

Structuring Your Literacy Classroom: A Balanced Literacy Block (K to 5)

Chapter Eight

- I. Read Aloud
- II. Shared Reading
- III. Guided Reading
- IV. Independent Reading
- V. Word Study
- VI. Writing

The previous chapters of this text examined each component of balanced literacy instruction in depth. This chapter is intended to bring all of those components together, providing you with a context for understanding how to structure your literacy classroom so that each instructional moment propels your students forward as readers and writers. All that we have learned about literacy instruction—from the grade level standards and assessment tools discussed in chapter two to the research-based instructional methods explored in chapters four through seven—culminates in a real classroom with real students. Our hope is that you will be able to synthesize all that you have learned in this text as you prepare to become an exemplary literacy teacher.

To that end, this chapter is about the implementation of effective, research-based strategies and activities during the instructional day. In districts across the country, teachers are weaving instruction in each component of literacy throughout an uninterrupted block of time—the balanced literacy block. Though the time allotted for the block and its components varies by grade-level, school, and district, it is common for elementary teachers to devote two to three hours each day to literacy instruction. The individual parts of the balanced literacy block include:

- **Read Aloud**
- **Shared Reading**
- **Guided Reading**
- **Independent Reading**
- **Word Study**
- **Writing**

Every day throughout the year, teachers read to students during the **Read Aloud**, read with students during **Shared Reading** and **Guided Reading**, and listen to and assess students' reading during **Independent Reading**. During the **Word Study** portion of the balanced literacy block, teachers provide explicit and systematic instruction in the building blocks of literacy—book and print awareness, phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and the alphabetic principle, and word and structural analysis. Finally, teachers plan their **writing** instruction so that they model excellent writing for students, share the pen with students during Shared and Interactive Writing, and conference with students as they write independently.

Most likely, your school or district will provide guidance on how to structure your literacy block. Consider two schedules that an exemplary second grade and fourth grade teacher follow to ensure that their students receive instruction and practice in all the components of literacy.

A Balanced Literacy Block

Ms. Cleary's Second Grade Literacy Block	Mr. Moreno's Fourth Grade Literacy Block
<p>8:20-8:30 Morning Meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief shared writing activity; student of the day shares the news, teacher scripts message Daily goal setting and class pledge 	<p>8:20-8:30 Do Now and Community Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do Now (correcting sentences for grammar, language mechanics, and spelling) Daily goal setting/problem solving
<p>8:30-8:55 Read Aloud</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will improve reading comprehension by making inferences about characters in <i>Julius, Baby of the World</i> by Kevin Henkes 	<p>8:30-8:55 Read Aloud</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read chapter of <i>The Watsons Go To Birmingham</i> by Christopher Paul Curtis; continue to model using a two-column journal entry to record a short passage of text on the left, and the thoughts or questions that the passage sparked on the right
<p>8:55-9:35 Shared Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will improve reading comprehension by making predictions about <i>The Tortoise and the Hare</i> Students will build fluency through echo reading 	<p>8:55-9:45 Shared Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preview vocabulary (through word web) in next chapter of <i>The Gold Cadillac</i> by Mildred Taylor; whole class discussion of what has happened so far in the novel, think-pair-share predictions (with explanations) for upcoming chapter Read next chapter (teacher reads first page aloud while students track; students read next two pages with a partner and then finish the chapter independently) Remind students to discuss the passage with their partner and use their two-column journal entry to record thoughts and questions After reading, place one passage on the overhead and lead class discussion on what thoughts or questions it sparked; students journal to record ideas
<p>9:35-10:05 Guided Reading/Literacy Centers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small group differentiated instruction; Octavia, Joshua, Barry, Tia will be able to summarize portions of a book (summary sentences on sticky notes) Other students working independently at the listening center (students with fluency needs), word sorting center (students who need more practice with <i>vowel consonant e</i> pattern), word work center (students quiz each other on word wall words/decodable words and read decodable books), reading response center (students from previous day's guided reading group work to reread the book and write in their journals about it), and buddy reading (students doing repeated reading to build fluency) 	<p>9:45-10:15 Guided Reading/Independent Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with two groups, one to receive additional instruction in long vowel spelling patterns, the other to build fluency through a phrasing lesson Other students reading independent leveled books and responding in a two-column journal entry as needed (Clayton, Shawnice and Troy read along with independent-level book on tape to work on fluency)
<p>10:05-10:25 Independent Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student read books on their independent reading level Conferences/assessments with Nikya, Daquaz, and Juan 	<p>10:15-10:40 Word Study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target morphemic patterns: <i>-tion, -tient, -tience</i> Blending, sorting, and dictation activities

Ms. Cleary's Second Grade Literacy Block	Mr. Moreno's Fourth Grade Literacy Block
10:25-10:55 Word Study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target spelling pattern: the // sound spelled <i>ai_</i> and <i>_ay</i> • Blending, sorting, and dictation activities 	11:40-11:40 Writer's Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students work to revise their memoirs by adding supporting details to demonstrate their <i>courage</i>, <i>pride</i>, or <i>persistence</i>. • Discuss what details Lois Lowry gave us to identify character traits in her characters
11:00-11:30 Lunch	11:40-12:10 Lunch
11:30-12:10 Writer's Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin persuasive unit: pre-writing by reading <i>A Fine, Fine School</i> and discussing the genre of persuasion; students describe the purpose of persuasion in notebooks 	

As you can see, both the second and fourth grade literacy blocks are broken into similar parts (Read Aloud, Shared Reading, etc.), but the **time** allotted for decoding and comprehension differs. While second graders in Ms. Cleary's classroom spend a half hour in Word Study, Mr. Moreno's fourth graders devote slightly less time to that part of the block. Further, Mr. Moreno's students devote significantly more time over the course of the morning to comprehension activities. Another difference between these two classrooms is the **emphasis** given to certain literacy skills. A quick glance at their schedules tells us that both teachers use a research-based scope and sequence. While Ms. Cleary's students study spelling patterns for the long /ā/ sound (as is developmentally appropriate for early second grade), Mr. Moreno leads his class in a study of complex word endings (though it's important to note that Mr. Moreno differentiates to meet individual needs by offering small group instruction in the long vowel spelling patterns for his students who haven't mastered this skill).

Finally, we see that the **context** in which students learn and practice comprehension strategies differs. In second grade, Ms. Cleary's students build their comprehension during the Read Aloud and in Shared Reading. During these times, students are listening to a book read to them or are supported by the voices of other fluent readers; thus, their cognitive energy is freed to think strategically about the texts. In fourth grade, however, students are able to use comprehension strategies during Independent Reading; for most students, decoding has become an automatic process. The fourth graders with weak decoding skills (Clayton, Shawnice, and Troy) listen to a book on tape during this time to improve their reading fluency and also attend Mr. Moreno's small group for additional instruction in troublesome spelling patterns.

In the next part of this chapter, we will zoom in significantly to examine each part of the balanced literacy block, considering its purpose(s) and describing what excellent literacy teachers consider as they plan and instruct. Additionally, we will peer into Ms. Cleary's second grade classroom to get a snapshot of each part of the block in action.

A Balanced Literacy Block

I. Read Aloud

During the Read Aloud, the teacher reads a book, poem, or article to the entire class. Many of us have warm memories of our elementary teachers reading aloud to us during “story time,” perhaps as he or she sat in a rocking chair and we sat with our classmates on the rug. Read Aloud is the most teacher-directed part of the literacy block, and it is crucial to the literacy development of students throughout elementary (and even middle) school because it develops their ability to use comprehension strategies to think about a text.

