

# A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Reading Workshop

GRADE

1



LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM  
THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT



A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR  
**The Reading Workshop**  
**Grade 1**

Common Core Reading and Writing Workshop

Lucy Calkins  
*and Colleagues from*  
*The Reading and Writing Workshop*



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# Overview of the Year for First-Grade Readers

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## New Work for the Coming Year

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

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

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

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

## Workshop Structures

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Reading Aloud*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## *Shared Reading*

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

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

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

## *Word Study*

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

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

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

### *Small-Group Instruction*

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

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

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



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

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

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

## Assessment

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

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

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

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

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

#### General Range of Adequate Reading Rates by Grade Level

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

*Harris and Sipay (1990)*

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

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

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

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

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

## Classroom Libraries

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

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

### *Finding Great Literature to Build and Refresh Our Libraries*

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

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



## UNIT ONE

# Readers Build Good Habits

### SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER

(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: D/E)

September's unit of study will inevitably be a challenging one. Essentially you will say to kids, "Do it all. Roll out the works!" You will want to make sure your children learn the procedures for participating in your new classroom community, for organizing their own reading lives within this new community, and for working with partners. You'll also want children to use everything they know as they read—from book orientation strategies and knowledge of letter-sound correspondence to comprehension strategies and how to read with fluency. To top it off, you also need to devote a fair amount of your time this month to assessing individuals, setting up classroom management procedures, and initiating supports for any readers who come into your room with urgent needs.

Your temptation may be to teach one thing on Monday, another thing on Tuesday, and yet another thing on Wednesday. We understand the urge to try to get everything going. The problem, though, is that tossing one tiny teaching point after another at your kids means that very few of these will make a lasting impact. Your minilessons during these first couple of weeks should instead convey a sense of urgency, vigor, and excitement. You'll be teaching children to adopt enduring priorities. The little strategies are useful options, but there are some really important big priorities to spotlight. For now, at the start of this year, one of those priorities is conveying to kids that as first graders, they can now become more grown-up as readers, which means taking charge of their own reading lives.

Your job at the start of the year is to rally your class, to inspire kids, to help them feel secure, safe, and confident that they will become strong readers. If you are going to capture your children's hopes and imagination, start the year by helping each child feel



as if he or she is an active participant in the club of readers. Jerry Harste, a prominent literacy educator and researcher, once said, “Our job is to create in the classroom the kind of richly literate world that we believe in and then to invite children to role play their way into being the readers and writers we want them to be.”

The “theme” we have selected for the beginning of first grade is that readers are like runners. Readers warm up for reading, we set goals for ourselves, we establish good habits, and we push ourselves to be the strongest readers we can be. You will see that theme woven into many of our September teaching points and lessons. We invite you to join us in teaching children that readers are like runners, or to invent your own theme for the start of first grade. If you follow our theme, we suggest you begin the year by telling your children that it takes drive to start reading, and momentum to keep going. It won’t always be smooth sailing, but because they are first graders, they are already on their way to doing what it takes to be really strong readers. Whatever you decide, your goal will be to teach a unit that inducts children into the good life of being an avid reader.

## **Organizing the Classroom and Launching the Unit: Choosing Books, Assessing Your Readers, and Establishing Early Reading Habits**

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Before you launch this unit, you have some choices to make. What will the children read? How will you give them access to those texts? Ideally, you will go borrow armloads of books from kindergarten teachers that children read at the end of last year. You’ll jump-start your children’s reading if you can make book baggies with these, hang familiar poems and songs around your classroom, bring your group back to the beloved big books, and revisit books that were last year’s special hits. Don’t worry that these texts will be old hat for your kids—after all, when a song comes on the radio that we recall from our younger days, we don’t flick the channel, thinking, “Oh, I already know that song.” We sing along with great joy and confidence that comes with the familiarity and comfort of hearing something we know so well. How great it will be if your children feel invited to “sing along” with stories and poems and songs they know. Having last year’s books in your classroom will remind children of the readers they used to be, which would be a very good thing!

Because you will want your children to begin reading right away, it is essential that you steer them to books they can read. We suggest you postpone the traditional start-of-the-year assessments for the first three days, using the kindergarten book baggies you created to get kids into approximately just-right books (or easy books). When kids are done with their baggies, they can choose more books that are similar, and the baggies can meanwhile go back to the kindergarten classrooms. Chances are you’ll have a record of the levels that many of your students were reading at the end of last year, but we know some kids will have gone up in levels, some kids will have slipped, and some will remain the same. This means that as kids read, you’ll quickly make informal assessments, and then move kids into different books as needed until you are able to conduct more formal assessments. These quick, informal assessments will allow you to

watch readers at work to take note of the kids who need you to assess them completely right now and to receive additional support. To locate the small group of readers in your class in need of immediate assessment, draw on a variety of quick assessment tools—even just noticing which children can settle themselves down and start reading quickly and easily at the start of the reading workshop. For those children who don't have a grasp on their concept of reading, you will need to administer the concept of reading assessment.

Over the first two weeks, you'll pull aside individual children as they read to do running records and miscue analyses. The purpose of these initial assessments is two-fold. You'll want to ascertain the level of text that a child can read with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. You'll also want to do miscue analysis on the running records to determine the child's strategy use, self-correction habits, miscue habits, and levels of fluency. We suggest that you assess not only until you reach what appears to be a just-right text level but also have the child read a text that's a level higher. This can give you a helpful glimpse of what the child does and does not rely upon when the text is a bit too hard.

You will need systems for how children will go about choosing books. You may want to put collections of texts in different areas within your room, and then send one randomly chosen group of children to one area (say, the meeting area where you have a couple of big books and a pointer so the kids can read along together) and another randomly chosen group to another area where you may have some really enthralling science books. In another section of the room, you could lay some chart-sized all-time-favorite poems on the floor or the tabletop. You can put emergent storybooks that children read last year (perhaps *Caps for Sale* and some fairy tales) in a basket and set that in the middle of another table. You could then rotate your children from one area to another, inviting them to first read to themselves, putting Post-its on parts they like, and then to read to each other.

If this seems to pose too many management challenges, you could simply have children continue to read from their book baggies. Or you might put a collection of diverse but interesting texts at the center of each table and ask children to draw from that bin, sit at that table, read and Post-it for ten minutes, and then move chairs alongside each other and continue to read, this time with a friend. You probably won't call these friends reading partners yet. After you have assessed students to determine their reading levels, you will set up long-lasting partnerships, pairing children who read at or very near the same levels.

Meanwhile, it will have been a while since children have read with a partner, so you will want to remind them of the basics of partner reading, such as how to sit hip to hip, how to place the book (in the middle of them) and read one book between them, and how to take turns. You may also need to teach children ways to decide who goes first, whose book to read, and other sharing techniques. Then, too, you'll probably teach different ways to read with a partner, such as echo-reading, choral reading, and assigning roles. You will remind children to talk off of Post-its during partner time, to retell books to each other at the end of their reading—either telling beginning, middle, end; problem and solution; or synthesizing the text and saying, "My book is called. . .

because. . ." or "The title of my book is . . . and it's mostly about. . ." Partners should be meeting every day to read and talk as you confer with partnerships, teaching kids how to coach each other in their reading and helping them talk more about their books after they read.

Early on, you will need to help your children get back into the swing of pointing under each word, checking for one-to-one matching, looking at the pictures and the print for help with tough words, and so forth, which were some of the fundamentals that the Common Core State Standards asked for last year. Even if you can borrow books from last year's classrooms, it is likely your children will not remember to use many of the strategies they learned the year before. Don't worry just yet about the details of each child's actual work with print. Instead focus, first, on getting children into the swing of functioning like independent readers. To support this independence and to help children stay engaged and focused during reading time, you will set them up to get into the habit of shopping for at least ten to twelve books per week when they are in just-right books.

## **Part One: Readers Push Ourselves to Be the Best Readers We Can Be, Reading Long and Strong**

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The start of the year is your chance to set the pulse of the reading workshop—so be sure to set it high! You'll want your young readers to share your enthusiasm for reading, even when they encounter difficulties or lags, as they surely will. Reading won't always be a breeze, and you won't want to sugarcoat the work for children. Instead, you'll tell kids that reading is like running; it takes drive to get started and momentum to keep going. Sometimes readers get tired or encounter bumps in the road—and when that happens, they know that they need to try a little harder. The good news, you can tell readers, is that just like runners have things they can do to be especially strong runners, there are things we can do as readers to be the very best readers we can be. As first graders, they already are doing some of those things—and soon they'll be doing even more.

"If you know anything at all about running," you can tell children, "you know that even before runners set off on a run, they need to warm up. Well, guess what? Readers warm up too." You'll convey that just as runners stretch their muscles before a big run, readers stretch our muscles before diving into a book. First, we find a comfortable reading spot, one where we know we can give ourselves over to a good book, and then we settle into that spot with the book we've selected. But we won't read just yet. First, we'll want to spend a few minutes getting a feel for the book. We can look at the cover and the back, noticing what kind of images we see—are they bright colored or more muted? Do they show people and animals that look real, or are the pictures more cartoonlike and silly? Then we can flip through the pages, looking at the pictures and thinking about what might happen in this book. Will there be a lot of action? Will we learn all about one thing? We'll be stretching our reading muscles, warming up for this book. *Then*, we start reading.

As the unit progresses, you'll teach children that readers, like runners, set goals for ourselves. They might say to themselves, "Today, I'll run half a mile." But then, after they've been running a certain distance for a little while, they might find that they can run a little further, so maybe they'll decide that they can run one mile. And before they know it, they're running two miles, then three, then four, and eventually a whole marathon. It's like that with reading, too. At first, readers might only be able to read a couple of books. But the more we read, the faster we finish two books, and soon we think to ourselves, "I bet I could read even more! Maybe I could read five or six books instead of two or three." We set goals for ourselves. We can even keep track of our reading by recording which books we read each day. We can do this in the classroom and we can do it at home.

You'll also emphasize that strong readers read for a long time. Readers use our baggies to help us do this long reading work. Some runners just run for five minutes and feel exhausted. But *strong* runners, like marathon runners, get into shape. Strong runners become accustomed to running in long stretches of time, without needing to quit early. Strong runners can take a little break—and then keep going! As you talk this up, you'll find it is not hard to sell children on the idea of reading for long periods of time. By now your kids will be eagerly tracking their progress and feeling more and more confident and eager as they measure their growth in concrete ways. You could create a chart or a line graph that shows how long children read during the first week of school and how they have built up their reading over time. This way, children will feel that their reading strengths aren't just making them strong readers on their own but are making the whole class a stronger reading force. You might even join in a healthy read-a-thon with other first-grade classrooms, which will rally kids across the grade to read even more.

To help your children stay focused on books and reading for longer stretches of time, encourage them to reread. You can spend a few minilessons teaching students a variety of purposes for rereading. For example, you might teach them that when they finish a book, they can go back and read it again, this time in their best storyteller voice. They could also reread a book to find something they didn't notice or think about the first time they read it. You can teach them that often readers will focus a lot on the words the first time, but when they reread they have an opportunity to focus more on the pictures. You can show them examples of texts where the pictures offer more information than the words, as well as texts whose pictures may contradict the words of the text (such as *Saturday Mornings*, a Mondo book). You might want to create a chart called "Different Ways We Can Reread" so that children learn that all of these are reading choices they can make at any given moment. You can ask kids about the choices they are making or to think about better ones they might make.

The idea of reading for longer stretches of time might be abstract and not so meaningful to young children. For this reason, many teachers have found that it helps to use some sort of record-keeping system so that children can "see" how much they've read. One possibility is to give children large sticky notes that they keep on the inside back cover of their book. Every time they read that particular title, they can put a check mark, a tally mark, or another symbol to represent the fact that they read it again. Or you might give children a bookmark for each book, on which they make a tally mark

every time they read the book. These options are an early-in-the-year early grades variation on the reading logs that older kids will be keeping. You do not want kids writing the titles of their level E books, because it will take up reading time. That is why we suggest tally marks. The important thing is that children are reading many books—ten to fifteen every day.

You can also teach children that even the strongest readers can lose focus for a bit. Perhaps there's a loud noise or something interesting going on in another part of the room. Perhaps the reader has to go get a tissue to wipe his nose, or maybe someone interrupts the reader. Whenever these things happen to readers, we have strategies to get right back to our reading. Strong readers often go back a page or two (or a paragraph or two) and reread to refresh our memories about what's going on in our story.

Earlier, we mentioned that you will probably want to help children set goals for themselves. A big part of this will involve setting goals for the volume of reading they'll be doing. By the time children enter your first-grade class, they should be able to sustain reading for half an hour in school and an equal time at home. You'll want to make sure your expectations for the actual amount of progress they'll make during that time are tailored to the level of text the child can handle. Of course, children will spend time looking at pictures, pausing briefly to think, or working on solving a tricky word. Still, in about twenty minutes of independent reading time in school, it is likely that this child could read about ten books—and some books more than once.

It is likely that not every reader reads at the same rate, although there are helpful ranges to keep in mind. These ranges of rates correlate to the types of fluency we expect. Reading rate, then, is important to pay attention to because it is one of the ways to look at fluency. It is also important to know each child's rate to keep volume in check. Rate also has implications for the number of books a child needs to have in a baggie or bin for the week.

You will want to think about tools you can bring into the classroom that help you and your children to track reading volume, rate, and habits. Many first-grade teachers suggest that at least the readers who are reading texts at levels C and above start the aforementioned book logs. Children will simply tally the number of books they've read and reread in a day and at home. These logs can be an important conversation starter for teachers in conferences, as well as for parents at home. We talk about the logs with questions such as:

- What do you notice about how many books you tend to read at home?
- What do you notice about the number of books you tend to read at school?  
Why are these different, do you think?
- Do you notice sometimes when reading was really good for you—what do you think made it so good? How could you get more times like that?
- Do you notice times when you didn't do much reading? What do you think caused those times?
- How do you think you could make a goal for yourself about how much you read based on what you see here?



Read-aloud will play a big role in September. The main purpose for these early read-alouds is to teach your children that during this time, they will have an important responsibility to think and talk about the book they are reading. You'll also teach them your expectations for participation, engagement, and behavior. Model how to make a prediction in a book by looking at the cover, flipping through the pages, and envisioning what you think it will be about. Then you can model how to predict and revise and/or confirm that prediction as you read through the text. Teaching retelling right from the start of the year will be very important as well. The Common Core State Standards expect that first graders be able to retell, drawing on key details and demonstrating understanding of a story's central message or lesson. Therefore, you'll want to model for children how to incorporate meaning into your retelling. You won't just say, "In *Ruthie and the Teeny Weeny and the (Not So) Teeny Tiny Lie*, Ruthie finds a tiny camera on the playground, lies that it is hers, and at the end admits she was lying and gives it back to Martin." You'll say, "In *Ruthie and the Teeny Weeny and the (Not So) Teeny Tiny Lie*, Ruthie, who loves all teeny tiny things, is delighted when she finds a teeny tiny camera on the playground. When her classmate Martin tells her the camera is his, she lies, insisting that it is hers. That's because she wants that camera so so badly. The teacher, not knowing who to believe, takes the camera away from both of them. Ruthie feels awful the rest of the day and finally breaks down to her parents. They assure her that everyone makes mistakes and that she can fix it. The next day she tells her teacher the truth and says sorry to Martin. Her teacher tells her she was brave to be honest, and Martin says it's okay. She has learned some valuable lessons: We all make mistakes sometimes, lying can lead to lots of agony, and people will forgive you if you tell the truth."

