do the work to understand them.

And they will need to work. At the core of this unit is the understanding that when a book is hard, we know it will not be a quick read. We know that, when faced with a challenge, we may have to double our efforts by talking, rereading, or researching to help our understanding. Remember what Malcolm Gladwell teaches in *Outliers*, his

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study of the conditions that lead to extraordinary success—that the single unifying condition is that someone gave kids an opportunity to work hard. Gladwell says that, assuming you have the essential skills, hard work trumps talent.

This is a great graduation gift for our eighth graders. We can teach them that they have the ability to make an action plan when they are assigned a book and that this action plan will get them through tough texts. For instance, eighth graders could study their (or sample) high school summer reading lists. They might work with a partner to think about what books they might want to read to prepare them for the books they'll encounter during their freshman year. If students see *Romeo and Juliet* on the list, they may make a plan with their partner to read Jacqueline Woodson's *If You Come Softly*, Sharon Draper's *Romiette and Julio*, and Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series. You might teach students to use summaries or the blurbs on the backs of books to get the gist of the theme and use Internet search engines, classmates, or librarians to help build these action plans. This is a good time for us to work with colleagues to develop author or book title pairs that would help students to build these action plans. For instance, you might pair the following together: *To Kill a Mockingbird* with *Freedom Summer* and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry;* or *Of Mice and Men* with *Out of the Dust;* or *1984* with *The Giver* and *The Hunger Games*. This process models for students that they can make an action plan to gear up to read more difficult texts by using all they learned from participating in a reading workshop.

Action plans might also highlight plans for summer reading partners, reading spots, or places to go to replenish books. Action plans might be centralized around reading volume, where students take what they learned from their year's reading logs and make a plan for how many books they'll need to read over the summer to maintain their eighth-grade reading level. Whether it is finding a partner, using supplemental resources, or drawing upon everything they know about reading, knowing that there are steps to take to succeed is going to empower all of our students to walk through the doors of their high schools a little more confident than they were before.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

This unit builds on Unit Two on interpretation, in which students investigate themes within and across literature. Sometimes as readers move into more difficult texts, reading practices that they controlled in easier texts become more troublesome. You may find, therefore, that you want to turn to Unit Two for some strategies for reading texts for their subtext, or meanings, not just their plots. In this unit of study, you'll take students into classic and contemporary adult fiction and help build a further toolkit of indispensable reading practices, which they can take with them to high school and beyond.

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Part One: Investigating Narrative Structure, Theme, and Craft

- "As we begin complex literature, readers often choose partners to read with. We seek friends whom we enjoy talking with, so we can extend those conversations to conversations about books. We extend our friendships by reaching across social boundaries and forming literary friendships. We make time to talk to someone about what we're reading. Often we'll make reading plans together, figuring out how far we want to read, what other versions of a text we may want to explore, and whether we want to converse in person or online. We also decide if we want to own the book, so that we can annotate it, because writing in the margins can be both effective and satisfying."
- "At the beginning of complex narratives, readers often talk about the literary elements of a story, that is, we will talk about what we think is happening and how events are related. And we'll talk about the characters and the place. Often complex stories are dense, and it helps to make sense of them with reading partners. Illuminating what is actually happening will help us illuminate meanings as well."
- "Sometimes as we start harder fiction, we'll realize that the story takes place in a cultural or historical setting with which we are unfamiliar. Often it's worth doing some quick research to find out more about the time and place, so that the forces and pressures that are exerted on characters make more sense to us."
- "As we read, pretty soon in a story, we remember to ask ourselves: 'What is this story starting to be about?' Sometimes we'll recognize themes and issues that other literature has dealt with, and we'll say to ourselves: 'I wonder how this story will develop this issue or theme? What will be the same or different?' Always, we know that good stories suggest more than one meaning, so we track a few ideas across stories."
- "As we investigate possible meanings and themes, we seek moments in the story that illuminate a theme. We also notice moments that make a critical social issue visible. Sometimes these moments are hypervisible to some readers, because readers come to a text with critical lenses and ethical concerns."
- "Reading partners sometimes form clubs as well, to investigate literature. We know that collaborative interpretations are richer than isolated ones. Each reader brings a unique perspective to a book. Club members often prepare for conversations by annotating a text, writing notebook entries, and/or flagging parts of the text with small Post-its."
- "One way to delight in complex literature is to highlight the parts of the text that we simply like—the scenes or lines or moments that we thought were really well written. These moments often stir up strong emotions in the reader—and those moments are worth returning to, to investigate the author's craft. We may begin to notice literary devices this way, and those are also worth investigating, to analyze *how* the author writes."