An effective Read Aloud has several instructional purposes, with some variance by grade level. These purposes include:

- To build **book and print awareness** in Kindergarten by modeling reading behaviors, such as handling a book and reading from top to bottom and left to right
- To develop **phonological and phonemic awareness** in Kindergarten and first grade by choosing some books with rhyming or predictable patterns
- To model **reading accuracy and fluency** for all students by giving them the opportunity to hear the teacher read quickly, expressively, and with ease
- To develop all students’ **listening and reading comprehension skills** by asking questions and leading discussions about books before, during, and after reading and by exposing students to sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structure

Teachers who lead effective and purposeful Read Aloud plan and execute them with the following in mind:

- **Choice of text is crucial.** Books that you read with students must be developmentally appropriate and representative of a wide variety of genres. As Jim Trelease notes in *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, students throughout elementary school should listen to both picture books and chapter books. While our Kindergarteners primarily listen to nursery rhymes, predictable texts, and picture books, our first through fifth grade students enjoy and benefit from a healthy mix of picture books and more complex novels. Choose Read Aloud books that build students’ knowledge about a theme or content area, or to model a particular comprehension strategy. For some suggestions of excellent books for Read Aloud, see the “Lists of Books for Read Aloud” in the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 64-81) found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✕
- **Plan your Read Aloud as carefully as you plan any other lesson.** After you choose a book, you should read it carefully, choosing vocabulary words to explicitly teach and marking spots that are ripe for questions and for “thinking aloud” about reading comprehension strategies. Write down your questions on sticky notes, stick the notes in the book, and consider how you’ll ask questions to ensure that all students get a chance to think and share in some way. (While there is not time for every student to share his or her comment with the class, you can provide some opportunities for students to think with a partner or a small group.) Note what you will say as you model “thinking aloud” for students and make sure you are explicit with your students about the thought processes that you go through as you read.
- **Consider carefully when to stop and think during Read Aloud.** Pausing your reading to think and discuss is a balancing act. Stopping too often disrupts the flow of the book and interrupts comprehension. Not stopping enough limits the amount of critical thinking that students can do around the text. Be sure that you balance asking critical questions with leaving “open space” for students to think and to share their thoughts and questions with a partner or the whole class.

When students have learned effective reading strategies, they will often want to use them as you read to them; let them do so.

- **Plan ways for students to respond after Read Aloud.** Students are taking in new information as they listen to a Read Aloud. To fully process that information, they must respond in some way to what they have heard. Reading researchers recommend giving students an opportunity to respond after Read Aloud and asking them to do so in a variety of ways—orally (through discussion or a think-pair-share), visually (through drawing or imagining), physically (through a pantomime), or in written form (through journaling or responding to a prompt).¹⁶⁷ Not all of these methods need to be used for your Read Aloud to be successful, nor must the response time be lengthy. Sometimes one minute to think and share with a partner will suffice, and at other times, a five-minute journal entry is necessary.
- **Build routines** that create an atmosphere conducive to listening and thinking and that mark Read Aloud as a unique time in your classroom. Have a special chair to read from (a rocking chair or a bar stool often works well) and consider asking even upper-elementary students to sit in front of you on the carpet.

Classroom Snapshot: Read Aloud

As the classical music begins to play softly, twenty-one second graders tiptoe to the back rug and find their spots on the carpet, eager for Read Aloud to begin. From her rocking chair, Ms. Cleary asks Daquaz to turn off the overhead lights and turn on their reading lamp. When all twenty-one bodies are still, Ms. Cleary welcomes her students to Read Aloud and holds up the cover of the book that they will read. As soon as they recognize the familiar mouse characters from Kevin Henkes' books, a buzz fills the classroom. "Ooo... this looks like *Chrysanthemum* and *Sheila Rae, the Brave*," several students whisper. Ms. Cleary has chosen to begin this unit on characters by reading several Kevin Henkes' titles because she knows that he creates strong, dynamic characters with which young readers can identify. On this day, she plans to read *Julius, the Baby of the*

Ms. Cleary and her students create a comfortable, familiar atmosphere during the Read Aloud.

Ms. Cleary carefully chooses quality children's literature for the Read Aloud.

World, the story of Lilly, a mouse who is excited to have a new brother until the baby arrives and takes of all of her parents' attention. Out of jealousy, Lilly does everything in her power to reject her brother—until their older cousin begins insulting the baby.

"Whiz kids," says Ms. Cleary, "Today we are going to read and think about the characters in another Kevin Henkes book, *Julius, the Baby of the World*. You remember that main characters, like *Chrysanthemum* and *Sheila Rae*, are the stars of our stories, and that we can learn a lot about these characters by thinking about what they say and do. What made us think that *Sheila Rae* was a show-off?"

Tia raises her hand. "Cause *Sheila Rae* kept making fun of her little sister for being scared of stuff," she explained. "Very smart, Tia. Our class inferred that *Sheila Rae* was a show-off because of how she treated her sister. Did Kevin Henkes tell us in the book that she was a show-off? A chorus of *no's* erupts. No, we had to use our own background knowledge of how people act to understand why *Sheila Rae* was acting that way. Just as we did when we read about *Sheila Rae*, we are going to read *Julius, the Baby of the World* and make some inferences about what kind of mouse the main character is. Now let me give you a little

Ms. Cleary continues to reinforce comprehension strategies, such as inferring, that have been previously introduced.

¹⁶⁷ Rasinski, Timothy V. *The Fluent Reader: Oral Reading Strategies for Building Word Recognition, Fluency and Comprehension*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2003.

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preview of this book. Lilly has been the only mouse in her family for her whole life until the day that her mom and dad bring home a new little brother, Julius. Put your thumb up if you have little brothers and sisters.” Three-quarters of the thumbs in the class go up. “So I bet you’re going to make lots of inferences about why Lilly behaves as she does once the new baby arrives on the scene. Who can remind us what we’re going to think about as we read?” Barry responds, “We’re gonna infer about why Lilly acts the way she does. We have to put our own thinking together with what it says in the book.” Ms. Cleary smiles, pleased that her students are using the language of inferring that she has modeled, and says, “That’s right. Can someone remind me why we need to infer when we read?” Daquaz raises his hand and explains, “‘Cause most of the time the book doesn’t come out and tell us everything about what’s going on. We have to do our own thinking too.” Ms. Cleary nods and begins reading.

*Before Julius was born, Lilly was the best big sister in the world.
She gave him things. She told him secrets.
And she sang lullabies to him every night.
After Julius was born, it was a different story...
...“I am the queen,” said Lilly. “And I hate Julius.”¹⁶⁸*

Ms. Cleary models expressive, fluent reading.

When she gets to her sticky note, Ms. Cleary stops reading, puts the book on her lap, and says, “You know, this part of the story is really making me think. At the beginning of the story, Lilly seemed really happy and kind. But in this part, Lilly wrote a story called ‘Julius, the Germ of the World’ and that seems really mean. I wonder why she did that?” Ms. Cleary looks puzzled for a moment, and the class is quiet. “You know what I’m inferring right now? I’m thinking that Lilly is acting mean because she feels bad about having to share her mom and dad with Julius. I’m going to turn back and show you the pictures that helped me to think she doesn’t want to share...”