Especially during the first month of the school year, you will want to read aloud engaging picture books that have strong storylines with characters who are active. Choose books that will draw readers in. If children aren't with you when you read aloud, you may need to be more dramatic or to abbreviate read-aloud times or to select more fast-paced books. When you sense that children are listening really well, help them notice what the room feels like and help them know this is how reading time should feel now that they are in first grade.

Some of you may find it helpful to assign read-aloud partnerships early in the year and do explicit teaching about the expectations for partner work during these read-alouds. These beginning-of-the-year read-aloud partnerships tend to last for only a week or two. Before long, you will know children enough to establish longer-lasting partnerships.

## Part Two: Readers Make Pictures in Our Minds as We Read—and We Revise the Pictures as We Read On

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In the second stretch of the unit, you will remind children that just like runners don't set off on a run before getting a feel for how the path will go (where it leads, whether there will be hills, and so on), similarly, before readers read a book, we look at the cover, read the title, look at the first page, and begin making pictures in our minds of how this story

might go. You could say something like, “Readers, we’ve been talking about how runners train themselves to run longer and stronger, and how readers can train ourselves to read longer and stronger, too. Wanna know something else runners do that might help us as readers? Before a big race, really great runners make a picture in their mind about the race to get ready for it. They imagine what to expect, what they’ll see along the way, and how the race could go. As readers, we can do that, too. When we get ready to read a book, we can make a picture in our mind of how the book might go. We can use the cover, look at the words and pictures on the first page, and flip through the pages to get a sense of what kind of book it will be. And because we know that books don’t always go the way we think they might go, we also know that the pictures in our mind might not match the story as we read on—and we get ready to revise them when that happens.”

Teach children that we don’t just look at the cover and the first page of the book and think, “I don’t know how this will go.” Of course we don’t *know* how the story will go, but we have some ideas, and we begin making a possible movie in our mind (just a tiny one) before we start to read. This takes brain power. It takes imagination. The wonderful thing is that when children write, they are doing the reciprocal process. They begin by recalling one time—perhaps one child recalls one summer evening when a bat got into his house and he and his brother tried to catch it, running after the bat with a net. Then, that child will draw a picture—perhaps it is a picture of a boy with a net—and other kids could look at that picture and think, “I bet this will be a story of a boy trying to catch something. Maybe a butterfly.” But then the writer will put words on the page, sounding out those words, and by recording the letters—*bat*—the writer will tell the reader the information she needs to revise her first imagined story, substituting one that more accurately matches the text.

Likewise, as children read, they will need to use their imagination to alter their idea of what a book is about when they read the actual words that are on the page. For example, a child reading a story about a boy visiting his grandparents’ farm might at first think the characters are standing in very tall grass. But when she looks at the letters in the word, she’ll see not a *g* but a *c* and will have to think about what else might be a tall leafy thing that begins with the letter *c*. Perhaps she’ll recall that farmers grow crops—and will think about foods that are grown that begin with the letter *c* and will realize that in fact, these are corn fields.

It is not a small deal to teach children to rev up their brains in anticipation of reading the print on the page. Encourage your children to pause before they start to read, not to dive right into the word work of reading, and to get their brains turned on about the content of the book. This positions them to make meaning and to revise meaning as they read. You’ll want them to look at a book that, for example, is titled *At the Zoo*. They’ll think about the animals they have seen at the zoo and thus expect that the book may have an elephant and some tigers and maybe a house full of snakes, too. Then, as the child reads that book, the actual words may challenge those expectations. This work of revising predictions or adjusting expectations when the text necessitates it is important, too. According to the Common Core State Standards, first graders should be able to use the illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events. This unit supports that skill work.

As children read their books, help them hold in their minds what they anticipate the book will be about. As they read each page they will think about how each page goes with what they anticipated, or they may find themselves revising those ideas. Sometimes a book can take a different spin on an idea than we anticipated, and we need to revise their thinking when necessary to ensure we are getting the meaning from the text.

Much of this work involves envisioning and predicting, though you won't, of course, name these skills for children. Instead, you might, for example, say to the child reading the story about the boy's visit to his grandparents' farm, "What do you see as you read this story? What's on this farm? Oh, cows and pigs? And corn? Yes, I see all that, too." In that way, you'll get children to do the early work of imagining the physical landscape of a story. Of course, children will get much of this from the actual illustrations, but this will convey to them that readers pay attention to pictures as we read, using them to really "see" the story. As the action unfurls on the page, you can coach children to add that to their mental picture. "Oh no! It's raining really hard! I wonder what the wheat looks like now. Do you think it's still standing tall and perky? Or is it drooping?" And this, of course, gives you the perfect segue into prediction work: "What might happen next, do you think? What will the grandparents do?"

You can also get kids to notice what's the same and what's different in two books, both on their own and with a partner. Children will quickly spot that those two books both feature animals, for example. But when pushed to look a little more closely, they will notice that these are two very different kinds of animal. Perhaps one book is about a polar bear living in the arctic, while the other is about a girl who gets a new dog. Children can also think across characters, noticing that whereas in one story, the character experiences a new sibling as a fun playmate, in another story, the new baby makes the character feel jealous and angry. This work supports the Common Core State Standard #9, which suggests that first graders should be able to compare and contrast characters' adventures in stories.

Depending on your students' experiences with read-aloud in previous school years, you may find that it's necessary to model how to turn and talk and to revisit the conversation techniques described in the prelude to this calendar. One option for the start of the year is to read aloud, then finish the reading and say to children, "Who could get us started in a conversation about. . . ." Then call on one child, and after he or she speaks, scan the room, nodding for someone else to participate. As you do this, watch for instances when children do the sorts of things you hope they will do. That is, if one child says, "I think. . . because. . ." and then refers to the text, note this. "Wow. I am so impressed that you already know that it is important to back up your ideas by saying, 'I think this because. . . ' and then referring to the text. You're just starting first grade and already you know that!" Then, when one child adds on to or talks back to what another child has said, you can again make a fuss about this. If a child asks another child to say more, you can practically fall over backward in excitement.

Of course, if children do not remember how to have a conversation, you'll need to decide how you can get all the behaviors going. One good possibility is to take your class on a field trip to visit older students who do these things, and, as they do them,

point this out to your youngsters. Then, back in your own classroom, you can channel children toward doing all that you hope they'll do by saying things such as, "Can anyone talk back to what Joe just said? Do you agree? Do you have an example? Let Joe know." As children talk together, name and spotlight what some children do well. This will allow you to revisit some fundamental characteristics of a high-level conversation, such as speaking clearly, listening actively, disagreeing with civility, adding on to what someone has said, staying with the text instead of going off-track, and so on.

It is important that you approach reading-aloud planning to teach not only methods for talking well but also methods for comprehending well. At this point in the year, you may want to focus on reading a bit and then stopping to model how you monitor for sense. You can show students how you stop and retell the main events before you move on. It is likely that your first graders already know how to predict what will happen next and do so quite naturally. You can pause and say, "So far. . . happened. I wonder what will happen next?" Students can turn and tell their partner what they think will happen and why they think this. Some of your read-alouds might also focus on reacting to the text and making simple character inferences by putting yourself in the character's "shoes." You can say, "Wow! Sophie is so angry. If that were me I would. . . ." You can prompt students to explain their reactions to the text and empathize with the character.

You may want to do a bit of inquiry with your children and elicit from them what strategies they have used in the past to get through tricky words or parts of their books. This can be the start of your chart called "While I'm Reading, If I Get Stuck I Can. . . ." You will want to be sure that you are building on what kids already know. During this first unit of study, you'll want to make a point of reminding students what they learned the year before and now know. Many teachers find it helpful to create some tools, like charts, with children that they can use independently when they get stuck or need reminders. When kids contribute to writing strategies, this helps them also recall and grasp what they can do to help themselves.

If you have a large number of children who cannot yet write coherently, they will need phonics instruction and they will also need, during reading workshop, to reread familiar shared reading texts and to approximate reading familiar storybooks. (See October of the Kindergarten Reading Calendar.) For example, you might read a book such as *Caps for Sale* aloud several times and give these children each a copy of it. We sometimes put a sticker on the book labeled "Old Favorite." Then for a slice of time in each day's reading workshop, encourage these children (or all your children) to "read" by storytelling these books. You'll want to support children in attending to the meaning of the story by using the pictures and saying back the language that is in the book and they have heard you say over and over in the repeated readings. You will support them like a parent does, inviting them to read while you respond emotionally to the stories, anticipating how stories go and adding in the meaning and language on the pages. English language learners (ELLs) especially benefit from emergent storybook reading. Teachers may spend some time during the workshop pulling small groups of ELLs with similar needs together to read aloud old favorites. Invite children to point to the pictures, to storytell in accompaniment, and to read along with some of the parts

like, “You monkeys, you. . . .” Some students will act like the characters as they read emergent storybooks. These readers will look up from *Caps for Sale*, shaking their fists and saying, “You monkeys, you. . . .” In addition, these children will need extra time working with the alphabet and sound-letter correspondence.

If you have a fair number of children who begin the year struggling with the concept of one-to-one matching as they read, you may want to refer to Units Three, Four, and Five as described in the Kindergarten Curriculum Calendar for Reading. These unit descriptions may provide some ideas for work you can do in small groups and conferences with students who still struggle to point under the words.

### **Part Three: Readers Share Books with Friends and We Become Stronger Readers Because We Share**

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For this final portion of the first unit, you’ll offer your children support in their book talks with their friends. To extend the running analogy, you might say something like, “Readers, I just thought of another thing we can learn from runners. Usually, when runners are trying to get faster and stronger, they’ll run with a friend. The company of a running friend can help them get through hard parts of running, and they have someone to talk to about their running and their lives.” Then, you might say, “I’m thinking that we already have reading friends, someone we read with and talk to about books. For the next few days, we’ll learn ways to read with a friend so that you both become stronger readers who can read for longer times.”

Depending on what you observe when your students read together, you’ll want to offer instruction that supports them with both the technical aspects of partnerships (taking turns, deciding how to read together, holding the book in the middle, settling disputes, and so on), and you’ll want to provide them with a variety of ideas for what they might talk about to each other. You can show partners ways to coach each other in their reading by relying on strategies to help them get through tricky parts and figure out words or by reading in different ways (choral, echo, taking turns). You can also teach children ways to retell to partners after they read to each other and how to use their Post-its to talk off their reading. As children retell, you’ll nudge them to think about what the most important parts of their books are. Rather than telling everything, they’ll want to think about which parts will give their partner a sense of the major events of the book and which parts matter the most to the storyline. Kids who are reading at higher levels such as J and above this early on in the year can read in same-book partnerships and read and talk about the important parts of their books together. You may want to refer to Unit One in the Second-Grade Curriculum Calendar for Reading for ideas about how to support your higher-level readers.

As partners talk about their books with each other, you’ll want to be sure that they are asking the right sorts of questions to have a meaningful conversation. Are they thinking about who did what where? When they retell, are they sharing what happened at the beginning, middle, and end of their books? Are they looking at both the pictures and the text to get a feel for the story, and revising their mental image



when need be? Are they considering what changed over the course of the story? What have they learned as readers? It might be helpful for partnerships to act out parts of their books, especially parts that are particularly dramatic. When kids finish a book together, they also might help each draw some conclusions about what happened in the text. They might talk about why some of the things that happened in their book changed and how the characters feel at the end. They may even do some beginning critique work and talk about why they liked or didn't like the book that they just read. You want to set the standard high for readers and to teach them to think at the very highest levels of literacy early in the year to give them a feel and taste of the great thinking work that lies ahead for them this year.

You'll continue to support the work children are doing in workshop through your read-alouds, perhaps spotlighting how to support readers on how to draw these conclusions and think about what we learn from books. Are there lessons we can learn, messages that the author is maybe trying to teach us through the story? At this point in the unit, you may want to choose books to read aloud that have particularly clear lessons that children will have an easy time spotting. You'll want to demonstrate how to not only think about these lessons but to also talk in partnerships about them. You can support kids with learning how to connect and relate to the characters and what happens in the book to help engage them in listening, talking, and thinking about their reading.

Meanwhile, during science and social studies, you'll also want to be reading aloud. These read-alouds will help children to see how reading helps them learn new information and be amazed by interesting big ideas and facts. Those children who chose to read nonfiction during reading workshop will also be supported when you show how nonfiction readers orchestrate many reading strategies when reading nonfiction. To make sense of the text and to learn new information, readers need to be constantly thinking about the big ideas the author is trying to get across. We look from pictures to text to synthesize the information on the page. When we come to new vocabulary, we work to learn it from the glossary, context, or pictures because new vocabulary is part of the new learning. You may choose to read in text sets, where there are many books about one topic, to show children how to talk across texts to compare and contrast. Social studies and science read-alouds can bring in other genres besides nonfiction—poetry, songs, stories, and so on—to show children how there are many genres that can be used to teach about a topic.

## Word Study and Shared Reading

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There is so much that first graders need to learn about letters and words and how they work. An effective word study curriculum for first grade, according to the Common Core State Standards, covers phonemic awareness, letter-sound work, spelling patterns, high-frequency words, word structures, and strategies for problem-solving words. The goal in word study is to help children become efficient problem solvers of words as they are reading and writing. You will want to make sure that you are showing children how to

transfer what they are learning about words to their own reading. Therefore, you will want to balance your instruction so that some of the work with words occurs in isolation and much of it occurs within the context of reading and writing. Shared reading is a perfect time in the day to help students understand how their word study work helps them with word solving in reading. During shared reading, prompt students to notice features of words as they are thinking about the meaning of the text.

You can begin making plans for word study by administering assessments to determine what children already know about letters and words and what they are ready to learn next. We recommend the Spelling Inventory in *Words Their Way*. It is administered just as you'd administer a spelling test. This assessment will help you determine each child's stage of spelling development. You'll also want to do letter identification and sound assessment. You will want to assess students' phonemic awareness knowledge. In other words, you'll want to find out what students understand about the sounds in words or phonemes in words. According to the Common Core State Standards, children should be able to hear individual phonemes, blend phonemes, and segment phonemes. A perfect time to assess students would be during writing when students are writing words. Ask students to tell you the sound they hear at the beginning of a word, end of a word, and in the middle of the word. Notice whether the student can isolate sounds in words and blend sounds together. A more difficult task would be to say the word and have students segment the sounds in a word. For example, say to the student "I will say the word *hat*, you say the sounds you hear in *hat*." The student should be able to say /h/-/a/-/t/.

