

Maximizing the Impact of Our Instruction: Powerful Minilessons and Meaningful Reading Conferences

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Components of a Balanced Literacy Framework

Reading Workshop

Writing Workshop

Shared Reading

Read Aloud with Accountable Talk

Small Group Instruction
(guided reading/strategy lessons/interventions)

Word Study/Phonics

Interactive Writing

Story Time

For your consideration:

- As I plan instruction, how might I align the components of balanced literacy so that they can reinforce or complement each other?
- How am I going to inform my instruction by kid-watching and assessing during the components of balanced literacy?
- Does the work my students do in the components transfer into their independent reading and writing work?

Balance Within the Classroom Environment

Independence and collaboration

Whole group, small group, partner, and individual instruction

Teacher talk and student talk

Student choice and teacher mandate

Consistency and variety

Teacher Plans and Responsiveness to Students

For your consideration:

- How does the rest of my day support the work and reinforce the expectations of independent reading workshop?
- Are there any areas in which I could work to strike more of a balance?

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Growing Readers: Units of Study for Primary Classrooms (Stenhouse)

Please Note: Much of the material in this packet was created while working with the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project or else it may be based on the Project's work.

A Classroom Library Might Contain...

- ▶ Baskets of books representing various genre
(i.e. Nonfiction, Poetry, Mysteries, Biographies, Wordless Picturebooks, Graphic Novels...)
- ▶ Baskets of books gathered around topics
(i.e. Sharks, Dinosaurs, Halloween, Books about School, Books about Baby Siblings...)
- ▶ Baskets of books featuring individual authors
(i.e. Ezra Jack Keats, Mem Fox, Donald Crews, Dav Pilkey, Cynthia Rylant, Arnold Lobel...)
- ▶ Baskets of books arranged by series
(i.e. Horrible Harry, Frog and Toad, Poppleton, Judy Moody, Cam Jansen...)
- ▶ Baskets of books that support the work of the current unit of study
(i.e. during a poetry study: Poetry by Arnold Adoff, Poems about Nature, Silly Poems, Shape Poems...)
- ▶ Leveled book baskets that represent the range of learners and their projected growth
(i.e. depends on your particular leveling system and the text needs of your students...)
- ▶ Baskets that contain texts other than books
(i.e. Sunday comics, Maps, Cards, Internet Material, etc...)
- ▶ Baskets that contain “kids’ picks”
(i.e. Books We Love From Home, Favorite Books from Kindergarten, Top 10 Funniest Stories...)
- ▶ Shared reading texts and multiple copies
(i.e. Mrs. Wishy-Washy, Hungry Giant...)
- ▶ A basket containing books the teacher has read aloud

Other classroom library considerations:

Location – Where is the library in the classroom?

Changes – How does it change to reflect the work, time of year, etc.?

Design – Is it visually appealing and organized so that readers can find books?

Access – How do students borrow and return books?

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Guiding Principles for Independent Reading Workshop

- Readers have time to read every day.
- Readers select their own appropriate books.
- Readers have opportunities to talk about their books in authentic, self-initiated ways.
- Readers take care of books.
- Readers respect each other's reading time.
- The work for readers is not only reading the words but also understanding the story.
- What we expect children to do during independent reading time needs to be replicable outside of the classroom.

Balance Within the Reading Workshop

Maintenance learning – Acquisition learning – Exposure

Teacher talk – Student Talk

Private reading – Partner reading

Silence – Talk

Whole group – Small group – Individual instruction

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Reading Workshop

Minilesson

Connection

Teaching Demonstration

Active Engagement

Link to Work

Independent Reading Time

Private Reading Time

(Mid Workshop Teaching)

Partner Reading Time

(Teacher confers with individual readers and may work with small groups of readers during reading time.)

Teaching Share Time

Minilesson Reinforcement or

Minilesson Preview or

Minilesson Add-On or

Problem Solving

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Minilesson Basics

- 5-10 minutes long
- multi-level
- precedes independent reading time
- clear expectations for work
- assessment-based
- distinct and separate from shared reading and read aloud time

Minilesson Challenges

- handling student participation
- keeping minilessons brief
- teaching with clarity and focus
- maintaining student engagement

For your consideration:

- How can we adapt minilessons for students who are English Language Learners?
- Where do we get our teaching ideas for minilessons?
- What can I do so that my minilessons are as efficient and effective as possible?

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Sample Minilesson

Connection:

Readers, for the last week or so, we've been learning about lots of things readers can do to help them figure out the words. Sometimes, we get to a tricky word though, and we try something and it just doesn't work. It would be so easy to give up and say, "Aww, it's too hard." But we don't give up in this class, do we? We are the kind of readers who are brave and who try really hard to figure out words and to understand stories. Today, I want to teach you that brave readers try really hard to figure out hard words by using a variety of strategies.