Ms. Cleary plans her Read Alouds thoughtfully, marking places to stop and noting specific questions to ask.

Ms. Cleary continues with her reading, stopping at her next sticky note to ask, “Why do you think Lilly drew this picture?” Ms. Cleary shows the page again, pointing to the picture Lilly drew of her family, and allows students to think for a moment. “Lilly drew a picture showing herself, her mom, and her dad and wrote the words ‘that’s all there is really.’ Was that really all of her family?” The students respond with a chorus of *no’s*. The class is quiet for a moment. Slowly, Octavia raises her hand. “I’m inferring that Lilly is wishing Julius had never come.” Ms. Cleary nods. “Hmm... what words or pictures made you think that?” Octavia asks Ms. Cleary to see the page again. “Right there where she left out Julius from her drawing! She’s making up that he’s not in her family!” Octavia exclaims. Ms. Cleary responds, “I think you’re right. Can anyone else think of a big word that we could use to describe Lilly? What word means how you feel when you *really* want something that someone else has—like all of your mom or dad’s attention—and you can’t have it?” Within seconds, hands are waving in the air. “Whisper it to me if you know it,” Ms. Cleary says. Most of the children whisper, “Jealous!”

After Ms. Cleary and her students finish the story, they return to their tables. Ms. Cleary says, “Today we were making inferences about what kind of mouse Lilly is by thinking about what she said and did in the story. Now, I want you to draw a picture of Lilly saying or doing something that showed her being *protective* and *caring* toward Julius.” As students get busy drawing their responses to the book, Ms. Cleary walks around their tables with the text in hand. If students seem stumped, Ms. Cleary asks if they’d like to look at the pictures in the book to help them infer.

Students are given an opportunity to respond to what they have heard and discussed in the Read Aloud.

¹⁶⁸ Henkes, Kevin. *Julius, the Baby of the World*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1990.

II. Shared Reading

During Shared Reading in all grade levels, students read chorally from a single text. The teacher reads along with students, his or her voice supporting their reading as needed. As students are more able to read text independently, teachers decrease and eventually eliminate their voice support. The teacher instructs the students to listen the voices of their classmates so that they are all reading at the same pace. Less able readers will listen to the other students while attempting to read and pronounce as many words as possible. Teachers often walk around the room during this time, helping readers to track print and pronounce words. The type of texts used in Shared Reading varies by grade level.

Shared Reading has several purposes:

- To build **book and print awareness** in Kindergarten and first grade students by modeling reading behaviors, such as reading from top to bottom and left to right
- To build **phonics skills** in students by providing instruction and repeated practice in decoding books on their independent level
- To increase the **reading accuracy and fluency** of students by providing instruction and repeated practice in reading a text quickly, easily, and with expression
- To advance the **reading comprehension strategies** of all students by teaching key competencies before, during and after reading the selection

In order for students to increase their literacy skills, teachers should consider the following when planning and conducting Shared Reading:

- **Choose Shared Reading texts carefully.** Typically in the Kindergarten through second grades, students read one enlarged text, such as a Big Book perched on an easel or the edge of the chalkboard, a poem or chant copied on to chart paper and hanging on a chart stand or the blackboard, class sets of picture books, or a short text copied onto a transparency and projected on the overhead. During the reading, use a pointer or your hand to track the print as you and your students read. From the middle of first grade on, students may read a story from an anthology book, a chapter from a novel, or a magazine article, in addition to reading poems, chants, or other enlarged texts. Texts for Shared Reading should be at the instructional level of most students in the class. Consider choosing a text that is connected to a thematic unit or lends itself to a particular comprehension strategy. For instance, if your fourth grade students are engrossed in a study of the ocean, you might choose an informational article about humpback whales in *Ranger Rick*, a children's wildlife magazine.
- **Use a variety of instructional methods to engage students in repeated reading.** As you read in chapter four, one of the most effective ways for students to build their reading accuracy and fluency is to read a text repeatedly. Think about the Shared Reading text you've chosen and then select one of many instructional methods to ensure that students remain engaged and are able to practice fluent reading.¹⁶⁹ **Choral reading**, the strategy used most frequently during Shared Reading, involves the teacher and all students reading a text aloud in a chorus; the voices of fluent readers help to support those who are less fluent. Variations of choral reading include having the teacher or a student read much of the text, while the whole group chimes in to read key parts, having tables or sides of the room read parts, or using a "call and response" method, in which one student reads a line or two and the class responds by repeating those lines.

¹⁶⁹ Rasinski, Timothy V. *The Fluent Reader: Oral Reading Strategies for Building Word Recognition, Fluency and Comprehension*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2003.

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To teach students to read with smooth, rhythmic expression (what linguists call *prosody*), you might choose a text and ask students to **echo read** the passage by sentence or line. You can model the correct phrasing and expression and then encourage students to mimic the sound of your voice.

Many teachers have found that **reader's theater** significantly improves the reading accuracy and fluency of their most struggling readers. To use this in your classroom, choose a script, assign parts to students, and then spend several days in structured practice. Students are motivated to improve the fluency and accuracy of their delivery because they know they will get to perform the script in front of classmates.

Classroom Snapshot: Shared Reading

Ms. Cleary's second graders have been studying how good readers use a variety of strategies, such as predicting, asking questions, and inferring, to help them understand their reading. Her students have learned that readers make predictions by using their background knowledge about characters or the familiar patterns of genres to make smart predictions about stories.

"Whiz kids, let me have your attention. Before we start Shared Reading today, I want to ask you to think for a minute about one strategy that we use to understand our reading—making predictions. When I'm reading a book and I make a prediction, I'm not just taking a random guess at what could happen. I'm really thinking hard about what I know about a character or what I know about a particular type, or genre, of story. Today, we are going to read *The Tortoise and the Hare* by Janet Stevens and make some predictions about the story by thinking about what we already know about the genre," she explains.

The students take out their anthology books and turn to the opening page of the story. "I want everyone to let his or her eyes scan the opening page of this story. What do you notice that might be helpful for us as we consider what could happen in this story?" Ms. Cleary inquires. The room is quiet as the students glance over the opening page, reading the title, looking at the pictures, and thinking. Finally, a hand shoots up. "Under the title it says that this story is a fable," announces Nikya. "We've read those before!"

All students have their own copy of the text used in Shared Reading.

"Yup—we sure have. What are the titles of some other fables that we've read?" Several heads turn to reference the class Bookworm, a list of all the books they've shared during Read Aloud and Shared Reading, color-coded by genre and posted on a giant inch-worm that crawls across the bulletin boards. "*The Ant and the Grasshopper!*" "*The Boy Who Cried Wolf!*"

Ms. Cleary helps students apply their understanding of a particular genre as they make predictions about a new story.

"From our reading of fables, what have we learned that might help us make smart predictions about *The Tortoise and the Hare*? Turn to your partner and share one thing you know about fables," directs Ms. Cleary. Students share their ideas, noting that most fables teach a lesson and use animal characters that act and talk like people. After the students share out their ideas, Ms. Cleary says, "So before I even read, I'm ready to make a prediction. I can see by your hands that many of you are too!"

Joshua, want to share your prediction?" Joshua smiles. "I think that these animals are going to teach us a lesson about how to act," he explains. "Joshua, can you tell us why you think that?" Ms. Cleary asks. Joshua replies, "I think it because all of the fables we've read have taught us a lesson. One of the animals usually makes a big mistake. Remember how that grasshopper wasted all of his time singing and then didn't have any food saved up for winter?" Ms. Cleary responds, "I do remember that, Joshua. That's a good example of one lesson we learned from a fable."