Once you have assessed all of your children, you will have a better sense of how you can organize your word study. You can anticipate that you'll need to provide for small-group support. You'll notice your students will need to work on different features of words. Managing small groups can at first feel daunting. You'll want to start off by teaching children the routines for several word study activities such as sorting, word hunts, and making words with magnetic letters. You might teach the routines in a whole group, as you review some of the features taught in the previous year. For example, you will want to teach all of your students how to do a sort. Once children are assessed and you have formed groups, all students can sort at their own stage of spelling development. For example, you might have one group working on beginning sounds, one group working on ending sounds, and one group working on blends. As you are teaching the routines for word study activities, however, you might want to review some of the work from kindergarten, such as rhymes, hearing syllables, and letter sounds. You will also want to include some phonemic awareness work during your word study routine. Research shows that phonemic awareness is most effective when it is done in small groups. After assessing your students' knowledge of phonemic awareness, you will notice that some students need to work on isolating sounds in words, while others are ready to do more work with segmenting sounds.

You will want to plan time for shared reading every day. Shared reading takes only ten to twenty minutes, and it provides opportunities for children to fall in love with books, read with joy, and get some texts "under their belts." During a shared reading session, many teachers spend part of the time rereading familiar shared texts

with their students. It's important to include a variety of texts, including big books, nursery rhymes, songs, short poems, class charts, and so on, and to make sure students have chances to join in and read the text together.

During shared reading you will want to support students with transferring what they are learning in word study to their reading. Some students will need more work on using their knowledge of beginning sounds, while others will be ready for more work with blends and digraphs. Your work during shared reading should help put together what children need as readers and what they are learning about words during word study. Once you administer running records on your students and analyze them, you will learn a great deal about how they are processing texts. Some students will need more work on searching the meaning of the text to support their word solving, while others need to do more work monitoring their reading to make sure the word they are saying looks like the word in the text.

You will also want to remind students of the strategies they have learned in kindergarten as well as build on what they have already learned to do. Plan the prompts you will use with students as you read the shared reading text. For example, if students need to search the meaning of the text and search the visual information (print), you might say, "Think about what would make sense and also look right" as you read the text together. You also want to reinforce the comprehension work readers do—making predictions and envisioning—that is going on in read-aloud as well. In most first-grade classrooms, you will probably begin the year in word study by doing a name inquiry, which may be familiar to many of your students if they did a name study in kindergarten. Each day, one of the students' names is featured, and the class studies the name in many different ways. During the name study, you will reteach letter names, letter-sound relationships (focusing on beginning and ending sounds), and phonemic awareness (hearing individual sounds in words, blending and segmenting, rhymes, syllables).

In interactive writing, you can reinforce the early reading strategies that first graders learned in kindergarten. As you know, during interactive writing, you and your children write a very brief text together on large chart paper. You will write the words or parts of words that are either too easy or too hard for children while they write the words or parts of words that they are beginning to approximate. One child at a time comes up and writes while the rest of the class tries the same thing using their fingers to write "in the air" or "on the carpet." You may suggest that each day a child shares a piece of news such as, "I rode my bike without the training wheels." As you and your children write the story, you can ask them to stretch out the words and have children come up and write down the letters they hear. Once they have written a word, the class can reread it and think about what word goes next.

Right away, you will also want to create a word wall to which children can add three to five high-frequency words (such as *the*, *went*, *is*, and *and*) a week. Many teachers put specialized words (words that support science studies, seasonal words, and so on) on word lists that are separate from the word wall in an attempt to keep the word wall less cluttered and more helpful to students. For each unit of study, you'll notice that the curriculum calendar includes a version of the following chart, which we hope will help you locate resources for your word study/phonics instruction.

<b>If you decide to teach. . .</b>	<b>Suggested lessons in <i>Words Their Way, 4th edition</i></b>	<b>Suggested lessons in <i>Phonics Lessons 1st Grade,</i> Pinnell &amp; Fountas</b>
Phonemic awareness: Blending individual sounds (e.g., b-a-t to get bat) Segmenting individual sounds (cat to c-a-t)	4-12 (p. 115) 4-18 to 4-26 (pp. 118–123)	PA3 (p. 97)
Letter names	4-27 to 4-31 (pp. 123–125)	LK1 to LK4 (pp. 135–150), LK7 (p. 159), LK9 (p. 167)
Letter-sound relationships: Beginning sounds Letter formation	5-6 to 5-8 (pp. 157–158) 4-18 (pp. 118), 4-20 (pp. 119) 4-10, 4-11 (pp. 114–115),	LS1 to LS3 (pp. 197–208), LK5– LK6 (pp. 151–158)
Phonological awareness: Rhyming words and syllables	4-14 (pp. 116) pp. 182–183	PA1, PA2 (pp. 89–96)
High-frequency words	pp. 148–150,	HF1 to HF8 (pp. 325–356)
Simple CVC spelling patterns (Ex. _at, _it, _op)	5-12 to 5-19 (pp. 160–164)	SP1 to SP4 (pp. 283–298)

## Additional Resources

This unit is about getting everything going—routines, stamina, strong reading, enthusiasm for reading workshop—everything. Your first graders ended kindergarten able to read for thirty to forty minutes. They'll remember these basic routines with a little practice and coaching. Coming to the meeting area, turning and talking, reading privately and with a partner, and selecting books will not be the highlight of your unit in first grade—unless the majority of your class did not attend kindergarten or they did not participate in a reading workshop last year. If this is the case, you may want to incorporate some lessons on choosing books and some strategies for partner reading, and you'll want to teach kids to read one book after another and another and another. You will want to plan to do this basic work in addition to the following teaching points so that your class doesn't miss out on anything. You could do more than one lesson per workshop—a minilesson based on lifting the level of children's reading and an interruption partway through the workshop to introduce or remind students of another strategy for routines or independence.

Remember that the end-of-the-year benchmark for kindergarten is level D/E, meaning that even with a little bit of slide over the summer, your new first graders should come to you ready to hit the ground running. Of course, there may be a number of children who actually come back to school ready to read even harder books—perhaps they read during the summer or attended a summer program or sim-

ply grew in age and maturity. We invite you to adapt some of the teaching points below for higher levels. You may refer to later units of study to find strategies for children doing work at higher levels.

On the other hand, children who are just beginning to read level C/D books or below will need strong support. You need to match kids up to books as best you can until you've had a chance to conduct a formal running record, and provide support through book introductions, coaching, and small-group work. You may need to revisit some of the teaching points from last year's kindergarten units, maybe even borrowing some of the charts from kindergarten classrooms if you can, to help kids remember all of the great work they did at the end of the year last year. You'll need to do extra shared reading, perhaps two or three lessons each day instead of one, highlighting early reading strategies like one-one match, using initial sounds and the pictures to make a good guess at unfamiliar words, and using the patterns to predict how books will go. You can then revisit those shared reading texts with small groups of children who need the extra support so that they can catch up.

The teaching points below are far from encompassing, nor are they set in stone. They are meant to help you imagine a possible pathway, one that will need to have detours, and alternate pathways to the same end, and may branch out very differently.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### **Part One: Readers Push Ourselves to Be the Best Readers We Can Be, Reading Long and Strong**

- *Connection:* "Readers are like runners. Readers warm up for reading, we set goals for ourselves, we establish good habits, and we push ourselves to be the strongest readers we can be. It takes drive to start reading, and momentum to keep going. Sometimes readers get tired or encounter bumps in the road—and when that happens, they know that they need to try a little harder. The good news is that just like runners have things they can do to be especially strong runners, there are things we can do as readers to be the very best readers we can be. As first graders, you already do some of those things—and you'll be doing even more soon."
  
- "Today, I want to teach you that just like runners warm up before they run by stretching their muscles, we warm up before we read too. First, we find a comfortable reading spot, and then we settle into that spot with the book we've selected. Then we spend a few minutes getting a feel for the book. We can look at the cover and the back, we can flip through the pages, looking at the pictures and thinking about what might happen in this book. *Then*, we start reading."

- “Today, I want to teach you that readers, like runners, set goals. A runner might say to herself, ‘Today, I’ll run a mile.’ At first this might be hard, but after two days of running a mile, that same runner might change her goal, telling herself, ‘I think I can run a mile and a half now!’ It’s like that with reading, too. Readers can set goals for how many books we will read during our workshop. One reader might say, ‘I will read seven books today!’ But then pretty soon that goal may change. ‘I will read ten books today!’ the reader might say. We set goals for ourselves in the classroom and at home.”
  
- “Today, I want to teach you that strong readers, like strong runners, read for a long time. We can use our baggies to help us do this long reading work. One way to do this is by taking all our books out of our baggie. Then when we finish reading a book from the pile, we can put it back into the baggie. When all our books are back in the baggie, we can do the whole thing over again!”
  
- “Today, I want to remind you of something you learned to do in kindergarten. Readers reread. Just as we have songs we sing over and over, so too, we have books we read over and over.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “We can reread our books in our best storyteller voice.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “We can reread to find something we didn’t notice or think about the first time.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “We can reread to give us a chance to focus more on what’s happening in the pictures.” (You might choose to make a chart during this lesson called “Different Ways We Can Reread.”)
  
- “Readers, today I will teach you that even the strongest readers can lose focus for a bit. Maybe there’s a loud noise or something interesting going on in another part of the room. Maybe you have to go get a tissue to wipe your nose, or maybe someone interrupts you while you are reading. Whenever these things happen to readers, we have strategies to get right back to our reading. Strong readers often go back a page or two (or a paragraph or two) and reread to refresh our memories about what’s going on in our story.”
  
- “Readers, today I want to remind you that readers have something very valuable that can help us read: We have each other! Readers know that we can work with our reading partners to help us out when the reading gets tough and laugh with when your books are funny!”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “Last year, you sat with your partner, shoulder to shoulder, sharing one book, helping each other when there was a tricky word, or laughing when there was a funny part. You can do that this year too, if you want!” (You might want to create a chart here, adding to it during mid-workshop teaching points as you notice children working with partners in useful ways.)



## Part Two: Readers Make Movies in Our Minds as We Read—and We Revise the Pictures as We Read On

- “Today, I want to teach you that when we get ready to read a book, we can start to make a movie in our mind of how the book might go. We can use the cover, look at the words and pictures on the first page, and flip through the pages to help us make this movie.”
- “Today, I want to teach you that as we are reading our books, we hold in our minds what we imagined the book would be about and then when we turn the pages we think if each page goes with what we thought. Sometimes it matches, but other times it doesn’t, and we have to revise our original ideas.”
- “Today, I want to teach you that we can think about what kinds of words we might see before we even start to read. For example, if the book is called *At the Farm*, a reader might think, ‘I bet there will be words like *cow* and *chicken* and *pig* in this book.’ Then as we open the book, we look to see if those words can help us read the words on the page.”
- “Today, I want to teach you that readers watch ourselves to make sure that we understand what we are reading. Whenever we read, we try to figure out what is happening. Strange things pop up all the time in books—confusing parts, words we don’t know, things that don’t fit with the movie we made before we started reading. When we feel confused, readers stop and try to make sense. We don’t let ourselves stay confused or lost when we are on a new book journey because we might miss something spectacular.”
- “After a book is finished, we don’t just close the book and move on. Today, I want to teach you that readers hold onto our book in big ways.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “One way we can do this is by trying to say how the end of our book and the title/cover go together. Another way is to think about what we learned from the book or how it fits into our lives or made us think a little bit differently about things.”
- “Today, I want to teach you that reading partners also can work to make a movie in their minds too. It’s not just the person sharing the book that can do it! As your partner is sharing their book with you, you can also think about what’s happening in the pictures and words and what you already know and make your very own movie at the same time.”
- “Today, I want to teach you that readers can compare the books we read. Readers notice when we have two books that have similar things in them. But readers don’t just stop there—we think about what is different about the books too! For

example, one reader might notice that two books in her baggie have animals in them. Then she might think about how one book teaches about what animals do and the other tells a story of animals playing in mud. Readers notice lots of similarities and differences in our books.”

### **Part Three: Readers Share Books with Friends and We Become Stronger Readers Because We Share**

- “Today, I want to teach you that reading partners find ways to work together. Before we begin our partnership reading time we need to decide how we will do our reading, thinking, and talking work together during partner reading time.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “Partners can take turns reading one partner’s book, then talking about it, and then reading the other partner’s book and talking about it.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “Partners can echo reading, repeating what our partners read and making it sound smooth.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “Partners can read the pages of a book together, like a chorus.”
- “Today, I want to teach you that when reading partners read together we make sure that neither of us misses anything in our books. Reading partners work together to make meaning, to make sure that we remember the book we read. We retell our books like a runner retells a run: ‘You should have been there. . . it went like this. . . . It was tricky on this part. . . . Here let me show you some of the pictures and parts from my book.’”
- “Today, I want to teach you that reading partners make sure that our partner does not get stuck in her book. We do this by helping our partner use strategies to get unstuck. First, we go to the confusing place, and then we help our partner try different things that she has learned that might help get her out of trouble.”
- “Today, I want to remind you of all the things partners can talk about inside our books from kindergarten.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “We can talk about funny parts, sad parts, confusing parts, parts that surprised us, and so on.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “We can use Post-its to mark these pages and even jot a few words about what it makes us think.”
- “Reading partners can push each other to think about the big things we learned from the books in our baggies.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “One way to do this is to ask ourselves, ‘Why is this book called. . . ?’ and then push each other to give thoughtful answers.”



## UNIT TWO

# Tackling Trouble

*When Readers Come to Hard Words and Tricky  
Parts of Books, We Try Harder and Harder  
(Assessment-Based Small-Group Work)*

**OCTOBER/NOVEMBER**

**(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: E/F)**

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**T**ry patting your head and circling your hand on your stomach simultaneously. It's not easy to keep the two different actions going at once. Readers need to do a lot of that. Readers need to envision the story, think about what's happening, and predict what could come next. Meanwhile, readers need to work with little black marks on the page. We're suggesting that by early October, you turn your readers' attention specifically to the challenge of working on those little black marks—the hard words and tricky parts of books.

This unit is designed to provide an opportunity, very early in the year, to revisit the strategy work children learned in the previous year but may have forgotten. It is also for you to teach children more sophisticated strategies that will help them read more challenging books. This is critically important work because as children begin reading books at level C and above, they become more reliant on word-solving strategies that use what they know about phonics.