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- "Readers know that most texts are part of a literary tradition. We might research this tradition or set out to read more texts within that tradition, especially if we enjoy a text."

Part Two: Dealing with Difficulty While Focusing on Interpretation

- "Sometimes complex literature can remain opaque to a reader, perhaps because the language is archaic, or the setting is entirely unfamiliar, or the characters seem unsympathetic, and we find it hard to work through the text. We'll know the text is getting hard for us, because we slow down, we disengage, we start to not really care about it. Readers know we have tools that help us to re-engage. Sometimes, we talk to another reader—we find out what he or she thinks about the text so far, and we ask what he or she likes about it. We may ask this reader to retell the story like a movie trailer, for instance, or to compare it to books we've loved, or to highlight the most fascinating aspect."
- "Often partners or clubs may read parts of a text aloud, first figuring out any new words, then talking about what is actually happening in the text, then reminding each other of what came before and what tone the scene has, and then reading it aloud in a readers' theater."
- "Readers often compare film versions of a classic text, focusing on how directors and actors interpret scenes and characters and settings and comparing those interpretations with our own."
- "Sometimes when we struggle to understand what is actually happening in a text, it's helpful to see if there are summaries of it online or through curricular supports. If we read a summary first and then return to the text, sometimes it opens up to us because we know something about it before tackling the language. We may also find that there are some easier versions of classic texts available, and those may help us get started as well."
- "When we want to know what other critics have thought about a text, we can turn to literary criticism and curricular supports. If I read the SparkNotes, for instance, I'll know what people tend to talk about when they talk about *Romeo and Juliet*. If I read Harold Bloom, I'll know what he tends to say. So we may gain a history of the discourse around texts by seeing what others have said. These resources may illuminate fresh meaning in the text, and we compare these interpretations with our own."
- "Readers remember the skills we carry with us as readers for tackling difficulty, such as looking up unfamiliar vocabulary, researching the background of a text, rereading, and reading forward. We keep an eye on our reading rate as we do this work, and if it's taking a really long time to try to access a text, we also try easier versions, audio and film, and curricular supports to help us comprehend a particularly difficult text."
- "Readers keep going with our independent reading while we struggle with a hard text. Sometimes turning to reading we enjoy actually gives us new energy

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for reading a hard text. It's as if we warm up, and then we try to get some more reading done on something hard while we're warmed up. If we schedule our time, almost as if we were training for a sport, we can help ourselves get the reading done that we want."

Part Three: Reading across Texts: Allusions, Context, Criticism

- "Readers often take up certain literary and critical theories to investigate the effect of a text. These may help us analyze stereoptypes, discourse, and embedded stances on social issues."
- "We may take up gender and feminist theory, for instance, to examine issues of representation and the policing of gender norms and transgressive characterizations."
- "We may examine the pressures that are exerted on characters and how those shape identity construction—especially pressures from different sources."
- "We may take up Foucauldian analysis to analyze power and how it shifts, and resistance to it, in a text."
- "We may study the hidden curriculum of a text to examine possible subtext—what it teaches and implicit lessons that may be embedded in the text."
- "We may analyze the narrative trajectory of a text and moments of narrative disruptions when the story line or a character seems to bump into oppressive discourse and possibility closes down."
- "We may analyze the residue of reading—the indelible images that linger when we finish a text and what those images mean to us."
- "We often make references to other texts as we read, analyze, talk, and write, comparing and contrasting characters, narrative structures, tone, and craft."

Part Four: Readers Become Expert at Literature, Authors, and Reading Practices

- "Readers know how to make action plans for a novel. We may seek out literary criticism, curricular supports, alternate versions, and nonfiction support. We seek out friends with whom to read, and we make a plan for how we'll get started."
- "As we begin a novel, we carry with us all we know about how to deal with difficulty. We talk to our friends about the text and also about what work we're doing as readers."
- "As we move through a novel, we'll design our interpretations, using the literary and critical theories we find most fascinating. We may compare interpretive lenses and what parts of the text those illuminate."
- "We often think of our reading as a project—rarely does a text exist in isolation. If we read Sherman Alexie, we may want to research the Spokane reservations

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or look up Seattle. If we read Harper Lee, we may want to research the civil rights movement. Or we may make our own text sets of texts that go together thematically or are similar in their literary tradition."

- "If we love an author, we'll often study that author deeply. We may begin to be able to recognize that author's work, so that we're able to say, 'That's so Alexie.' We read everything we can get our hands on."

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