As this is the first reading of this fable, Ms. Cleary reads a sentence or phrase aloud, and asks the students to repeat it back to her and make their voices sound similar. The short phrases and repetitive dialogue of the fable help the students to echo read with a high level of fluency, especially for a first reading. At a suspenseful moment in the story, Ms. Cleary pauses and says, "Wow! The hare thinks he's being so funny by lying down and taking a nap. I think he's trying to make fun of how slow Tortoise runs. But now I'm remembering what Joshua told us, that in fables, one character usually makes a big mistake that teaches him or her a lesson." After a few quiet moments, several students whisper, "Ooo, I know what's going to happen!" Ms. Cleary says, "I want you to use what you already know about fables to think about this story. What do you think might happen? Turn to your partner and make a prediction."

Students build fluency by mimicking Ms. Cleary's phrasing and expression through echo reading.

After a minute of discussion, Ms. Cleary says, "I am so impressed with how thoughtful your predictions are! Really smart thinking! Now, turn back to your partner and explain why you made that prediction. What made you think it? You might want to start with these words... *I predicted that because...*" and she writes those words on the board to get students started. Several moments later, Ms. Cleary asks Juan to share his partner's prediction. He shares, "Barry and I both think that the hare is going to lose the race." Ms. Cleary asks Barry to explain. "The hare is playing around and wasting all his time. He's not even running; he's just laughing at the tortoise and joking on him. And the tortoise doesn't pay him any mind and keeps walking. I think the hare is going to waste all of his time and the tortoise will catch up and beat him."

Ms. Cleary pushes her students to think more deeply about their predictions by basing them in the facts of the story or characteristics of the genre.

"Very good thinking, Barry and Juan. Let's continue reading and find out what happens," Ms. Cleary says. The class continues to echo read the story, and at the end, many students note that Barry and Juan's prediction came true. "Yes, Barry and Juan thought that Tortoise would win and they were right. What lesson does this fable teach us?" Ms. Cleary inquires. Nikya says, "It teaches us not to play around too much." Daquaz adds, "Also, that if you really want to win something, you've got to try hard and stay focused." Ms. Cleary says, "I think you're both right. Whiz kids, I am so impressed with the way you used your knowledge of fables to help you make good predictions. Make sure to do that when you are reading on your own."

III. Guided Reading

Guided Reading is a time to have students practice using decoding and comprehension strategies as they read a text that is on their instructional level (they can read it with 90% accuracy). Membership in a Guided Reading group is flexible and depends on the needs of students. The teacher makes sure to pick a text that is on the appropriate level and that allows students to practice a strategy that will address a pre-identified need. The teacher works with a small group (ideally, no more than six) to support their reading, making decisions about group membership and the focus of the lesson based upon ongoing assessment of what students are and are not doing to make meaning while they read.

Guided Reading can serve a variety of purposes, depending on the needs of students:

- To build **book and print awareness** in Kindergarten and first grade students by having students recognize the cover and back of a book and practice reading from top to bottom and left to right, for instance

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- To develop **phonics skills** in students by having students practice decoding words with a text that is on their instructional level
- To improve students' **reading accuracy and fluency** by teaching fluency mini-lessons and by asking students to repeatedly read a text
- To develop students' **reading comprehension skills** by having students use a particular comprehension strategy

Teachers plan and execute Guided Reading lessons with the following in mind:

- **Planning the lesson.** Determine Guided Reading group membership by considering the needs of individual readers, as well as their reading level. For instance, you might pull together several early readers who are unable to use punctuation to guide their oral reading—these are your students who never take a breath at a period. Though many students in your class might be early readers, only those students who are skipping over periods or question marks would be pulled for this Guided Reading lesson. Because you aim to address specific individual needs through these lessons, membership in a group is flexible; students rotate in and out of groups as particular needs arise and are addressed instructionally.

After grouping students and determining the objective, it's time to **choose a text** that is appropriate for the lesson. Many schools have sets of fiction and non-fiction texts suitable for Guided Reading; there are multiple copies of each book and books are leveled according to difficulty (Scholastic and Rigby books are commonly used). However, if your school does not have such a collection you might use selections from a basal reading series, or you could print out multiple copies of leveled texts from one of the myriad websites that now offer these at no charge. For a listing of a few, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 82: "Leveled Books"), which can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

- **Conducting the lesson.** Most often, you will have your small group join you at a common meeting area (either a table or a spot on the carpet) for Guided Reading lessons. Many teachers follow these steps to conduct a guided reading lesson:
 1. Hand out individual copies of the text to all members of the group and begin the lesson by introducing the book and setting the purpose for the lesson. For early and emergent readers, the book introduction is often a **picture walk**, a way to activate background knowledge and clarify challenging vocabulary. For fluent readers, you will say enough to get students interested in the text, relate it to their lives, and address any challenges inherent in the text.
 2. Regardless of their stage as a reader, students read the book on their own, simultaneously. Early and emergent readers will read aloud (it is often helpful to have them turn away from each other to avoid distraction), while fluent readers read silently.
 3. While students read, you should ask one student to read aloud for a bit while you listen and guide him or her to use the print concept, decoding skill, or reading strategy on which the lesson focuses. As you listen and guide each student, you might use this as an opportunity to informally assess fluency.
 4. Students should be encouraged to read the book several times during the course of the lesson to build fluency and further comprehension. Explain the purpose of this practice to your students so that they understand how important it is to their progress as readers.
 5. After students have finished reading, ask them to respond to the text, revisit particularly difficult passages, work with words and language from the text, or demonstrate understanding of their reading (though you won't do all of these things during one lesson).

- **Considering reading and developmental levels.** Both the format and the content of Guided Reading differ based upon the stage and developmental level of the readers in the group.
 - For early and emergent readers (usually Kindergarten through the middle of second grade), you will need to provide a great deal of support, through picture walks, exposure to the language of the book before reading, and attention to conventions of print. Though each student reads the text independently, early and emergent readers need to read aloud, often in a whisper voice. After the reading, ask students to respond through shared or interactive writing, drawing, or a shared retelling of the story. Some common objectives include: concepts about print (such as ending punctuation), decoding strategies (such as blending the words), and comprehension strategies (for example, identifying the story structure or identifying and using non-fiction structures, like a table of contents). Readers at these stages will read a new book almost every time they work in a guided reading group, but should continue to read their guided reading books during independent reading.
 - Fluent readers need less support from you during guided reading. Book introductions should be brief—just enough to spark students’ interest, give them the gist of the book, and allow them to connect it to background knowledge (including genre or author knowledge). Fluent readers will read silently, though you might ask a student to read out loud for a bit to monitor fluency and comprehension. After reading, students may have a discussion, respond to their reading in a journal, or reflect on their strengths and weaknesses as readers. For these comprehension activities to improve students’ reading, you must explicitly teach and model them for your students over a period of time until they can do it on their own.
- **Creating Literacy Centers.** Students who are not in the Guided Reading group are working independently or with partners, often at literacy centers. When creating literacy centers and assigning students to them, you should be guided by three questions. First, how will the practice done in this literacy center propel students forward as readers? Some centers, such as the art center, might marginally help students with their reading (as it can involve reading to follow directions), but do not genuinely help students learn to read. Second, in which center does each student need to work to become a more proficient reader? Students who need practice reading fluently might go to the listening center and whisper along with a recorded reading of a book. Partners might match pictures of rhyming words. Some students might use a reading response journal to draw or write about a book read independently or during Read Aloud, Shared, or Guided Reading. Regardless of grade level, students’ needs should dictate what they do when they’re not in a Guided Reading group. Finally, are students able to do this activity independently with a high rate of success? If you are conducting lessons with guided reading groups, you will be unable to provide any assistance to students working independently. For this reason, students must be able to complete any task at literacy centers entirely on their own. Teachers who do not carefully consider this issue often find their guided reading groups interrupted, their students off task, and the instructional needs of all children unmet.