Because September was filled with assessments and routines, this unit will be your chance as a teacher to get into the nitty-gritty of differentiated instruction. You will need to use all of the information you collected through your September assessments—and perhaps even collect some new information—to help guide your students toward strategies that fit their specific needs. This may mean doing some follow-up informal running records to shed light on student progress and stumbling blocks. If you have done running records previously and have been trained to do them, you won't need to do these on a special form unless your school has different mandates. Just pull a chair alongside a child who is reading and say, "Let's hear you read aloud." Then take notes on any sheet of paper, noting miscues as usual. If you are a bit unclear

about running records, then you'll probably want to use paper that is formatted to help you take and analyze these assessment notes (you can find blank running record forms on our website: [www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com)).

When you do running records, whether you are just looking on as a child reads his or her just-right book or you have brought the child to a specific text, it is important that you see what happens when the child reads a text level that will be a bit hard for the child. These assessments will help you look at one of the three parts of text complexity that are addressed in the Common Core State Standards' qualitative section. Some of them will have entered the year rusty from a summer without reading. After just a few weeks of reading up a storm, be ready to move up to another level of text difficulty. If their speed at moving through books has increased, that, too, can be a sign they're ready to move up. You will probably want to put readers into transitional baggies containing some of the easier books at the text level, and then you will want to provide extra support in those harder books. Same-book partnerships help, as does a book introduction.

When a text is a bit difficult, the reader's work contains enough miscues that you can see patterns across them, and this allows you to understand what the reader does and does not yet control. You will be able to see whether each child leans especially on phonics, on the meaning of the story, or on the syntax of sentences to cope with difficult texts. This will give you enormous support in knowing how to teach a particular child. That is, if one child reads, "I jumped into the water," as "I jumped into the wagon," and does not self-correct, then you will know that this child is certainly using syntax and some phonics but is not attending to meaning. So, if this child confronts difficulty in the midst of reading, you will plan to later teach by coaching, "What would make sense? Reread and think, 'What else *might* fit in here?' Check the ending sound." You will not, on the other hand, be apt to say, "What sound does the first letter make?" The student already knows this information. Nor would you want to coach the reader to use his or her language structure by saying, "What would sound right?"

Most of your readers will be reading around level E from the start of the year. Those students who are below these levels will need tailored instruction through guided reading, shared reading, and small-group strategy lessons to help them move along right from the start of the year. At the end of two months of teaching, you are hoping to see that your kids have moved as readers. You will see that some of your readers have already grown one or more reading levels. Hopefully, as you continue to do these running records, you'll see that summer rustiness has worn off and children are ready to progress. In any case, fine-tune each reader's selection of books with books that are just right and clarify where a child can go to find more books that will be just right.

You may find from your running records that you have some students who are not quite ready to move to the next level. These children appear to be "between levels." This might be because they read painfully slowly, because they don't read with 96% accuracy, or because their inference skills are not so strong. In any case, children like this are not yet ready to move to the next level. They are in transition. Therefore, they

should be reading mostly books that are just right, but also a few books that are a notch harder. Books in the latter category will require a few reads before a transitional reader is able to attain 96% accuracy or more, with fluency and comprehension.

By this time, you will be differentiating your word study instruction based on September assessments. You'll want to make it very clear to your students that the reason they are working so hard to learn about parts of words in word study is so that they can use this knowledge to problem-solve words in their reading and writing. You'll want your beginning readers to understand very early in the year that careful readers never rely on just one source of information or strategy. Rather, we learn how to be flexible and use a variety of strategies. In other words, we learn how to cross-check as we read. We stop and ask, "Does it make sense?" "Does it sound right?" "Does it look right?" How important it is, then, that you move mountains to be sure that your children have the mindset and the tools to tackle tricky words with vigor.

Then too, because this unit is especially assessment-based, you will need to lean on small-group instruction more than ever. You'll need to make sure your minilessons are relevant to a span of readers. To differentiate your minilessons, you will want to think about ways in which you can support diverse readers during the active involvement. You might say, "Try this in your just-right book." Some teachers find that it helps to establish a seating chart that essentially groups children into ability clusters (without making this obvious), engineering kids to work within ability clusters and giving each cluster an appropriate text with which to work.

In your minilessons, you will teach children strategies for tackling hard words and hard parts of their books. You will, of course, want to think about ways in which partnership conversations and Post-its can support the work of this particular unit, adding a spotlight on reading strategies for tackling words. The content of the unit will always affect not only the minilessons and some of the small-group work but also some of what children do with partners. Remember that partners can Post-it parts where they had confusion or where they tried to figure out a new word. You'll teach partners to offer helpful prompts rather than simply calling out the word in question. Kids can remind each other to look at the first part of the word, think what would make sense, and reread the word. Partners can also help each other try other strategies, referencing the classroom chart for possibilities. Partners can then agree, disagree, and add in.

## Decide on Your Theme Song for This Unit

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Teachers, as you embark on a new unit, you need to decide what your "rally cry" will be. Your job at the start of the unit is to be the inspirational leader, drumming up kids' passion for the important work of the upcoming month. So stop and think, what really *is* your goal for this upcoming month? Think about what many of your children are doing now when they encounter hard words in books. Think about the relationship between writing, reading, and phonics.

The most important goal for you in this unit will be to make sure your readers are active problem solvers. For most new readers, this is the hardest work they will do.

To rally your students around this goal, you could choose to take a cue from Kathy Collins. Lucy Calkins' *The Art of Teaching Reading* describes how Kathy taught this unit of study to first graders at P.S. 321. She started with Alex's heated story of his bike ride up a gut-squishing hill in Prospect Park. Kathy helped Alex describe how bike riding is different if you're riding straight uphill—the bike gets wobbly and you need to get off—downhill—when you ride without even pedaling—and on level ground. Kathy asked, "Do any of you ever feel like some books are uphill books? Exhausting, no-fun books that make your reading all wobbly?" Soon, the class became deeply committed to the metaphor of "flat-road" books, where just the right amount of work is needed. From there it was a small jump to the metaphor of readers encountering "bumps in the road." For Kathy's first graders, this unit became about how readers deal with bumps in the road. This might make an apt theme for a unit of study on difficult words and tricky parts. Your students will need more than inspiration to help them with the hard work of reading. However, pulling the class together around this common goal will help to provide the engagement and energy that is required to tackle the hard work ahead.

As this unit unfolds, the broad directions of your teaching could be as follows:

- Readers think about the story and how the words will go before we read the words.
- Readers use all we know about letters, sounds, patterns, and snap words to help us read.
- Readers make sure they check and fix their words when they notice something is not quite right.
- Partners help each other read.

## **Part One: Readers Think about the Story and How the Words Will Go Before We Read the Words**

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Readers prepare before they read. This may seem obvious to us as adults. We prepare in so many ways before we read. We study the cover and flip over the book and read the back. Many adult readers who are now reading on e-readers relish the fact that we can read the whole first chapter of a book before deciding to buy it. Still, other adults don't even consider reading a book unless it has been recommended by a reliable source, whether that is the *New York Times* or a trusted friend. All of this preparation helps us to engage fully in our books and makes it easier to work through slow beginnings or confusing passages, because we have the greater story or theme in mind. But preparation before reading is not something that most kids do on their own. Before you teach this unit, you might look around your classroom and observe how many students independently study their books before actually reading them. Chances are that at the start of the unit, the number will be small because many of your students will be so excited about being able to read longer, harder words and books. The prereading strategies they



were taught in the past will have gone right out the window. You can change that in just one week.

You might rally your students around this work by saying, “Readers know the secret that will make reading the words in our books easier to do. We can do some work in our brains before we even start to look at the words on the page.” Students should always search for the meaning of the story before they even open up the book. As readers are getting ready to read the words in our books, we think about the meaning of the book. The title, pictures, and parts we have already read can help us to read the words. Many times, students neglect to use the meaning of the story to problem-solve and decode using only what they have learned about words. The important thing to understand is that by helping students get themselves ready to read, you are actually helping them figure out new and tricky words. When kids study the cover and the back of a book, make predictions, and take picture walks to set themselves up to read, they are setting themselves up to solve words too. If the reader has the bigger story in mind, when she comes to a hard word, she can think, “What was I thinking this might say? Does that help me figure out this word?”

You can teach your kids that while working on tricky parts in texts, they need to make sure they continue to comprehend. They can check themselves by retelling the texts to themselves at different points along the way. You’ll want to remind your students that they can retell across their fingers by using cue words such as, *first*, *then*, *next*, *after that*, and *finally*. If students get stuck as they retell, you can teach strategies they can use to get back on track. For instance, you can teach them to touch each page and retell the big thing that is happening on each page. This strategy works best in shorter texts with lots of picture support. You can teach them to be resourceful and use illustrations in the text to remind them of the story as they say, “Oh, yeah, this is the part when. . . .”

As children are strengthening their prereading habits in this first week of the unit, you will also want to think about the kinds of small-group work that will be required. You may have a few students who are just now ready to move into conventional reading. For these students you may work by leading guided reading and strategy lessons. If you can, you’ll want to work with the most vulnerable children several times a week in small groups. During guided reading sessions, choose books the children will be able to read easily with just a little support. Give them a book introduction and then let them each read the book alone (yet alongside each other) while you lean in to coach one child’s reading and then the next. You can use the prompts from pages 114–115 in *The Art of Teaching Reading* for assistance. At the end of this session, make one explicit teaching point and send children off to put these books into their private bookshelves. You’ll also want to pull together guided reading groups for children who are ready to move to the next level of text difficulty. You’ll want to provide them with book introductions for the first few days in the new level. This offers them a little extra support while they are first working on harder texts. The speaking and listening section of the Common Core State Standards says students should participate in collaborative conversations with peers and adults in small and large guided reading groups.

You may want to do some small-group strategy lessons with your stronger readers in which you teach reading strategies appropriate to their level. Take a close look at the texts they are reading and determine any challenges the texts present. Remember that at higher levels, readers will encounter challenging words, but they will also struggle at times to make meaning from texts. When a group of children in your room face the latter challenge, you could pull them into a small group and use a shared text to teach them how to hold onto more text across pages. As you read across one or more pages, stop and ask the children to think about what they just read and describe this in a simple sentence. For example, a child who is reading the book *Zoo Looking* might stop at the end of the first few pages and say, “This book is about a girl who looks at a giraffe and the giraffe looks back.” However, if you ask her to think about the whole book, the title and how the pages go together, she is more likely to come up with a summary that encompasses the meaning of the whole story, like, “This book is called *Zoo Looking* because it is the story of a girl that goes to the zoo.”

English language learners (ELLs) can benefit from small-group instruction based on their needs as readers and/or speakers of English. You might continue to gather these children in small groups to do some emergent storybook reading, or you might decide to do some book introductions for the books in their baggies to supply some concept knowledge and/or vocabulary they need. You may want to reference the December unit of study for kindergarten, “Readers Use Print Strategies to Read Shared Reading Texts,” for further ideas to help these readers and new speakers of English according to the Common Core State Standards.

It is important to be mindful of the books you choose for your ELLs. Books with familiar concepts like playtime, families, and animals will help their language acquisition by enabling them to match new vocabulary to familiar concepts. You may also want to choose books that match their stage of language acquisition. For example, if children are in the beginning stages of learning English, you could choose a book that is in present tense or present progressive rather than the past tense, which is usually acquired later. When you pay attention to the language structure of just-right books and the language abilities of English language learners, children can transfer what they know and are learning about syntax and vocabulary back and forth among reading, speaking, and writing.

## **Part Two: Readers Use All We Know about Letters, Sounds, Patterns, and Snap Words to Help Us Read**

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Once you have gotten your students to search for the meaning of the story before reading the words, you will want to help them use all that they have learned about words to problem-solve in efficient ways. You might start this work by telling children to draw on their ever-expanding knowledge of letters and sounds to help them word-solve. You will want to teach minilessons reminding your readers that looking closely at words is a big part of what we do as readers. Also, children can use the phonics work they learn to do (at their respective spelling stages) during word study in the reading workshop,

drawing on this to help them read books. You will likely have also started to work with students to strengthen their high-frequency word vocabulary. Here too, you will want to remind children to use these words to help them read. While your small-group work will support children in using specific word study strategies and student levels, your whole-group teaching will be an important way to rally your kids around using all they know.

For the bulk of your readers, using word study strategies will mean looking for parts of words as they problem-solve rather than just sounding out words letter by letter. Only about 45% of words in English are phonetic, so simply saying, “Sound it out” will probably *not* work. These readers, who are now reading in levels E and F, will also need to harness the patterns they know to help them read unknown words. Your spelling inventory data will help you to know what patterns your students know so that you can expect them to use that knowledge as they read. For example, if kids are spelling words with digraphs and blends correctly, you will want students to use that knowledge when reading words. If they come to a word that begins with a blend or a digraph, such as *clean* or *shopping*, you’ll want students to read *cl* as a blend, not letter by letter. A child who reads the sentence “She did not want to *stay*” should be trying to see the *ay* part of the word *stay* and then use that to read the word.

You will also want to teach students the strategy of using known words to help you figure out new words. During word study, students most likely have been sorting words under anchor pictures and words. Anchor pictures are words that can help you sort the rest of the words. You might help students use these words to help them figure out words as they are reading. For example, if students have been studying spelling patterns with *\_ed* and they know the word *bed*, you can say, “The word you are trying to read is like the word *bed*” as they are problem-solving the word *sled*. You might also use the prompt, “Does that word look like a word you know?” when the child is stuck. If you need to provide even more support, you might make the word *bed* with magnetic letters right next to what they are reading. Ask, “What word is this?” The child says, “Bed.” You say, “Look at the word you are trying to read. What part is the same?” You’ll also want to show students how they can use their high-frequency words to help them read new words. The words *she* and *can* will be words that can help kids read lots of other words since they have the *sh* digraph and the *an* spelling pattern that is in so many other words.

Your more beginning readers—if you have a few still at levels B and C—will be reading just-right books that have relatively supportive illustrations that accompany the text. You will want to make sure that these readers are using those pictures but also attending to print. These students may only know beginning sounds and ending sounds. If a child has demonstrated a solid grasp of initial and final sounds on the spelling inventory, this would lead you to teach your kids that when they come to a hard word, they should look at the first sound of the word and think of words they know look and sound like that. You might demonstrate this by looking, for example, at the sentence, “I like to eat popcorn.” The word *popcorn* might be covered with just the letter *p* showing at the beginning and the letter *n* at the end of the word. You might say, “I’m looking at the first letter of this word. /P/. That is the first letter sound of the

word I've read. /P/ /p/. Let's see. What could it be? It should be something that I eat. Playdough? Pizza? Popcorn? Let's check the picture! I see popcorn. Let's say 'popcorn' and think about what we hear at the end. Now let's check the ending part." Pointing to the *n* you might say, "What does that sound make?" You then might show children how they can think about their guesses to pick which one looks right and makes sense.