Teaching Demonstration:

Watch me as I read this book. I'm going to get to a hard part, and I want you to watch me as I try lots of different things to figure out the words. You'll notice that I don't just give up. *(Teacher uses a big book, such as My Teacher so everyone can see. She gets stuck on a word, and then in an exaggerated way, she demonstrates how to try different things to figure out the word. In this example, the line of text is 'My teacher helps me count.' and the tricky word is 'count'.)* My teacher helps me, hmmm, let's see. That's a new word for me. I'll check the picture. She's doing math and writing numbers. My teacher helps me do math, nope that doesn't work. My teacher helps me /c/c/c/. My teacher helps me coat. No, that doesn't make sense. My teacher helps me /c/c/c/ count, count! It's count. Now I'll read it smoothly. My teacher helps me count.

Did you guys notice how I checked the picture? When that didn't really help, I didn't give up. Did you notice how I tried something else? I used the beginning of the word and said the sound, and at first I guessed 'coat' but that didn't make sense, right? Then I just figured it out. I didn't give up. All that work was helpful for me and I could figure out the word because I tried really hard.

Active Engagement:

Now I want you to try this. We're going to another page, and this time, you'll be stuck on the word. I've covered it up so at first you'll use the picture. Then we'll look at the beginning of the word as I move the post-it. Then we can look at the whole word. This is a pretend time when we're just going to practice what it feels like to try different things, okay? *(Teacher runs through this procedure, and the children are calling out guesses for the word. After they try a couple of things, the teacher asks them to make meaning.)* Okay guys, we tried a few things. Turn to your neighbor and tell him or her what would make sense in this place. *(The teacher gives them several seconds to do this and listens in.)*

I love how you guys just didn't give up. You tried a few things, and then you thought about what would make sense. That's just what you can do in your own books. Now you know what it feels like to try a few things.

Link to Ongoing Work:

Readers, anytime you're reading, I want you to be really brave and use all you know about figuring out words to help you when you get to a hard part. Do you guys feel brave? I know you're not the kind of kids to give up easily. Today I'll be looking for examples of brave reading.

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Mediocre Minilesson Transcript Can You Save This Minilesson?

Teacher: Boys and girls, we've been learning strategies for ways that readers check to make sure they understand what they've been reading. What are some things you guys know how to do?

Mirabel: Stop and check yourself.

Paul: Ask yourself, "What's going on?"

Chelsea: Stop and check when you're reading.

Teacher: Those are some things we do when we are making sure we understand what we're reading. Today, I want to teach you something else careful readers do to make sure they understand what they are reading. They make pictures in their mind of what they're reading so that they can make sure they understand. If you make a picture in your mind, it helps you see what's going on in the story, like when you're remembering something...you get a picture in your mind and it helps you to remember.

Let me show you what I mean. I'm going to read a part from our read aloud book and I'm going to show you how I make a picture in my mind as I'm reading. That helps me to make sure I'm understanding the book.

(Teacher reads aloud for a minute or so and stops at a particular part.) Hmm, let me picture what's going on right now. *(She thinks aloud and shares what she's envisioned.)*

Readers, did you hear how I was making a picture in my mind as I read? Did you see how it helped me to understand what was going on in the story. It was like I was reading the words and watching the movie at the same time!

Now it's your turn to try it. I'm going to read on in this chapter, and as I read I want you to make a picture in your mind.

(Teacher reads on for a little bit and then stops.)

So what are you guys thinking? Turn and talk to your partner right now. (Children turn and talk about a variety of things.)

Teacher: So, what were you guys thinking?

Shane: We were thinking that Junie B. is going to get into big trouble when her parents find out what she did.

Teacher: Anyone else?

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Christina: We were thinking that she's going to fix it before her mom and dad find out.

Teacher: Did anyone make pictures in their minds as I was reading?

Students nod.

Teacher: That's what great readers do...they make pictures in their minds to help them understand what they are reading. Whenever you're reading, make sure you're getting a picture in your mind because that will help you understand.

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Kinds of Minilessons

- Inquiry-based Minilessons
 - early in unit of study (1 or 2)
 - students observe themselves
 - what do we know/do already?
- Typical Minilessons
 - throughout unit of study
 - clear teaching point
 - closely follows architecture
- Review Minilessons
 - toward end of unit of study
 - based on assessment
 - reminder lessons for orchestration of strategies

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Readers Build Good Habits

A Possible September Unit of Study for Kindergarten and First Grade

(Please note: The details of the instruction will be different in order to acknowledge the strengths and meet the needs of the particular grade and students.)

Readers know the procedures for reading workshop so they can do their best work.

For these lessons, you'll teach students about the management, procedures, and routines of reading workshop in your classroom.

Possible Minilessons:

Readers get to know themselves and others.

For these lessons, you'll teach children ways to cultivate a reading identity, such as naming their favorite books, favorite places to read, and favorite reading memories.

Possible Minilessons:

Readers read and talk well about books with partners.

For these lessons, you'll teach children how to work cooperatively with partners, and you'll teach them different things they can talk about with their partners.

Possible Minilessons:

Readers always make sure their reading makes sense.

For these lessons, you'll teach children how to read for meaning as they use the early strategies and reading behaviors, such as studying the illustrations, reading known words, and so on.