Classroom Snapshot: Guided Reading

Ms. Cleary has asked Joshua, Tia, Barry, and Octavia to come to the back carpet for Guided Reading. Ms. Cleary knows from her reading conferences that these four students are beginning to read chapter books, but are not always able to remember what happened, particularly if they read one book over the course of several days. Ms. Cleary

Students are chosen for Guided Reading based on recent informal or formal assessment results. All students share a similar need.

A Balanced Literacy Block

suspects that her students are not stopping to think about what’s happening in their stories as they read. As a first step, Ms. Cleary has decided to ask her students to write one or two sentences that summarize the most important things that have happened at the end of a section in a book.

“Boys and girls, during our independent reading conferences, I’ve started to notice something about each one of you. You are all starting to read chapter books! I can’t wait to hear about some of the amazing books that you’re going to read over the next few months of school. But I remember a problem I had when I first started reading chapter books, and I’m wondering if any of you are having it too. Have you ever read a chapter in a book and then found that you couldn’t remember what happened?” Four heads nod in unison. “Joshua, I’m going to put you on the spot for a minute. Will you tell everyone about the problem you had with your *Junie B. Jones* book the other day? Look back in your journal to remind yourself,” Ms. Cleary says. During an independent reading conference earlier in the week, Joshua had seemed unable to remember much of what was happening in book he was reading. Ms. Cleary had asked him to write this problem down on a sticky note and put it in his reading journal so that he could share with the group today. Joshua opens his notebook, reads for a moment, and replies, “Well, I was reading about the mushy gushy valentine and Ms. Cleary asked me why Junie B. thought the valentine was from Meanie Jim and I couldn’t remember.”

“Thanks for sharing, Joshua. When we start reading books that are longer, we’ve got to make sure that we are remembering the important things that have happened earlier in the book so that we can understand what’s happening later on in the book. Today, we’re going to practice writing down one summary sentence after we read a chapter. That sentence is going to summarize what we’ve read; it will remind us of the *most important* things that happened in that chapter. Does that make sense to everyone?” Ms. Cleary asks. Octavia raises her hand, “Are we supposed to write it in our reading journals?” Ms. Cleary replies, “Good question. We’re going to write it on a sticky note and at the end of the lesson, we’ll stick our notes in our journal.”

Ms. Cleary explains the specific skill that students will be working on during the Guided Reading lesson.

The book is carefully chosen to match the objective of the Guided Reading lesson. Each student gets a copy of the book and reads it to him or herself.

Ms. Cleary gives a brief introduction to *Martin and the Tooth Fairy*, explaining that after Martin realizes that his tooth fairy pays more money per tooth than those who visit other children’s homes, he comes up with a plan to make money off of his classmates’ teeth. Ms. Cleary has chosen this picture book because it is short enough to work through in one guided reading lesson and, though it does not have chapters, it has clear points at which students can stop and summarize.

Ms. Cleary says, “I want each of you to read the first part of the book silently. When you get to the end of that section, you’ll notice that I’ve put a sticky note there for you to write your summary sentence. Remember, the sentence is only to remind you of the most important things that happened in the part you just read. After you’ve written your summary sentence for the first part, you may go back and reread that part until everyone is ready to share. Can someone tell me what we’re going to do?” After Tia repeats the directions, the students get started.

As they read, Ms. Cleary moves around the table, leaning in and asking students to read out loud. When the students finish the chapter, Ms. Cleary looks at Barry and asks, “What are you thinking?” He responds with a blank look. “Octavia, can you help Barry out?” Ms. Cleary asks. “Um, I think we’re supposed to write something on our sticky note?” she replies, sounding more like she’s asking a question than making a statement.

Ms. Cleary realizes that her students are not ready to summarize on their own so she decides to take a different, more structured approach. “Let’s work through this first one together. Remember that we are writing one sentence that summarizes what this first part is all about. I’m going to share two ideas I have for what our first summary sentence could be. You tell me which one you think is better. Are you ready?” The students nod their heads. “Choice one: Martin lost his tooth at school and Cynthia called it ugly. Now listen to choice two: Martin put the tooth he lost under his pillow before bed and found four quarters there the next morning. Which one is a better summary sentence? Let me see everyone’s fingers voting for choice one or choice two.” As she glances around the circle, every child is holding two fingers in the air. “Ah... who can tell me why they’re voting for number two?” Barry looks eager to answer this time. “The first one didn’t tell what it was about. That was just something little that happened at the very beginning. You didn’t even tell about the money!” Ms. Cleary smiles and asks, “Do the rest of you agree?” Joshua, Tia, and Octavia nod in unison. Tia adds, “Yeah, sentence two tells the most important part of what happened.”

“Alright, now let’s keep reading, and when you get to your next sticky note, turn to your partner and decide together on a good summary sentence. Remember to tell the most important part.” Ms. Cleary instructs. Ms. Cleary pauses to look around at her other students busily working in centers. A quick scan shows all students reading, writing, or quietly working in partners as they should be. After about ten minutes, each pair has written a summary sentence and Ms. Cleary asks them to share. Tia and Barry read their sentence first: “Martin made a tooth business.” Then Joshua and Octavia volunteer: “Martin is going to try to make some money by putting other kids’ teeth under his pillow.” Ms. Cleary replies, “I like how Barry and Tia used the word *business* in their summary. But I think that Joshua and Octavia’s summary really gave us the most important part: that Martin is trying to make some money, or what we call a *profit*. Can we combine these so that we use that great word *business* and the detail about Martin trying to make a profit in one sentence?” The students combine the two sentences and write it on a sticky note. Ms. Cleary instructs, “Now let’s all read the next section and think of a summary sentence independently. Remember: we want the most important part.” The students read and write as Ms. Cleary listens to them one at a time, offering guidance and praise for excellent summary sentences.

Students not in the Guided Reading group work at other literacy centers on assignments they can complete without guidance from the teacher.