The important thing here is that you are demonstrating how readers use more than one strategy at once to tackle the hard words and tricky parts of books. In this case, strategies include looking at the beginning of the word, searching the picture, and checking the last letter. Integrating the use of several different strategies that weave together meaning and word-solving is the key to growing a reader. Be careful to not make it seem like the use of a word attack strategy is enough for a child to read an unknown word. As in the example above, we always want to show how the use of initial and final letters, along with picture cues and story understanding, helps us to make meaning from our reading.

Again, make sure that as you teach your children to tackle tough words, you shift between reminding them of strategies for dealing with letters and sounds and strategies to searching their knowledge of structure. For example, when a child encounters a tough word, one important thing for a reader to do is to think, "What kind of word would make sense and sound right here?" Students can "guess the covered word." For example, if a child reads, "The cat jumped \_\_\_\_\_ the fence," hopefully that child uses what she knows is happening in the book and about language to help her know that a clarifying word probably goes into that spot.

The Common Core State Standards suggest that students should be able to read words with inflectional endings such as *-ed* and *-ing*. Many of your students may not be ready for this instruction during word study but can still rely on their knowledge of language and what sounds grammatically correct. For example, if the text says, "The cat jumped in the leaves," the students should be able to eliminate saying the word *jump* instead of *jumped* because that wouldn't sound grammatically correct. The student might try *jumped* and then check the word at the beginning and end to make sure it looks right. In this way the child is relying on her knowledge of structure to anticipate the words in the text. The child might guess that the tough word could be *over*. By using what is happening (meaning) in the text, she can unlock what the word is apt to say (structure) and then look to letters (visual) to disqualify certain options. Children should use what they are learning about word endings (e.g., *-s*, *-ed*, *-es*, *-ing*, *-er*, *-est*) to help them figure out what *sounds right* in a book.

As children move into higher reading levels, they will be reading longer words with more syllables. It is also stated in the Common Core State Standards that students should be able to decode two-syllable words following basic patterns by breaking the words into syllables. Children should now understand that every part of a word needs at least one vowel. You will need to teach them how to use this knowledge when trying to read longer words. For instance, the word *rabbit* could be overwhelming, but if you break it up in two parts, *rab* and *bit*, it is much easier to decode.

Of course, as children tackle hard words, you'll also want to make sure that they do *not* need to work hard to tackle every word. More than half the words that readers encounter are the same thirty-six words! Remember that many of your children probably have more than twenty-five words under their belt from kindergarten. Lots of other words they encounter are ones they should know with automaticity. It is important that, by this time, your children all have a substantial repertoire of words they "just know." These words will be a great help as they read. This unit is a good time to rally children's enthusiasm for extending their sight vocabularies. Tell them that researchers say by the time children are in first grade, they should know twenty-five sight vocabulary words "in a snap." This year they will learn even more!

Some of your children may need help on sight vocabulary words in particular and will be apt to have less stamina during reading time. You may then suggest that these children take a few minutes during every reading workshop to strengthen their sight vocabulary muscles. Perhaps you'll give each of these children word rings with cardboard cards strung on a chain, holding together the words you hope that a particular child can read in a snap. Perhaps one child will have fifteen words on that word ring, and twenty-five on another. Children can remove the words they know perfectly so as to focus on the words they almost know. Word lists of the high-frequency sight words are not hard to find. You can also consult the TCRWP assessments for word lists.

Children who need special help with sight words could play games to practice reading these words. One child can sit with another, looking at the word wall, and the first can say, "I spy a word that is. . ." and then give hints until the other child guesses the selected word. Then, too, you can simply give these children a pointer and ask them to take time every day to read the words on the word wall. Some teachers try to make this fun by suggesting children take on different voices each time they reread the word wall. One partner can say to the other, "Read the word wall in a witch's voice" or, "Read the word wall by meowing the words." These are silly instructions, but the point is for these words to become automatic for children, and some youngsters will benefit from repeated practice. Of course, the best way for children to learn sight vocabulary words is by seeing those words in real books at their just-right level, which is the essential thing they do during reading workshop.

The other important thing about increasing students' sight vocabulary is that these sight words can act like stepping stones to get across a stream. In other words, the sight words can give students a running start that can often provide the necessary momentum to figure out the tricky parts. For example, if a child is reading a book about a little girl's first day at school and encounters a sentence such as, "All day I cried for my mom," she is likely to be able to use "All day I" as a running start to "cried." The words "for my mom" are probably within her sight word vocabulary. You can teach students that when strong people work out, they use "spotters" to help them lift heavy weights. You might say, "As we read, we can use the words we know as 'spotters' to help us deal with the tricky parts. We can read the easy parts of the sentence and that can give us a boost so we can read the tricky parts."



## Part Three: Readers Make Sure They Check and Fix Their Words When They Notice Something Is Not Quite Right

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As you confer with your students, you grow excited about your students' problem-solving with words. You will want to say things like "good job" and "that's right" each time they read a word correctly. We caution you to hold back from telling the child when the word is right, because a reading goal is to get kids to do their own monitoring. Often when they stop at a word or are confused, they immediately look up at us or ask for help. However, you will want to teach students how to self-monitor so they are independent. If we are always telling them when the word is right or wrong, they will always have to depend on someone. Show students how to check their own reading. Teach them to stop when something doesn't make sense with the story or doesn't sound or look correct. They can ask themselves questions like, "Does this go with the story? Does this sound like a book? Does this word look right?" You will want to prompt your students to remember to do this work as they are reading. Some students will know exactly what to do when you say "Check it" to them. Some will need a little more prompting such as, "You said 'Mom want in the car.' Does that sound right?" You'll want to teach students that once they have noticed something isn't right, they have to think, "What else could go with the story? What else do I see in this word?" As you analyze your running records, notice whether students are self-correcting. You will want to see that students are monitoring consistently rather than sparingly. You may notice that your students are consistently searching for meaning, structure, and visual information but never monitoring and correcting. If this is the case, you will want to spend more time in this part. After the student fixes the word, you will want to make sure that the child rereads to make sure that this time it is right.

As readers move along this month, you will be thinking about how to support your beginning readers in reading more complex books. One way to add complexity to their reading materials is by making interactive writing texts. Just as you have been doing since the beginning of the year, you can gather a whole class or small group to compose a text. You can tell a story of something that happened in the classroom. "We found a frog in our classroom. We put him in a cup. Then we let him go." You could repeat this news and suggest the class (or small group) join you in counting the words.

Then, if you want to work with children on leaving spaces between words, you might say, "I am going to write one line for each word. Say the story with me again and watch how I make one line for each word." As children say it again, you write a short line for each word. Then invite children to join you in writing the news. Rely on children for the high-frequency words they are apt to know, and briskly fill in the other sections of words on your own. Make sure every child is active. If one child comes up to write "on" to the story, every child can meanwhile "write" that word on a knee, a patch of rug, or a whiteboard. Each time a word is complete, encourage the children to reread what has been written. Make sure the text sounds right and makes sense in the story. This whole interactive writing time will be only about seven to ten minutes long at the most. Now this text can be added to the classroom library, and you can



give small copies to students who would benefit from reading these texts on their own. While the text may be a higher level than the books the child would otherwise read, the fact that the child helped create the text will make it supportive reading material.

## Part Four: Partners Help Each Other Read

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So far, this write-up has focused on ways you can help your children tackle hard words and tricky parts in stories. We hope you are seeing how you can help children draw on a growing and flexible repertoire of strategies. Hopefully it is clear that you cannot teach a strategy in one day and then tell all your readers to disperse to their reading spots and to use that one strategy. Instead, you'll want your readers to use the strategy from today in combination with all they have already learned, drawing on everything *all at once*.

A word of caution: This unit is suggesting that you spotlight active, resourceful word solving. And we do believe that just mentioning the importance of this in passing doesn't actually galvanize kids into action. There is a risk of harping on word solving too much, because the only way for a reader to be successful is for that reader to draw on meaning and print simultaneously. Frankly, your assessments (running records) and your observations day in and day out as you teach will show you that some of your children reliably, predictably *only* zoom in to look at letters whenever they are stuck. They may forget about the fact that when a reader draws on a general sense of what is going on in the story and what is apt to happen next, this can make word solving much more efficient, putting the word solver in the ballpark of figuring out the word. This is very hard work and not work that you can do alone, so in this last part of the unit you can call on partners to help.

You can teach readers that while working on tricky parts in texts, they need to make sure they continue to comprehend and can, in fact, check themselves by retelling the texts to themselves at different points along the way. You may want to dedicate a few minilessons that do two things at once: support partner work and teach the qualities of good retelling. You'll want to remind your students that they can retell across their fingers by using cue words such as, *first*, *then*, *next*, *after that*, and *finally*. If students get stuck as they retell, teach strategies they can use to get back on track. For instance, you can teach them to touch and retell the big thing that is happening on each page, although this strategy works best in shorter texts with lots of picture support. You can teach them to be resourceful and use illustrations in the text to remind them of the story as they say, "Oh, yeah, this is the part when. . . ." You can also teach students to retell the lesson or message of the story when they are finished reading. This would be great work for partners to talk about and do together.

While the partners can support retelling and thinking work, they can always support each other in reading the words too. Teach children to use the strategies charts in the classroom to help each other as they read. You will want to teach children how to "coach" instead of telling each other the words, perhaps teaching them phrases like "Fix it!" or "Check it!" or "Try that again." This will help kids to support each other during partner time and engage for longer stretches of time with their eyes glued to the print.

Finally, you may want to spend a day or two teaching children that their reading can sound smooth. In other words, as they read and deal with tricky parts, you can teach them how to go back and reread. You can model by putting a sentence or two on a chart. You'll demonstrate how a reader gets to a tricky part, uses all she knows to figure out the word(s), and then goes back to read it smoothly. Teach children that when we read smoothly versus haltingly or in a jerky way, we are more likely to understand what we are reading. It's important to let your partners know that as they read a book over and over again across the week, their voice should become smoother and smoother until they no longer stumble on tricky parts. If by the end of the week, a book doesn't feel smooth to a child, he should plan to keep the book in his baggie for another week. This is another great way that partners can support each other's growth, cheering each other on as the words get smoother or supporting them to make a decision to hold onto the book.

## Celebrating the Work of this Unit

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The big work of this unit will have been teaching students strategies to read with accuracy, fluency, and understanding by integrating sources of information. One of the ways you might celebrate your children's new proficiency is to suggest that each of them find a just-right book they want to learn to read aloud well for a celebration. For several days, children will take this book home and practice reading it aloud in their best voices. Then, on the celebration day, you might have them read their book aloud to each other in small groups of four classmates. You might decide to invite kindergartners or older students to provide more of an audience. For students who are able to read more sophisticated, longer texts, you could suggest that they either select an excerpt to read aloud or choose a poem or short text.

### *Read-Aloud*

This unit emphasizes the strategies readers use to word solve on the run as we read. You'll want to make sure your read-aloud complements this by focusing on the thinking work that readers do as they read. During this month you will likely read a variety of information and story books. In these read-alouds you will want to model and engage your students in the work that readers do before, during, and after reading a book. You'll certainly want to emphasize that readers orient ourselves to a text before reading it, thinking about what the text is apt to say. One part of this preparation is likely to include teaching how readers think about the genre of the text to help get ready to read. As the Common Core State Standards point out, this is an important step in understanding our books and preparing for the ideas ahead. You'll also want to reteach that readers pause to reflect on a text in the midst of reading, saying something to ourselves such as, "Hmmm. I'm just thinking, 'What was the most important part in this whole book?'" or "What is this book teaching me?" Or "I'm noticing things about this character. Let's

see. . . .” During read-aloud, you might model this by saying things like, “Gee, I didn’t really ‘get’ that part because I was daydreaming a little. I’m going to reread it because I think that will help me.”

Children will be sitting next to their read-aloud partners (who may or may not be the same as their reading workshop partners). You’ll want to use read-aloud conversations to help children actively listen to their partners and grow their partners’ ideas, perhaps using phrases such as, “I agree with you because. . .” or “I disagree because. . .” As independent readers, we hope our students will attempt to clarify parts of their texts that they don’t understand or that are tricky. Use these or any other conversation starters to support partners in turning and talking in the midst of read-aloud. In time, you’ll find that children won’t need you to scaffold them in such a supportive way.

### Word Study

You’ll want to continue providing direct instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics this month. This unit of study supports students’ transfer of word knowledge into their reading. You will want to continue to build their knowledge of words this month during your twenty to thirty minutes for word study.

If you decide to teach. . .	Suggested lessons in <i>Words Their Way, 4th Edition</i>	Suggested lessons in <i>Phonics Lessons 1st Grade,</i> <i>Pinnell &amp; Fountas</i>
Phonemic Awareness: Hearing beginning sounds, ending sounds, and phoneme manipulation	Adapt 4-27 to 4-31 (pp. 123–125) 5-6 to 5-8 (pp.157–158) *Use activities that students know from beginning sounds	PA4 to PA8 (pp.101–120), PA10, PA11 (pp.125–132)
Letter/Sound Relationships: Beginning and ending Introduce simple initial blends and digraphs (bl, cr, sh, ch)	Adapt 4-27 to 4-31 (pp. 123–125) 5-6 to 5-10 (pp. 157–159), 5-15 (p. 162)	LS1 to LS5 (pp.197–216) LS7 to LS11 (pp. 221–240)
High-frequency words	pp. 182–183	HF1 to HF8 (pp. 325–356)
Simple spelling patterns CVC (e.g., _an, _in)	pp. 148–150, 5-12 to 5-19 (pgs. 160–164)	SP1 to SP4 (pp. 283– 293)

### Additional Resources

If your children are progressing as expected, they will be reading level F/G books by November. Now that your children have discovered decoding and can figure out unfamiliar words, there is a chance that some of your kids will develop a habit of “word calling.” That is, they will say words aloud, reading them phonetically or “sounding it out,” with little idea what the words mean. Look over your running records and conferring notes from Unit One to see if this is the case. If so, you will want to adapt

these resources to include a string of lessons on learning new vocabulary and figuring out the meaning of new and unfamiliar words. You might refer to *Unit Four, Nonfiction Readers Learn About the World*, for tips on dealing with new vocabulary.

There is also a possibility that your class may be ready for beginning chapter books. If you have a number of readers at level H or above, then you may want to look ahead to the February word-solving unit and/or the April/May character unit of study to find strategies for these readers.