Possible Minilessons:

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Growing Readers: Units of Study for Primary Classrooms (Stenhouse)

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**Readers Read with Stamina, Fluency, Engagement,
Meaning, and Attention to Print**

A Possible September Unit of Study for Second Grade

Readers know the procedures for reading workshop so they can do their best work.

For these lessons, you'll teach students about the management, procedures, and routines of reading workshop in your classroom.

Possible Minilessons:

Readers choose books with purpose in mind and can stay focused on their reading.

For these lessons, you'll teach children strategies for choosing books well and ways they can help themselves stay focused at reading time.

Possible Minilessons:

Readers have strategies to make sure their reading makes sense.

For these lessons, you'll teach (or reteach) children some basic strategies for reading for meaning and for monitoring their comprehension.

Possible Minilessons:

Readers work hard to figure out and to understand the words in their books

For these lessons, you'll teach children strategies for word-solving and vocabulary building as they read.

Possible Minilessons:

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Mini-Lesson Plan

Objective/Goal:

Connection:

Teaching Demonstration

Active Engagement:

Link to Ongoing Work:

What are some other ways this teaching point might be demonstrated?

What are some other methods for active engagement?

What are some possible follow-up teaching points?

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Reading Conferences

Research Decide Teach Conference	Coaching Conference
Proficient Partner Conference	Table Conference

Adapted from *The Art of Teaching Reading*, by Lucy Calkins

For your consideration:

- What kinds of conferences do you tend to have?
- What are some of the purposes for the various kinds of conferences?
- What kinds of notetaking system will be most helpful?

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Typical Structure of a Research • Decide • Teach Conference

Research

Decide

Compliment

Teach

Active Engagement

Link

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Reading Conference

S: Student; T: Teacher; Text: *Because of Winn-Dixie*, by Kate DiCamillo

The teacher approaches Charice, and pauses to observe for several seconds. Charice is about a quarter of the way through her book. She's writing something on a sticky note. There are several sticky notes jutting out of the pages of her book. The class has been learning strategies to help them understand characters, so the teacher expects that the sticky notes contain mostly Charice's thinking about the characters of the book.

T: Ooh, Charice, you're reading *Because of Winn-Dixie*. I love that book! What are you writing on your post-it?

S: I just read the part where Opal makes friends with the library lady, so I wrote, "Opal made another friend with the library lady."

T: Oh, I remember that part when Opal and the librarian became friends...what is her name? I can't seem to remember...

S: *(glances at the book for a second.)* Miss Franny. I should put it on my post-it *(she writes 'Miss Franny' on the post-it.)*

T: So what are you thinking about Opal right now?

S: She has some friends in her new town.

T: Charice, it's so wise for you to have thoughts about your character as you read, and as I flip through these other post-its, I can tell you've been paying close attention to Opal. Great work. I think you're ready for the next step. Here it is: one of the things that readers do when they notice something about their character is they think, "Hmm, how does this fit in with what I already know about my character?" It's like you're trying to put together a character puzzle and you lie this new piece of information alongside the other information you've gathered already. You think about how to connect them. Let's try it. So you just noticed that Opal made another friend, Miss Franny. Let's put this information alongside what you've already learned about Opal to see how it fits together. Ask yourself, "How does this fit in with what I already know...and then think back on things you've learned about Opal."

S: Okay... How does this fit in with what I already know about Opal? *(Student looks at teacher...)*

T: What do I already know about Opal? *(Teacher says this as if she's thinking about it too...)*

S: Umm, Opal has another friend, Winn-Dixie...

T: Hmmm, let's put that information alongside the new information...Opal has a friend Winn-Dixie and now she has another friend, Miss Franny the librarian. How do these pieces go together to tell us something about our character, Opal?

S: Opal makes friends...

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- T: Say more. Stretch your thought by adding some detail.
- S: Opal makes friends with a dog and a lady.
- T: What's that make you think?
- S: I don't know.
- T: Let me say back what you just said. You said, "Opal made friends with Winn-Dixie, a dog and Miss Franny, a lady. What are you thinking about this?"
- S: I guess it's kinda different because she doesn't seem to have any kid friends yet in the book. She made friends with a dog and a lady but not with kids.
- T: Say more.
- S: Maybe Opal is shy with kids or something because she's new. Maybe she's scared the kids won't like her or something or maybe she's more comfortable with grown-ups and animals.
- T: Wow, Charice. Look at the work you've just done...first you learned something about Opal, that she made friends with the librarian. Then you thought about how this information about Opal connects with other stuff you learned about the character. It's like you put two bits of information side-by-side and came up with some new thinking about Opal, that she seems to make friends with unexpected people, oh, and animals, but not kids. Then, you did a really big thing. You thought, "What does this make me think about Opal?" That is huge, hard reading work, Charice. I'm going to write it down on this post-it that you can stick in the beginning of your book to remind you to take these steps as a strong reader. Now read on, and when you have a thought about your character, consider how it connects to other things you know. I'll check back to see how it's going.

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