IV. Independent Reading

During Independent Reading, students put all that they’ve learned about decoding and comprehension into action as they choose and read books on their independent levels. Independent Reading serves a variety of purposes in the literacy classroom, including:

- To increase **book and print awareness** in Kindergarten and first graders by having students practice handling a book correctly and reading (even pictures) from top to bottom and left to right
- To improve **phonics skills** by having students decode words in books on their independent reading level
- To build **reading accuracy and fluency** by the repeated reading of books
- To boost **reading comprehension** by asking students to think and write about their reading and by exposing them to many vocabulary words

Simply allowing students to pick books and read for an extended period of time will do little to move them forward as readers. By considering the following questions you can ensure that each student is becoming a better reader every day during independent reading:

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- **What are students reading?** You must ensure that students are reading books on their independent reading level, meaning they can read them with 95% accuracy. Student choice is a hallmark of Independent Reading, and so we have the responsibility of teaching students how to pick books that are “just right” (on their independent level). Given that there will be students with a wide range of reading levels in one classroom, the requirement that every student have a “just right” book in his or her hands creates the need for a wide variety of types and levels of texts in the classroom library. Reading researcher Richard Allington has noted that every classroom library should contain 500 texts, equally split between fiction and nonfiction. Organization is key; books should be kept in baskets so that students can see the front cover and should be grouped by genre, reading level, or series. Students should keep several just right books in a “portable bookshelf” (often a freezer size Ziploc bag that travels between school and home). For a list of resources on where to find such reading materials, see again “Leveled Books” in the online **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 82). ✨
- **What is the teacher doing?** During independent reading, you will confer with individual students, take formal and informal assessments and have conversations about the student’s progress and about books he/she is reading. Use a variety of informal assessments, such as anecdotal notes and running records, or formal ones, like the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) or Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI). (Your district’s reading series probably includes these kinds of resources. Ask a colleague about the kinds of resources your district is using to analyze students’ reading progress.) In order to use data to inform your instruction, keep a record of all reading conferences that you have with students and examine the data you’ve gathered to identify individual needs. In addition to assessing students’ decoding skills, fluency, and comprehension, reading conferences are a perfect opportunity to determine a student’s interest in particular genres, writers or series and to assess their overall attitude toward reading.
- **How does this differ by grade level?** In Kindergarten and the beginning of first grade, students are often “reading” the pictures of their books and revisiting texts read in Shared Reading or created in Shared or Interactive Writing. Students at this stage will read out loud and may need to read with a partner or listen to a book on tape for some portion of Independent Reading. Students in upper elementary grades will likely be switching between Independent Reading and journal writing to track their thinking and monitor their comprehension. The time students spend reading independently varies according to grade level and time of year.

Classroom Snapshot: Independent Reading

Part way through Independent Reading, Ms. Cleary glances up from her conference table and smiles. Her students are spread out across the classroom—some sprawled out on pillows in the library and on both carpets, others sitting at several tables around the room. They all have their Ziploc bags with them, containing between two and five books that they chose when they arrived in the morning. There is a slight buzz in the classroom, as about half of her students still need to read out loud. While these students are audible, Ms. Cleary has taught them that their voices should never disturb other readers, so they “whisper read.”

During Independent Reading time, students read books they have chosen that are on their independent level.

Ms. Cleary is particularly pleased to see that after much hard work at the beginning of the year, her students are now choosing their own “just right” Independent Reading books. Joshua is working on his second book from the *Junie B. Jones* series; Juan, who loves non-fiction books, is reading *Rollercoaster Science*; Nikya giggles to herself as she reads *Itchy, Itchy Chicken Pox* for the fifth time.

She turns her attention back to Daquaz to continue their reading conference. He transferred into the class two days earlier, and Ms. Cleary’s goal for this conference is to determine his strengths and needs

Ms. Cleary uses this time to conference with individual students. Today, she uses part of the time to administer a phonics diagnostic to a new student.

as a reader. To this end, she has decided to administer the CORE Phonics Survey to assess his phonics-related skills.¹⁷⁰ Because she knows that Daquaz knows the names of all the alphabet letters, she begins the assessment by saying, “Daquaz, I’m so glad that you have joined our class. Today, I’m going to work with you for a little bit on your reading. I’m going to ask you to tell me what sound a letter makes and read some words for me. Does that sound good?”

Daquaz nods. “Okay, let’s begin. Look at these letters. Can you tell me the sound each letter makes?” After a few minutes, Ms. Cleary has determined that Daquaz knows all of the consonant and vowel sounds.

“Wow, you’re doing a great job, Let’s keep reading,” she encourages. “Now, I want you to read some words.” Daquaz begins to slowly decode, “*Sip... cat... let... but... hope* (for *hop*).” Ms. Cleary notes that he substituted *hope* for *hop*. As he made only one error in this first list, Ms. Cleary allows him to read the next line. “The second set will be made-up words. Don’t try to make them sound like real words,” she explains. Daquaz pauses and scrunches his face slightly. “Umm... *vope* (for *vop*)... *fute* (for *fut*)... *did*, I mean *dit*... *kem*... *lazy* (for *laz*).” He looks up expectantly. Ms. Cleary says, “Good. Thank you so much for reading with me today. We’re going to meet again tomorrow and talk together about your reading.” As he returns to his desk, Ms. Cleary makes a note in her assessment

When Ms. Cleary conferences and/or assesses students, she takes careful notes, synthesizes her thoughts, and plans future instruction.

notebook about the difficulty Daquaz had attempting to read the pseudo-words that contain short vowel sounds, even though he was able to pronounce all of the short vowel sounds. She thinks a good first step is to teach Daquaz that the vowel letters make different sounds depending on what other sounds are nearby. Tomorrow, she’ll begin teaching him about the closed syllable pattern in a small group and have him practice reading and writing words with this pattern for the next week.

V. Word Study

During Word Study, the teacher provides direct, systematic instruction in the basic building blocks of the English language so that students are able to decode and comprehend with ease. In a Balanced Literacy block, Word Study serves the following purposes:

- To develop **phonological awareness** by having students participate in activities that help them to hear rhymes, syllables, and onset/rimes
- To increase **phonics skills** by explicitly teaching students sound-spelling correspondences and patterns and decoding skills
- To build students’ **word and structural analysis** skills by teaching students to use parts of words (prefixes, suffixes, Greek and Latin roots) to decode multi-syllable words and understand word meaning

To conduct Word Study lessons that move students toward being independent, proficient readers, consider the following:

¹⁷⁰ CORE. *Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures*. Novato, CA: Arena Press, 1999.

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- **Understand how the written and spoken English language is constructed.** Excellent literacy teachers realize that teaching students the building blocks of reading is an enormous undertaking and that doing it effectively requires specific knowledge in the building blocks themselves. These teachers have a deep understanding of how the spoken and written English language is constructed. They use that knowledge to systematically teach students to articulate and manipulate sounds and use sound-spelling correspondences and patterns to read and spell.
- **Use direct, explicit, and systematic instructional methods.** Once you understand the building blocks of literacy, your task is to use explicit and systematic methods to teach your students to decode. During Word Study, use a variety of methods to build **phonological and phonemic awareness**, including:
 - Improve students’ ability to hear sounds by working with rhymes, riddles, and stories;
 - Teach rhymes and alliteration and play games to allow students to practice;
 - Scramble and unscramble sentences
 - Build sentences from individual words
 - Teach word segmentation by syllables; clap out syllables in students’ names and other familiar words
 - Draw students’ attention to their speech organs as they pronounce individual sounds;
 - Teach initial and final phoneme identification; have students practice identifying, deleting, and replacing initial and final phonemes; and
 - Teach children to put sounds together (blending) and take them apart (segmenting).

To teach students **phonics and the alphabetic principle**, use the following methods:

- Teach students to recognize upper and lower case letters by examining their shapes in alphabet books and on letter cards, modeling how they are formed, and asking students to write them;
- Explicitly and systematically teach students the relationship between sounds and letters, including consonants, consonant blends (/bl/, /gr/), digraphs (two successive letters that make one sound, such as /sh/ and /aw/), short and long vowels, and diphthongs (a speech sound made from two mouth manipulations, such as /oy/);
- Explicitly and systematically teach students to blend together sounds to decode unfamiliar words;
- Provide opportunities to practice phonics skills by building words that use the sound-spelling correspondences and patterns they have learned;
- Provide opportunities to practice phonics skills by sorting words that share a pattern; and
- Teach students non-decodable high-frequency words through a Word Wall.