Third, you may find that the strategies suggested below are just right for your children, but your kids cannot seem to sustain their reading for very long each day. In this case, you may want to adapt the unit to include more time for partners by structuring your workshop so that children read privately first, then switch to partner time. You might add a minute or two to private time each day so that you can gradually build up your children's stamina and independence so they can get to the goal of thirty minutes of private reading by mid-year, and longer by the end of the year.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### **Part One: Readers Think about the Story and How the Words Will Go Before We Read the Words**

- "Today I want to teach you a secret that will make reading your books easier to do! We can do some work in our brains before we even start to look at the words on the page. First, we look at the cover, then we read the title, and then we think, 'What will this book be about?'"
- "Today I want to teach you that readers not only get ready before we read our books but we can also get ready before we read a page. Readers make sure that we look at the pictures carefully, thinking about who is in the story and what is happening to get us ready to read the words."
- "Today I want to teach you that readers hold the whole book in our heads, and when we get to a tricky word, we can use what is happening in the story to help us figure out the word. We can ask ourselves, 'What was I thinking this might say? Does that help me figure out this word?'"
- "Today I want to teach you that when readers finish a book, we often pause and retell the book to make sure we understood it. We can retell across our fingers by using words such as *first*, *then*, *next*, *after that*, and *finally*."
  - *Tip:* "If you are having trouble retelling, open the book from the beginning and retell, touching the parts of the story as you go."

## Part Two: Readers Use All We Know about Letters, Sound, Patterns, and Snap Words to Help Us Read

- “Today I want to teach you that readers use what we know about other words we know to help us figure out a new word. When we are looking at a new word, we can ask ourselves ‘Does this word remind me of another word?’ For example, if I am trying to read the word *grass* I can use the word *green* to help me read the first part of the word.”
- “Today I want to teach you that readers use what we know about letters and patterns from word study to help us read our books. We can look closely at words and say, ‘Do any of these letters go together to make special sounds? Can I use those sounds to help me read?’”
- “Today I want to teach you that readers need to look all the way across words to help us read. We think about what would make sense and then look at the beginning, middle, and end of the word, putting the parts together to figure it out.”
- “Today I want to teach you that readers use words we know to help us read all the way through a word. If we see a word like *shopping*, we can ask ourselves, ‘Do I know any words that can help me read this?’ Then we can say, ‘I know *show*, so I think the beginning will sound like *shhh* and I know *hop*, so that can help with the middle sound!’”
- “Readers, today I want to remind you that not every word is a tricky word! We can read, and when we see a ‘snap word’ we can read it in a snap!”

## Part Three: Readers Make Sure They Check and Fix Their Words When They Notice Something Is Not Quite Right

- “Today I want to teach you that readers know that we can’t wait for someone else to check our words. We have to be the kind of readers who always check on our own reading to know if its right. When we check our words, we can ask ourselves, ‘Does this go with what is happening in the story? Does this sound like it would sound in a book? Do the sounds I see match the word I’m saying?’”
- “Today I want to teach you that readers reread to make sure that what we are reading is right. We can reread thinking about how the words we just read sound and ask ourselves ‘Can I say it that way?’ For example, when I’m reading, ‘Tom want into the store,’ I have to stop and ask myself ‘Can I say it that way? No way!’ Let me try something else. What if I say ‘Tom went into the store.’ Can I say it that way? Yes I can!’ When readers notice something is not right, they don’t just keep reading. We stop, we check it, and we try something else.”

- “Today I want to teach you that readers use what we have learned about parts of words to help us check our words. We can use our finger to cover parts of the word we are reading so that we can check if we see parts in the word that match what we are saying.”

#### **Part Four: Partners Help Each Other Read**

- “Today I want to teach you that partners remind each other that we want to understand our books, not just read the words. Partners can help each other to stop and retell when reading, using words like *first*, *then*, *next*, *after that*, and *finally*.”
- “Today I want to teach you that partners can help each other use the pictures in the book to help retell the big important parts.”
- “Today I want to teach you that partners help each other when one of them gets stuck on a word. When one partner is stuck, the other partner becomes his helper. He doesn’t just tell the word; he coaches the stuck partner like a teacher! He says ‘Try something.’ ‘Think about what is happening.’ ‘Look for parts you know.’”
- “Today I want to teach you that partners listen to each other read and try to catch each other’s mistakes! When something doesn’t seem quite right, we remind each other to ‘Check it,’ ‘Fix it,’ or ‘Try that again.’”
- “Today I want to teach you that partners help each other hold onto the story while they are reading. We can retell what we’ve read so far to each other to make sure we both understand what is happening in the book. This way we will be able to read the words and check the words as we think about what is happening in the book.”





## UNIT THREE

# Readers Meet the Characters in Our Books

**NOVEMBER/DECEMBER**  
(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: F/G)

**N**ow that your readers are up and running, reading book after book, figuring out words and fixing their mistakes, you will want to turn their focus back to the story. This unit aims to turn the focus especially to the casts of characters kids will now meet in their books. You'll help readers think about these characters as people, and get to know them by paying attention to the things these characters do, to what kinds of people they are, and to how their feelings change across the story as suggested in the Common Core State Standards.

This work will be supported by the books your children will be reading at this point in the year since most readers will be in books at level F or higher. In these books, the story is often a simple recounting of a character's actions in a funny situation with a silly resolution at the end. Because books at these levels tend to be very simple and sometimes have "flat" characters, it will help if you can put forward books that at least gesture toward bringing characters to life—that is, books that include memorable characters who do funny and interesting things. For your more emergent readers, Brand New Readers has a great selection of simple books about characters who seek things and often run into little problems. Some try to feed birds without having the squirrels steal all their food, while others try to build with blocks without someone knocking down their work. Series books like *Puppy Mudge* and *Biscuit* offer readers a variety of engaging books, and PM Readers, too, feature a host of characters who do lively things. For example, Ben has a birthday party and goes on a treasure hunt, Sally plants gardens and builds sand castles at the beach. The characters and storylines that PM Readers offer set children up to do some nice analysis work.

Prior to this unit, you will probably have done some extensive assessments to send home a report card and also to hold parent-teacher conferences, so you'll enter this unit with some very clear goals for particular readers. You'll want to think especially about the children who have not moved on to level F books and to make sure that the focus of the unit doesn't sway you from tailoring your teaching especially to those children's needs. For example, if you have a reader who still is looking only at the beginning letters to figure out what a word is apt to say, your conferences and small-group work with that reader will focus more on ways to look across words and use meaning and syntax to figure out tough words, rather than on discerning character traits.

You've always combined some meaning work with your phonics work—now the meaning work can be angled a bit toward the character ("Let's look ahead in this book before we read to see what this character does. It looks like he. . ."). Keep in mind that if you have just moved some readers to more challenging texts (or want to do so soon), this is a good time for children to read in guided reading groups. You can do that easily under the guise of this character unit—"Let's read these *Biscuit* books together, because Biscuit is a really amazing character." In first grade, it is always our goal to get children reading and reading well very quickly. We hope to move children through the lower levels of texts quickly, so that they can spend more time in lengthier books. In this unit, then, you'll combine small-group guided reading sessions, small-group shared reading work, and small-group strategy instruction aimed to help children to think about characters in the increasingly complex texts they are reading, as suggested by the Common Core State Standards.

Always, you'll want to approach a unit with a sense of the bends in the road that lie ahead. What will readers work on for a bit first, what next, and what finally? Because of the nature of the books that many of your children will be reading, we suggest you first help readers to think about the fact that when they read stories they will find themselves meeting characters and getting to know all about the interesting things that characters do. This supports literal comprehension, accumulating the pages of a book into a coherent plot, learning to talk and think in sequence, and learning to use words such as *after that*, *next*, *just after*, and *right before*. The new Common Core State Standards challenge us to place a renewed focus on this kind of retelling work. Through a focus on character-based retelling work, you can help your children recount the plots of their books, synthesizing what happens and how the characters react to what happens. A student might say, "In this book, the little girl wants Biscuit to go to bed. At first Biscuit looks like he will go to bed, but then he starts asking for all sorts of things! He wants to play and then he wants water and then food and a special toy. . . finally, he goes to sleep." This kind of retelling shows that the child is not just thinking about each page of the story in isolation. Instead, the child is beginning to chunk clusters of pages together into the beginning and middle of a story and into an ending that resolves or culminates the actions. You will want to ensure that your children are neither telling every piece of action from the story nor summarizing in such a global way that they delete key details.

This first character unit, then, supports the most foundational work, with the later character units standing on the shoulders of this one. If you glance ahead, you will see that in April/May, we suggest you invite children to walk in the shoes of characters, to role-play, empathize, predict, and use all this to read with increasing fluency and intonation. And later in the spring, when children revisit the topic of characters, we hope they will get to know a few characters in depth and be able to look across texts to compare and contrast characters.

Throughout the unit, you will be teaching readers about some of the optional ways in which they and a partner can talk about texts, and you'll probably want to support students to use Post-its more to support talking and thinking about text.

This unit, like any unit that spotlights comprehension, relies heavily on your read-aloud work, both that which you do within the minilesson and that which you do across the rest of the day. When selecting read-aloud texts, bear in mind the Common Core State Standards' admonition to balance simple texts that children can read almost independently with texts of greater complexity. Some of your read-aloud selections will continue to spotlight memorable and interesting, yet relatively straightforward characters like Olivia and Max and Ruby. You will want to balance these with more sophisticated books that offer your children opportunities to explore characters who are more complex. This is a good time to embark on a real chapter book featuring especially rich characters—Mercy from Kate DiCamillo's new *Mercy Watson* series, Dyamonde Daniel from Nikki Grimes' new *Dyamonde Daniel* series, Julian from *The Stories that Julian Tells*, or Mr. Popper, with his penguins. As you come to know these characters in read-aloud, you will be modeling ways for kids to approach their own independent books and to study the characters in those books.

Remember that children's listening comprehension vastly exceeds their reading abilities! As you read aloud, you'll want to do the work that you are asking children to do in their own books, and also help them join you in doing this sort of work, scaffolding them as they make a go of it. "Oh my gosh!" you might say. "This character does so many fun things. Let's just stop and remember the stuff she has done so far—don't you do that when you're reading? Let's see, first she. . . then she. . . . Goodness, she is being so brave, isn't she? I mean, she isn't scared of anything. I'd be so, so scared. Let's read on and see if she still is this way."

You'll want to do similar work in shared reading as well. Since children will be able to see the texts you use during this time, you can do some extra work related to the unit—work that will become an even bigger deal in your next character unit. For example, you can help children make characters' voices sound as if they are really talking. You'll be teaching fluency, and as part of this may want to encourage readers to "scoop up" more than one word at a time, so that they are thinking about making meaningful phrases out of longer sentences. As the unit progresses, you might also ask children to think about how a character's feelings change across a text, and then use intonation to reflect that feeling. "How do you think Mrs. Wishy-Washy feels when she sees those dirty animals?" you might ask. "Let's read the text in a way that shows this."

## Part One: Studying What Characters Do in Books Can Teach Us about Them

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Begin this unit by teaching children that by reading books, we get to know characters who *do all sorts of interesting things*. That is, talk up characters' actions and don't spotlight their traits just yet. Above all, you want the start of the unit to give readers a sense of "Yes, I can do this!"

You might, for example, say to kids, "During reading workshop yesterday, John met a kid named Tommy who likes to fish. He learned that one day after he put bait on his fishing pole and threw the line in the water, something cool happened. He caught a fish! John was so surprised that this little, little kid—about four or five years old—actually caught a fish by himself!" Then, you could point out that John met this young fisherman *in a book*, as you hold up a copy of the book and point to a picture of the character, Tommy. "When any of us meets a person—in life or in books—one of the things that we do is we get to know that person and know about the things that person does." You will teach children that after readers are finished reading a story, we can look back and think, "What does the character like or dislike?"

During read-aloud, you may choose a book such as *Max's Birthday* by Rosemary Wells to help students think about what a main character does in the story—or what happens to that character. Explain to your first graders that readers read a story *first* paying attention to what happens, and we do this in such a way that we can retell the story to others and remember it ourselves. You might say to children, "At the *beginning* of the story, Max's sister Ruby gives Max one of his birthday presents. *Then*, Max opens the present. When he sees that it is a wind-up lobster, he is scared. He yells, 'No!' and he runs away from it." At this point, you might pause and say, "Uh-oh, this isn't going so well." Then resume retelling. "Ruby tries to get the lobster away from Max. She is trying to help Max. But at the end of the story, the lobster lands on top of Max anyway." Make a scared face to show readers how Max is probably feeling. Then say, "And *this time*, instead of crying, Max exclaims, 'Again!'" You may want to point out to children that there was a shift in Max's feelings. We expected that he would be scared, as he was at the beginning of the story, but now he wants to play with the wind-up lobster; it is a fun game for him. Or you might decide to save this observation for the third part, when the focus will shift to how characters' feelings change across a story. Whatever you decide, you will tell children that as they read stories on their own, they can do what you just did; they can read, noticing what happens to their characters and what their characters do, and they can retell these happenings, saying what a character does first, next, then after that, and last. This will lead children to storytell (and to retell) their stories, which, of course, will help them accumulate the pages of a book into a coherent storyline. Retelling is an important strategy for first graders to use as they read and comprehend text.

Because your first graders will be writing fiction stories in the corresponding writing unit, the hope is that from reading as well as writing stories, they develop an elementary, bare-bones comprehension of story structure—that they grasp that a story is made up of a character who does one thing, another, and another. It is premature

to point out to students that stories often involve characters encountering difficulty, because this is not apt to be the case for the stories most of your students will be reading. Their stories will, however, be connected, with one page leading to the next, and with time usually progressing sequentially. Many of their stories will feature things that characters want or need to do. These stories will also often include a change or a twist at the end. So while the “problem” doesn’t stand out, there are connections to draw. For example, in *I Need to Clean My Room*, by Kimberlee Graves, the main character talks about all the things she does to get ready for bed. In the end, just before bed, she needs a snack (that is, just when we think she’s finally ready to go to sleep, she finds another distraction!). *Lights Out*, by Angela Shelf Medearis, features a little girl who can’t fall asleep, and tells us about all the things she does at night instead of going to bed. In the end, she gets so sleepy that she crawls back into bed and her dad tucks her in (in other words, just when we think she’ll *never* fall asleep, she does!). This is the perfect time, then, to help children retell the stories they read on their own and to talk with them about what has changed from the beginning to the end of their books. In writing, they can work on the same thing as they plan the stories they write and work on showing the changes in their books. Some phrases that can help children think and talk in this way are:

- In the beginning. . . but in the end. . . .
- At first. . . but now. . . .
- First. . . later. . . .

After readers have had practice retelling for a few days with lots of books, you could issue a new invitation—now they will not only read and think about the characters they are meeting and about some interesting things those characters do, they will *also* think about whether they see a pattern in the way that characters are acting and behaving. In the story about Max and Ruby, Ruby chases the lobster away once she realizes that Max is scared, but the lobster comes back—so Ruby chases the lobster away *again*. Hmmm. . . is there something to notice here? Is a pattern beginning? Can we start to predict how the rest of the book will go? Might Ruby chase away the lobster and then have to do that again and again as the lobster keeps reappearing? You will want your student to go beyond just predicting the end of the story, to start thinking about how the middle of a story can have a pattern that allows you to predict not just “what” will happen at the end, but “how” the characters get to that end! Tell readers that they can spot patterns not only in the books they have already read but henceforth in any new book they read.