Finally, as students become better able to decode, teach your students to use **word and structural analysis** to help them decode multi-syllabic words and understand their meanings in the following ways:

- Teach first graders compound words, simple contractions, and important word endings (like -ed and -ing);
- Teach second through fourth graders root words, simple prefixes and suffixes (like re- and -er), homophones, more complex contractions, and syllable types;
- Teach third through fifth graders complex prefixes and suffixes (like bi- and -tious); and
- Teach fourth through sixth graders the Greek and Latin roots of English words.

Classroom Snapshot: Word Study

Ms. Cleary's second graders are seated at their desks. "Whiz kids, get ready. It's time for Word Study. Listen very carefully as I call you to the carpet. Can everyone who has the /uh/ sound at the end of their name come to the carpet?" Octavia, Tia, and Nikya push in their chairs and join Ms. Cleary at the carpet. "Good listening girls. Now, anyone who has the /sh/ sound anywhere in their name, come on down!" After about thirty seconds, all of the students are sitting in their spots in front of the white board and Ms. Cleary says, "You all are becoming experts at blending words to help you read. Today, we are going to blend words with the long a sound, /ā/. Say the sound together and make sure your mouth makes a smile." The class says the long a sound in chorus. "Great. You all know that there are many ways that we can spell this sound, and today we are going to work with two of those spellings, ai_ and _ay." She writes those two spelling patterns on the white board. "Whiz kids, are you ready to blend?" Ms. Cleary asks. "Yeah!" her students answer. Ms. Cleary writes bay on the board.

Ms. Cleary uses even small opportunities to reinforce students' phonological and phonemic awareness.

Ms. Cleary: [Points to b] Sound.

Students: /b/

Ms. Cleary: [Points to ay] Sound.

Students: /ā/

Ms. Cleary: [Sweeps her finger under the word] Blend.

Students: /bay/

Ms. Cleary: [Sweeps her finger straight across] What word?

Students: Bay!

Ms. Cleary: Good! We live near the Chesapeake Bay.

Ms. Cleary: [Writes bail on the board and points to b] Sound.

Students: /b/

Ms. Cleary: [Points to ai] Sound.

Students: /ā/

Ms. Cleary: [Points to l] Sound.

Students: /l/

Ms. Cleary: [Sweeps her finger under the word] Blend.

Students: /bail/

Ms. Cleary: [Sweeps her finger straight across] What word?

Students: Bail!

Ms. Cleary uses a research-proven strategy to teach her students to blend sounds.

Ms. Cleary and her students continue blending the words *say*, *gray*, *snail*, *tray*, *trail*, and *spray* in the same manner. After six minutes, the students have blended all of the sample words. Ms. Cleary says, "Great blending! Now, I want you to take a moment and look at the words that we blended. What patterns do you notice?" The students are quiet for a moment. Juan raises his hand, "Three of the words start with *s* and two of them start with *b*." Ms. Cleary smiles, "Yes, that's true. Look again—do you see any other patterns?" Nikya offers, "Lots of the words have the /ā/ sound spelled with *ai* or *ay*." Ms. Cleary says, "Good noticing. Let's sort these words into two groups: one with the /ā/ sound spelled *ai* and the other with the /ā/ sound spelled *ay*." The students help Ms. Cleary sort all of the

Ms. Cleary has a deep knowledge of the English language and spelling rules and teaches those rules to her students.

words into two groups and then she points to the first and asks, "How do we spell the /ā/ sound at the end of a word?" The students respond, "AY!" Ms. Cleary nods, "Excellent. And how do we spell the /ā/ sound in the middle of a word?" The students answer, "AI!" Ms. Cleary says, "You've got it. When you are spelling and you hear the /ā/ sound in the middle of the word, you'll spell it... [the students complete her sentence]. And when you hear the /ā/ sound at the end of a word, you'll spell it..." The sorting and discussion of the spelling pattern takes ten minutes.

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As the students return to their desks by twos, three volunteers pass out the dry erase markers and small white boards so that the students can complete their dictation exercise. “In our dictation today, we’ll spell words that have the /ā/ sound. How will you know which spelling pattern to use?” Joshua answer, “If it’s in the middle, use an *ai*. If it’s at the end, use an *ay*.” Ms. Cleary gives him a thumbs-up and says, “The first sentence to write is: We use a tray to bring our lunch to our table.” She repeats the sentence, and her students begin writing. Ms. Cleary walks behind their desks to quickly check for understanding. She bends down to provide support for Daquaz as he writes. “Good job. I like how you are thinking about our patterns to help you spell. The next sentence is: A gray snail lives in the sand by the bay. Think about our patterns and begin writing.” After reading aloud both sentences as a class, with partners, and on their own, the students use the socks that Ms. Cleary has given them as erasers to wipe off their white boards. The dictation activity has taken eight minutes. “Your reading and spelling is improving everyday. I am proud of how you’re thinking carefully about the sounds and patterns that we’ve learned to help you read and spell. Continue to do that when you are reading!”

VI. Writing

In the Writing portion of the balanced literacy block, teachers scaffold their instruction along the continuum of teacher directedness so that students are increasingly responsible for demonstrating their ability to use writing skills and strategies. Similar to quality reading instruction, excellent writing instruction begins with the teacher modeling a skill or process, moves to the teacher guiding students to use those skills or processes, and culminates in students writing independently. The purposes of writing instruction are:

- To increase **print awareness** by modeling and asking students to write from left to right and top to bottom, use capital and lower-case letters, leave space between words, and use ending punctuation
- To strengthen **phonics skills** by modeling and asking students to hear the individual sounds in words and represent those sounds with written letters
- To develop **writing skills and strategies** by modeling and asking students to use the stages of the writing process to communicate with others

To accomplish these purposes, consider the following as you plan and instruct:

- **Teach toward two broad goals.** As writing teachers, we have two concurrent goals for our students; we want them to apply their expanding understanding of sound-symbol relationships and English language conventions as they write letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs (the **mechanics**), and we want them to understand how to use the writing process to communicate ideas, messages, and stories with others (the **content**). This means that we teach students the skills (starting sentences with capital letters, saying a word slowly to hear all of its component sounds, or using details to support the main idea of a paragraph, for example), along with the steps of the writing process that allow writers to take a small idea conceived in prewriting and develop it into a piece worthy of publication.
- **Consider the developmental and literacy levels of your students.** We want our students to understand the writing process and to produce independently many pieces in a variety of genres. However, we have to consider the developmental and literacy levels of our students as we plan our writing instruction. We cannot expect first graders to work through each step of the writing process as thoroughly as we would our fourth graders. With this in mind, consider the following examples of ways you might structure your writing classroom.

- In a Writer’s Workshop, you will plan units of study around a genre (such as narrative or persuasive writing), identify the skills that you want students to master, and then plan some lessons that will teach students to incorporate those skills in their writing and others that will teach students to use the writing process effectively. Begin your Writer’s Workshop with a mini-lesson that provides direct instruction and models exactly what you want your students to be able to do independently. The focus of the mini-lesson depends on the skills students need to master, the needs of individual students, and the stage of the writing process in which students are working. While students write independently, you will conference with individuals, guiding them through tough spots, helping them to master the objective of the mini-lesson, and asking them to reflect on their craft. Writer’s Workshop develops students into independent writers who use a process to create compositions in many genres.
- Students in Kindergarten and first grade typically are not ready to work on longer writing projects using a Writer’s Workshop model. You might conduct Interactive Writing lessons, in which students share the pen with the teacher and add letters, words, or pieces of punctuation to class writing. After the class piece is finished, be sure to read and reread the ultimate composition.

Classroom Snapshot: Writing

As Ms. Cleary begins Writing Workshop, she knows that her students are excited to begin a new writing project. They have spent four weeks learning about and creating personal narratives, culminating in a publishing party that many of the students’ parents and grandparents attended. Now, with her students sitting before her, Ms. Cleary prepares to begin the writing process with them again, this time to produce a persuasive letter. “I’m excited to tell you that today we are going to learn how to write in a new genre. We spent a long time creating personal narratives, and your families were as proud of your work as I was! Today, we are going to begin a new writing project. Before we get started, I’m going to read you a story about a little girl, someone just about your age, who is exceptional at the type of thinking and writing you will need to do in this new writing project. The little girl’s name is Tillie. Listen as I read about her.”

Ms. Cleary begins to read *A Fine, Fine School* by Sharon Creech to the students. She pauses periodically to allow students to predict, share reactions, and comment on Tillie’s actions as she persuades her principal, Mr. Keene, not to keep their “fine, fine school” open on Saturdays, Sundays, holidays, and summer break so that even more learning can occur.

Ms. Cleary uses quality children’s literature in a particular genre to introduce students to the elements they will incorporate into their own writing.

When done reading, Ms. Cleary closes the book and leans forward in her chair. “Tell me this, boys and girls – did the students and teachers agree with Mr. Keene’s decision to keep school open every day of the year?” The students respond, “Noooooo.” Ms. Cleary continues, “So *why* did no one want to tell Mr. Keene that they didn’t want to go to school so much?” Barry raises his hand eagerly. “Everyone knew how that he liked school – he called it a fine, fine school, so no one wanted to hurt his feelings.” Joshua chimes in, “The students were scared that he would be angry.” Tia adds, “Maybe the teachers were nervous that they would be fired. My mom was worried about getting fired one time, so she didn’t talk back to her boss when she wanted to.”

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Ms. Cleary uses the story to draw out and teach students about the elements of persuasion, such as how and why we persuade. Students need to know this in order to effectively write a persuasive letter.

“Those are all very good observations about why no one told Mr. Keene that they didn’t like his decision to make school open every day of the year. Now tell me this – was *Tillie* scared or worried about hurting Mr. Keene’s feelings?” Students shake their heads. “So what did Tillie do?” Octavia’s hand shoots up. “She wasn’t afraid – she gave him reasons why they should not have school all those days.” Ms. Cleary smiles. “That’s exactly right, she gave him reasons, lots of reasons, why she didn’t think they should have school on the weekends, on holidays, and over the summer. Do you think they were good reasons?” Students seem puzzled at first. Ms. Cleary explains, “Well, let’s think about what Mr. Keene did when he heard Tillie’s reasons to not have school all those days. Did he agree with her?” Heads nod. “So if he agreed with her, do you think Tillie’s reasons had to have been good reasons?” Heads nod again. Ms. Cleary wants to be sure students truly understand. “What if Tillie had told Mr. Keene to not have school all those days because she wanted to play Nintendo, ride her bike, and watch TV. Would those reasons have been good? Would they have convinced Mr. Keene to not have the school open so much?” “No,” Joshua says, “because Mr. Keene only cared about people learning. He would have thought that playing Nintendo instead of coming to school to learn was a waste of time.”

“Good, Joshua! You know, I think that Tillie thought very carefully about *who* she was trying to persuade before she decided on the reasons she would use. She thought about what was important to Mr. Keene—and and we know from the story that Mr. Keene loved his school and loved having students learn every day—and so Tillie used that in her reasons. Does anyone else agree? Why?” Students point out that Tillie showed Mr. Keene that if school happened on every single day of the year, students would end up *not* learning as much, which he would be sad about. “That’s exactly right, boys and girls. Tillie showed Mr. Keene a new way of thinking about having school open every day. Here’s another way to say that: Tillie *persuaded* Mr. Keene to change his mind and share her way of thinking.”

Ms. Cleary moves to her chart stand and writes at the top of the chart paper: *Why do we persuade?* “We know that Tillie persuaded Mr. Keene to change his mind because she didn’t agree with his decision.” Under “Why do we persuade?” Ms. Cleary writes, “to change people’s decisions.” She turns back to her students and asks, “What are some other reasons that we persuade people to change their minds? Think about books we have read, or situations in your own life.” Ms. Cleary guides students as they share suggestions for why they persuade people: to change someone’s opinion or rule, to convince someone to think like you do about an issue, to take a stand for something, to show people another way to think, to argue with reasons. When done, Ms. Cleary steps back to look at the chart. “This is a great list of why we persuade. I want to give you some time to write in your notebooks now. Here are the questions for you to write about: ‘What does it mean to persuade? Why do we persuade?’ Use your own words and think about examples from books we have read. While you are journaling, I’m going to conference with a few of you about your writing.”

As students move to their desks or a table to write, Ms. Cleary circulates with her writing conference chart on a clipboard. A quick glance reminds her to check in first with Barry, as he benefits from talking through his ideas with someone before he begins to write. After hearing him say the complete sentence he will write down for each question, Ms. Cleary moves on to Octavia, who has already begun to write. Ms. Cleary notes her excellent responses and simply reminds her to leave space between her words. Joshua is moving forward as well, but is stuck on how to spell the word *convince*. Ms. Cleary helps him to say the word slowly to hear the sounds and write the related letters, which results in Joshua scripting *kunvince* on the page. Ms. Cleary

Ms. Cleary uses the independent writing time to monitor and build different skills in different students.

knows that she will need to read each student's notebook later to ensure all students have understood the introductory persuasion concepts presented in the lesson.

To close the lesson, Ms. Cleary asks students to move near a partner and read their responses to the questions to each other. Ms. Cleary plans to have students continue in the pre-writing stage of the process by reading *Earrings!* by Judith Viorst and *The Great Kapok Tree* by Lynne Cherry. Then, the students will take a tour around their school, bringing their writer's notebooks to jot down their ideas of how they could convince someone in school (the principal, another teacher, their classmates) to do something that would improve the school for everyone.

Conclusion

All previous chapters of this text have addressed the research, foundational knowledge and instructional strategies you need to become an exemplary teacher of reading and writing for elementary students. No doubt, the synthesis of this information will take careful consideration and significant practice, although this final chapter should serve to give you a more detailed view of how the information interweaves to produce the balanced literacy block. Teaching children to read and write is incredibly difficult. It is not a process you can design by relying on your own education, advanced literacy skills, or love for books. As we hope this text has made abundantly clear, there is a science to teaching children to decode words and read independently, and you must learn to apply that science to your teaching. We also realize that by this point in the text, we don't need to impress this point upon you any longer. Your sense of urgency is heightened. You will arrive at the summer institute ready to build on what you have read. You will leave the summer institute with an even stronger foundation in the science of teaching students to read and write. You will arrive in your fall classroom committed to continued professional development in literacy, believing that teaching our students to read and write proficiently is critical to our ability to lead students to significant academic gains, and a key way to put our students on the path toward a better future.