At the end of this part, you may chose to have your children reread their favorite books and think about what they learned about each character. This provides children with another opportunity to work on reading more fluently, which you can reinforce by going back through the charts that are still hanging in your room. Also, it invites them to look again at characters’ actions, likes, and dislikes. You may want your students to

talk about their characters with the prompt, “I learned. . .” For example, a child might say, “I learned that Max didn’t like wind-up toys, but now he does.” Another might say, “I learned the little girl can’t sleep at night.” You might even push your readers to look at what they learned about the secondary characters. For example, a child might say, “I learned that Max has a sister named Ruby who protects him.” Another might say, “I learned the little girl has a dad who kisses her goodnight.” Encourage children to put Post-its on the pages that hold their observations, meet with their partners to reread the pages, and share what they learned.

## **Part Two: When Reading Stories, We Think, “What Kind of a Person Is This?”**

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In the next part of the unit, you will turn the focus from characters’ actions to characters’ traits. You will teach children that after readers are finished reading a story, we can look back and think, “What did I learn about what this character is like from this story? What sort of person is this character?” At the minimum, a reader can progress from saying, “Tommy fished” to “Tommy is the kind of person who likes to fish.” With careful study of the pictures and some inference, readers might go farther—“Tommy is brave because he put his own worm on the hook and didn’t worry about getting stabbed.” You may return to texts you have read earlier and point out that the actions a character takes show something about that character as a person. Max runs away from his toy lobster. What might this action teach us about Max? Is he a scaredy-cat? Is he too young for such a scary toy? You can teach readers to speculate, using words such as, “Perhaps he. . .” or “Maybe it’s because. . .”

You may also want to do some vocabulary development around words that describe characters’ actions so children can acquire a bank of such words across the year.

It is important that children pay attention both to the words and the pictures as they reflect on their characters. Books at their levels of reading rely heavily on both to tell the story—and to convey something about the characters. Often, the pictures fill in information the text doesn’t give—and vice versa. It is necessary, then, to look at the two side by side to get a really good idea about the characters in these books. When children attend to the pictures, you can show them how to notice facial expressions and body gestures to figure out what a character might be thinking, feeling, or doing.

Toward the end of this part, you can teach children to think about the actions and decisions of their characters and to consider whether they agree or disagree with them. You might also have them think about whether their characters’ actions or decisions are similar to or different from ones they would make. They can also think about whether they themselves are similar to or different from the characters. As they do this, your first graders may say things like, “At the end, Piggy is so silly. That’s just like me!” or “My dad would be so mad if I squirted him with a hose!” Drawing these kinds of connections to characters will create an even stronger bond between your young readers and the books they hold in their hands.



## Part Three: Readers Have Strategies for When It Is Hard to Get to Know Your Character

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You might notice that some of your students are having trouble learning about their characters. These children aren't able to say much about what their characters like or dislike, or about how their actions convey what kind of person they are. Don't worry if this is the case. You can turn it into a teaching opportunity. Tell children that this happens to all of us as readers at one time or another—and that there are different reasons why. You might then invite children to answer the question, "What do readers do when the character doesn't come out?"

One possible answer is to go back and tackle some of the tricky words that might be getting in the way of learning about their character. For example, a student reading *Mercy Watson Goes for a Ride* by Kate DiCamillo may not know what it means when Mercy "snuffles contentedly." You might coach the student through figuring out those words, using word-solving strategies from last month's chart (such as searching the picture for clues) and then rereading the page. The student will see how her new vocabulary knowledge brings that moment to life, allowing her to really picture Mercy the pig making proud, happy noises behind the driver's wheel of Mr. Watson's car. At other times, the tricky words might be ones that the students know the meaning of but are having trouble sounding out. Again, they can go back and use strategies from last month, like getting a running start by saying the words they know or putting together the meaning they expect with the letters they recognize to solve the word. Unlocking new words on a page, like *gently* and *darling* in *Mercy Watson Goes for a Ride*, can make the characters' personalities much more vivid.

Another strategy you may teach students when they have trouble learning about a character is to reread the book a few times to make it smooth. Again, you can remind them of the work they did last month, going through a book over and over until there are no stumbles, so that the story flows and the characters can come out.

If students are having trouble with characters but not necessarily with accuracy or fluency, it may help to teach them to reread with a specific focus that will pop the character out to them. You can say, "Try reading again, and this time pay close attention to everything that is happening to your character." If they want to, they can keep this focus in mind by asking after every page, "What happened to my character on this page?" Alternately, the reader can reread with a focus on what the character is doing. You can teach that it's helpful to pay close attention to the pictures and to action words like dancing, snapping, jumping, and singing.

## Part Four: Readers Notice Characters' Feelings and How They Change

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In the last part of this unit, you will invite children to pay special attention to the characters' feelings by studying the pictures, noticing feeling words, and doing some inference work. You might ask children to put Post-its on the pictures that give us clues about how

the character is feeling or to put them on places where the text tells us straight out how the character feels. It is very helpful to study the pictures and the words being used to capture the characters' feelings and how the "feeling word" matches the situation. For example, near the end of *A Day with Daddy* by Nikki Grimes, the little boy who only sees his father on the weekends says, "But I am only a little sad because we had a great day, and I know I'll see him again." You might discuss why the boy said he only felt a *little bit sad*. He didn't say he was *very upset* but rather *a little sad*. To avoid children using only happy and sad to describe how their characters are feeling, you might have a chart up in the room where children can add feeling words they are encountering in the books they read. Then you could try to incorporate these words into whole-class conversations and coach partners to use them when they are talking.

There are other, less direct words that can clue us into what the character is feeling, such as words describing actions or facial expressions. One way for students to think about these words is to ask themselves whether the clue words are negative or positive. If the text says "laughed" or "smiled," children can sort that into the positive word column and conclude that the character is excited or pleased. But if the text said "he frowned," then children would sort that into the negative word column and conclude he is sad or perhaps mad. Then readers would reread the text to see which of their guesses best matches what is happening in the story.

Making inferences about characters' feelings is a lot harder for readers. Again, the pictures can be so helpful because readers can study the characters' expression for clues to how they are feeling. You can also invite kids to look yet again at a character's actions, but this time watch for clues about what the character is feeling. In the story *A Day with Daddy*, the little boy eats his burger and fries slowly. We can think about why he eats his burger and fries slowly and how that is connected to how he is feeling.

Once your children have identified how the character is feeling in a part of the story, you can ask your students to use intonation to reflect that feeling. "How do you think Max feels when he keeps running away from his toy lobster?" you might ask. "Let's read the text in a way that shows this feeling."

Last, you might chose to work on noticing changes in characters. Characters tend to change in meaningful ways across the full-blown stories that adults read, and of course, characters change in books for young children, too, albeit often in smaller ways. Some teachers decide to reveal this concept during the third month of first grade, pushing youngsters to see the changes their characters undergo. Others feel this teaching content is best reserved until later, when it is evident in more substantial ways in stories children are reading on their own. If you decide to tackle this topic in this final part, you will want to be clear with children about whether a character is changing or whether the character's feelings and motivations change. You might ask them to put a Post-it on a place in the beginning of the story that represents how the character is feeling and then have them follow the evolution of that feeling through the rest of the book. They can put Post-its on places that show the character continuing to have that feeling and places that show the character's feelings changing. Readers then will think about how the character was feeling at the beginning as well as at the end and wonder what brought about the change. In *Peter's Chair*, Peter is jealous that

his baby sister is taking his parents' attention—and his old chair—but by the end of the book he is happy about his new sister. There's a shift in his *feelings*. We might say that the Peter *changes* by coming to accept that he is now the big brother and that his family is growing.

This year, with the Common Core State Standards in mind, we will also want to get students thinking about lessons that characters learn, even small ones! That is, in addition to being able to notice the things that a character does and to say something about what kind of person the character is, you may decide to channel your readers to think about how a character's changing feelings show that the character has learned something. You might say, "Hmm. . . it seems like Max is really scared in the first part of the story. In the middle he seems scared too—look, he is running away from the lobster—but here at the end he yells, 'Again!' I wonder why his feeling changed? Maybe he learned something. Maybe he realized that running away was fun and that the lobster would not really hurt him!" In this way, your first graders can start to see how a change in feeling can often lead you to a lesson or greater meaning for a story.

For some children, thinking of lessons or ideas is the easy part, and finding support for these lessons is harder. You will likely find that some children in your class will read a book like *Farm Concert* and easily blurt out, "You should be quiet" or "You should always listen to your grown-up!" But when you ask the child to show you text support, the child does not know what to do. This is when you will want to show your class how to use the pictures and words in the text to support their ideas. You might teach them to say their idea and then flip to a page that they think "proves it." You can also teach children how to reread the page and wrap some talk around how that page proves the idea. Showing text evidence may become a larger part of partner time, and partners can learn to ask, "How does this show your idea?"

## Word Study and Shared Reading

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At this point in the year, you are probably reassessing your students to track progress and plan next steps for your word study instruction. Chances are you will be using tools such as the Letter Identification Task, Word Identification Task, and Spelling Inventory to note what students have learned about words and what they need to learn next. Since all of these tasks are in isolation you will also want to assess what your students understand about words as they are reading and writing texts. Oftentimes students can read through a list of words but won't be able to read those same words in a text. As you analyze your running records, for example, notice what students are attempting to as they problem-solve words. When students are stuck on a word, write down their attempts and then analyze those. Are they saying the first sound of a word? Do they confuse patterns? Are they leaving off endings? Also, look at student writing to notice how students are transferring what they are learning about words to their writing. Donald Bear says that the way students spell words during writing is "a window into how they think the system works." In other words, what do they currently understand about words?

By now you probably conduct a daily small-group word study in your classrooms for about twenty minutes. Typically, in a first-grade classroom you might see one group working on ending sounds, one group working on vowel sounds, and another working on long vowel spelling patterns. Each day, you will probably conduct a lesson with a different group to introduce a word study concept to that group of students.

Once your students know most beginning and ending consonants, you will want to work on introducing short vowel spelling patterns. According to the Common Core State Standards, students should be able to decode simple, short vowel pattern words. To support this work in their reading, you will want to teach students how spelling patterns work in words. You will want to support students with hearing the pattern in the word and also noticing the pattern visually in the word. As you continue to build students' phonemic awareness, you might support the work within short vowel patterns by helping students also hear the middle sound in a word as you are holding up a picture. It won't be enough to just have students memorize the list of all the words that have *-op* in them. Research suggests that it is more useful to students if they understand that many different patterns occur in words and can use those words they know to get to other words. More important, you will want to teach children how you can use your knowledge of a pattern to read and write many other words. You may find it helpful to study vowels within students' names first because this is a good way to link new knowledge to something familiar. You will want to continue to explore vowels within simple CVC spelling patterns also.

You may want to continue to work with blends and digraphs if your children have good knowledge of beginning and ending consonants. You might include blends and digraphs when working with the spelling patterns (for example, *shop*—/sh/ digraph, and /op/ spelling pattern). You'll want to help your children become flexible with their knowledge of blends, digraphs, and spelling patterns by giving them opportunities to manipulate those parts with magnetic letters.

You will also want to continue to work with high-frequency words each day. Make sure students are not only working with these words in isolation but also seeing these words in text. Give students opportunities to chant words, build words with magnetic letters, write them on dry-erase boards, and search for them in shared reading texts as well as in their own independent reading texts.

This month you will want to make sure you are supporting students' work with problem-solving words in reading during your shared reading time. Based on your analysis of your running records, support students' next step with word knowledge as you read a text together. In this way you are helping your students work with words not only in isolation but also as they read text. Continue to support students with acquiring reading strategies while using what they are learning during word study. You will want to make sure to build up students' ability to search the text in different ways to problem-solve words. Teach students how to search the meaning of the text, the language of the text, and words using what they know about words. You may decide to do some small-group shared reading to differentiate the strategies you are working on with groups of students. Some of your struggling students may still need

to be prompted for the initial sound in the word because they are working on beginning sounds, while others will need to be prompted to look for parts in the words. If students have been working on digraphs (/sh/, /ch/) and short-vowel spelling patterns, you will want to make sure that they are not decoding words sound by sound but instead, are efficiently problem-solving words using parts of words.

<b>If you decide to teach. . .</b>	<b>Suggested essons in <i>Words Their Way, 4th Edition</i></b>	<b>Suggested essons in <i>Phonics Lessons 1st Grade , Pinnell &amp; Fountas</i></b>
Short vowel sounds	5-20 to 5-24 (pp. 165–168) *Use activities that students know from beginning sounds	LS12 to LS15 (pp. 241–256)
Initial blends and digraphs (e.g., /st/, /th/)  Final digraphs	Adapt 4-27 to 4-31 (pp. 123–125) 5-6 to 5-10 (pp. 157–159) 5-15 (p. 162) (These can be adapted to final blends and digraphs.)	LS17, LS18 (pp. 261–268)
High-frequency words	pp. 182–183	HF1 to HF8 (pp. 325–353)
Spelling patterns CVC	pp. 148–150, 5-12 to 5-19 (pp. 160–164)	SP1 to SP4 (pp. 283–295)

## Additional Resources

Now that your readers are up and running, reading book after book, figuring out words, and fixing their mistakes, you will want to turn their focus back to the story. This unit aims to turn the focus especially to the casts of characters kids will now meet in their books. You'll help readers think about these characters as people and get to know them by paying attention to the things these characters do, to what kinds of people they are, and to how their feelings change across the story as suggested in the Common Core State Standards.

This work will be supported by the books your children will be reading at this point in the year since most readers will be in books at level F or higher. However, if you have a number of students who are not yet reading at level F, then you will need to keep in mind that their books will not likely have strong characters. Instead, you will want to study their running records to determine what they really need support with. For example, for students who are not yet reading books with strong characters, you may end up planning a string of lessons on stopping and thinking about what is happening or on retelling the important parts of the book. Additionally, you may want to plan small-group read-alouds or shared reading that allow these students to still practice some of the higher-level thinking work that the rest of the class is engaged in.

You may also want to consider that a group of your students are probably now reading early chapter books—you will want to adapt the strategies below so that they are angled toward getting to know more than one character, rather than focusing only

on the main character. You might also adapt the strategies listed below to support kids in thinking across chapters as well as across whole books, and to think across books in a series, since many of the early chapter books your children might read are likely to be a part of a series, such as *Fly Guy* or *Henry and Mudge*. You'll certainly want to take a look at their book logs to be sure that children at higher levels are reading at the appropriate rate and that their volume is high. You can refer to Unit One in second grade for more details on expectations in early chapter books.

The teaching points below are far from encompassing, nor are they set in stone. They are meant to help you imagine a possible pathway, one that will need to have detours and alternate pathways to the same end and may branch out very differently.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### Part One: Studying What Characters Do in Books Can Teach Us about Them

- "Today I want to teach you that when readers begin a new book we think, 'Does my book tell a story about someone?' (A teddy bear? A dog? A mom?) We quickly look at the front cover and the pages of the book to see who is featured, and then we get to know that person by noticing what she does!"
- "Today I want to teach you that when readers read books, we get to know them so well that we can tell our partners about them. To get ready, we might retell the stories of what our characters do across our fingers. We say what a character did first, next, next, and last."
- "Today I want to teach you that as we read about what our characters do, readers guess what might happen next. We look at what the character is doing, what he or she likes, and look to see if there is a pattern. We use all the information we have to help us guess what will happen next!"
- "Today I want to teach you that as readers read, noticing all the things our characters do and say, we keep an eye on places in our book that we might want to share with our partner—like places where we could guess what the character was going to do or say next, or places where the character did or said something we thought was funny or cool—and we mark these with Posts-it so we don't forget them!"
- "Today I want to teach you that when partners listen to each other read, we can coach each other (like we learned in the units before), and we can also tell our thoughts about the character—about what we notice in our partner's book."



## **Part Two: When Reading Stories, We Think, “What Kind of a Person Is This?”**

- “Today I want to teach you that readers always try to figure out more about the character. One way we figure out more is by paying attention to how characters act in different parts of the story. It’s kind of like we spy on characters! We study characters like a detective and gather clues about what kind of person a character is.”
- “Today I want to teach you that readers figure out more about a character by looking at what the character does in each part of the story and then asking, ‘What does this show me about what my character likes or doesn’t like?’”
- “Today I want to teach you that readers also pay attention to what characters say to learn more about them. The words a character says can show us if he or she is angry or frightened or happy or sad.”
- “Today I want to teach you that readers can look closely at the pictures and the words in our book to think about how a character feels. Even when the words don’t say how someone feels, we can find clues to tell us. We can watch what a character does and says on the outside, imagine how her words would sound, and look at the expression on her face and her movements to guess how she feels on the inside.”
- “Today I want to teach you that when our characters do something, we can learn more about them by imagining what they are thinking. One way we can imagine this is to try and become the character, slip into his or her head and say, ‘Hmm, what would \_\_\_\_ think here?’”
- “Today I want to teach you that as partners read together, we can talk about all of the new things we are figuring out about our characters: what we think they are doing, feeling, saying, thinking, what they like or dislike.”

## **Part Three: Readers Have Strategies for When It Is Hard to Get to Know Your Character**

- “Readers, today I want to teach you that sometimes when we read we get to the end of a book and think, ‘Hmm. . . I don’t really remember much about the character!’ One way you can fix this is to go back to the beginning of the book, study the cover and then take a picture walk—looking at the pictures and then rereading the story, too. Sometimes going back to the book and really studying the pictures and the words can really help us to understand the story and the character.”

- “Today I want to teach you that sometimes tricky words get in the way of us getting to know our characters. We can’t have that, can we?! When this happens we have to use all of our word-solving tools to figure out the tricky words. On pages where we come across tricky words, we might try searching the picture for clues that will help us figure out the word. Using the picture we can make a guess at what the word is and then reread the tricky part to see if our guess makes sense.”
- “Readers, sometimes when we get to a tricky part or word, we may actually know the word that seems tricky. Maybe we have said the word or have heard other people say the word, but we have never seen it down on paper before. Sometimes when we haven’t seen a word written down before it can look hard, but we can figure out the word by looking at the picture, thinking about what makes sense for the page, and then saying the sounds of the letters (or chunks) on the page.”
- “Readers read and reread our books so that we know lots of things about our characters. We can read and reread our books so that we read with smooth voices and sound like storytellers.”
- “Today I want to teach you that when we are having trouble getting to know our characters we can reread, paying attention to everything that is happening to our character. We can do this by asking ourselves after every page, ‘What happened to my character on this page?’”
  - *Tip:* You might also teach students to focus on what the character is doing on each page. One way students might do this is to pay close attention to the pictures and the action words in the story.

#### **Part Four: Readers Notice Characters’ Feelings and How They Change**

- “Today I want to teach you that when we get to know a character, we can think about how that character feels in each part of the story. Readers often stop and ask ourselves, ‘How is my character feeling in the beginning? Does she feel differently in the middle of the story? Does the character’s feeling change in the end?’”
- “Today I want to teach you that when readers think about how a character feels, we think about ourselves and ask, ‘Would I feel the same way?’ Then we can mark these parts and share our thoughts with our partners!”

- “Today I want to teach you that when readers think about how a character feels, we think about other characters, too. We might ask, ‘Do I know another character who feels the same way?’ Then we can compare the characters with our partners!”
- “Today I want to teach you that when readers notice a change in the character’s feeling, we think about why that change may have occurred. Then we ask ourselves, ‘Did the character learn something here?’”
- “Today I want to teach you that readers don’t just share their ideas about books. We show parts of the book where those ideas can be found. When we work with partners, we can say, ‘Prove it!’ and then flip back to the part to prove our ideas.”



## UNIT FOUR

# Nonfiction Readers Learn about the World

### JANUARY

(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: G/H)

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### Preparation

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The turn of a month usually means an overhaul of your classroom library that corresponds to the new genre you're teaching. Since you are beginning a month teaching the strategies of nonfiction reading, your children need to be surrounded by nonfiction texts. You'll choose subjects on which there are many children's books available that are also accessible to your readers and ones that are of high interest (though you can talk up almost any subject so children want to read more). First-grade teachers this year, for instance, have had baskets of books around pumpkins, fish, insects, weather, flowers, big cats, pets, life on a farm, school, and sisters and brothers. You'll notice the emphasis on animals, plants, properties of water, and weather. That's because many young readers are eager to know more about these subjects, and they also already know *something*. Also, many of these themes connect to the science and social studies curriculum that your students are learning. Nonfiction readers attach their new learning to what they already know—so starting with some subjects with which your very young readers are a tiny bit familiar will be very helpful to them.

Your nonfiction library content will also need to contain multiple levels of books, including plenty that are easier than the average reading level of your students. Some people recommend that children read a level or two below their regular level when they read nonfiction texts. (So, for example, if a child is able to read level L fiction books with fluency, accuracy, and comprehension, you may ask him to shop for nonfiction books around level K or J.) Others believe that the lower-level books (below J)

are often more accurately leveled than higher-level books and that students reading these lower levels can read both fiction and nonfiction at the same level. The point is to be sure you match the student with text that is just right. Think about your leveled library and your readers. Listen to your kids read nonfiction books at their level. If they are struggling, drop them down a level or two. Other readers may be able to handle nonfiction texts at their just-right fiction level. In any case, your primary concern must be that the nonfiction books in your readers' hands are ones that they can read with ease and interest from start to finish. You certainly don't want kids thumbing randomly through too-difficult books just to glance at the lush pictures they contain, and neither do you want them zooming through books that feel too babyish to challenge them. You will want to reteach book-choosing strategies that you taught earlier in the year, now that the genre is different. Remind children to hold up a finger each time they encounter a hard word, and if they encounter more than three per page, to reconsider the book they've picked. Remind them also to try reading a paragraph to check if it feels too hard or too easy before settling down with any book.

## Setting Up the Nonfiction Library: Allowing Readers to Sift and Sort

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More than two decades ago, researchers found that when a child is roughly two years old, he or she will separate boxes and balls and make a separate pile for each—in other words, the child will show an active “sorting” behavior. Roughly at this same time, his or her vocabulary shoots from a *couple* of words to more than fifty. Scientists have since then discovered that the ability to “sort” or “categorize” objects is connected with the ability to “name” them. As they grow older, children continue to “sort” the items in their world: the food on their plates (yummy green peas vs. yucky yellow potatoes), the toys in their closet (sleek racing cars vs. chunky construction trucks), and the people they meet (friendly lady vs. scary stranger). They do this as a way of clarifying preferences and making meaning of their world. To “sort” an object into a category requires studying and understanding the object on some level, developing an idea of what it is and yes, *naming* it. Your first graders will, no doubt, have their own “sorting” instincts—for stamps, toys, or Silly Bandz perhaps, or for the friends and teachers in their lives. To start off this unit, you will issue the invitation that students “sort” through several cartons of new nonfiction books placed in a corner of your room. You'll have a few shelves and book baskets or bins ready for them to fill. You'll turn the reins over to your children, saying “We're going to start a new unit this month, and for this new unit, we have all kinds of exciting new books. Here they are! They're just sitting here, waiting, in these cartons. And guess what? *You* guys need to pluck them out of there and set them up in *your* nonfiction library.”

Before mayhem erupts, however, set children up for the sorting task ahead of them. “Remember, librarians don't just toss books into baskets and shelves any old way. Think like a librarian, like a person who is an expert on *types* of books. What are some categories according to which we might organize these nonfiction books?” This, of course, is a point at which your students' knowledge about the types, genres, and

authors of books will be revealed to you. Some might suggest organizing by “author,” others by “genre,” “level,” or “topic.” Take these suggestions in, write them up on a chart, perhaps adding one or two of your own in case that students fail to mention them so that your chart looks something like this:

Librarians organize books by:

- Author
- Subject
- Informational or Story
- Level

Organize the sorting activity by breaking it down—make groups of three or four and hand each group a carton to sort. Then, once this is done, invite two groups to merge and resort their combined collection, this time by topic. Finally, ask the class to come together and provide empty “topic baskets” for them to place books into and perhaps a few “label cards” to write the topic for each basket on before affixing these.

In other words, plan to give the control and ownership of the nonfiction “library” to your kids from the start. You probably won’t have to spend as much time “selling” these new books when all books will already have passed through every child’s hands and perhaps been briefly opened, scanned, and “sorted.” This categorization and sorting of books may feel like a big game, and in fact it plays the same purpose that sorting boxes and balls played at age two. As they study and categorize these books, children will make some personal sense of this new genre and acquire a new mental language for it. As they scan new books to sort—one with a cover featuring a glowing planet, another cover featuring the glowing filament of a light bulb—children will develop their own curiosity and enthusiasm about the content of this library.

## **Part One: Nonfiction Readers Read to Become Smarter about Our World and the Things in It**

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To create the drumroll around this unit, you will want children to know what makes nonfiction reading special and unique—why, for instance, should one be so excited to be starting a new month of this kind of work? “We read nonfiction to get so much smarter about the wonderful and terrific things that happen in our world, and then we teach others about it,” you’ll want to say. “Here we are, sitting in this classroom, but our nonfiction books will take us to the bottom of an ocean and show us what the fish down there are doing. Or into the cocoon of a caterpillar to show us how delicate butterfly wings are forming.” Demonstrate the wonder and excitement that nonfiction reading is. “You know how all of us have all the questions about the world? Like we wonder about where rain comes from or what it’s like to live in a different place—the answers to all our questions about the world are to be found in *nonfiction!*” You’ll want to maintain this wonder throughout the month, taking care to marvel alongside your students when they



show you an illustration of the widest tree trunk on earth or try to educate you about all they've learned about life around a pond.

At the outset, you will want to teach children the most basic, nonnegotiable skills that all readers use to make sense of nonfiction texts. It is a good idea to begin, therefore, by starting off the unit teaching text-previewing strategies. "Just like explorers study the lay of the land before they travel through it," you might say, "Readers study the lay of the land of our nonfiction texts before we actually begin reading them. There is a way that information is laid out in these pages. When nonfiction readers open a book, we study this layout to warm up for the reading ahead, to figure out what the text is going to teach." You will want to show children how readers decide where in a book to start. Usually a reader looks through the pictures to identify whether they are illustrations or diagrams of just one small part of the text. When turning to focus on the text, a reader usually looks first at the biggest font and the print that is on the upper left-hand side of the page. Once your children have examined and read all the different things on a page, teach them to look across the page and say to themselves or their partners, "Okay, this is mostly about. . . ."

This can be the time to open up a few of those books that your kids have just finished "sorting" to point out the text features that help readers make sense of how information is organized within the pages. From science and social studies, and also from Informational Text reading and writing in kindergarten, children will already know that these books have new kinds of features, ones that they don't see in fiction stories. Such text features include, for example, the table of contents, the index, glossary, headings and subheadings, text sidebars and italicized or boxed subnotes, labeled diagrams, tables, and charts. Remember that the Common Core State Standards call for children to "know and use text features to locate key facts and information," so you'll want children to actively begin using these features to decipher the organizational structure of their books.

Be careful not to let the study of text features consume too much time and space in your workshop—a day for this work is sufficient. In too many classrooms we see well-meaning teachers teaching text features with so much gusto that it leads to children opening up a book to study the text features, then closing it—and moving on to the next book without even reading the content! Remember, this defeats the purpose of "previewing." You'll teach text features as a way for students to get ready for the real work of reading, as a preliminary. You'll quickly want to move children toward actually reading their books, all the while keeping an eye on the features that keep them oriented about how this content is organized or where it is leading. As your children prepare to read, teach them how readers of nonfiction help ourselves by getting our minds ready to read our texts. Teach children to activate their prior knowledge about a topic by thinking to themselves, for example, "What do I already know about butterflies?" When children do this important work, it helps them to get ready for the vocabulary and concepts they may encounter in their texts. As children turn the pages of their texts, they'll say things like, "Oh, this book is about different kinds of butterflies. I bet there's a page in here about monarch butterflies," or "The pages in this book have tons of information. I have to make a plan for where I'll start to read first," or

“There is the word *cocoon*! It’s going to talk about the life cycle!” Later, when they close the book, they may ask themselves, “What *more* do I know about butterflies now?”

In the first part of the unit, you’ll work to get children reading nonfiction texts with fluency, phrasing, and intonation. You can take this opportunity to use your nonfiction big books, poems, or your whiteboards to have students practice reading nonfiction texts together, both inside your minilessons and during your daily shared reading time. Practice parsing sentences into three- or four-word meaningful phrases, showing students how they can “scoop” up more than one or two words at a time. Demonstrate how to reread and parse to convey what the section or page means.

Then, too, you will want to help readers understand the content itself. You’ll help children read, according to the Common Core State Standards, in nonfiction texts with fluency and intonation. You’ll teach them that nonfiction readers read informational texts differently than we read stories, partly because the voice in our heads is different when reading nonfiction. Whereas stories contain a story voice, nonfiction texts contain the voice of a teacher or of the narrator of a documentary. You might add that when reading nonfiction texts, we’re always aware of what’s important and what’s less important, and as we read, we use that voice in our head to pop out the big, important information in our book.

To make this point, you could launch the unit by playing a tiny video clip from a show such as *Unleashed*, a Discovery channel show that is narrated by the animal enthusiast Jeff Corwin. If you show a clip from a video, you can point out how Corwin uses different voices to pop out important information. You can channel children to listen for when Corwin uses a questioning, surprised, hushed, or dramatic voice, and you could help them notice the use of a dramatic pause as well. In their partnerships, children can practice reading aloud expository texts with intonation that conveys the meaning of whatever section or chunk of text they are reading aloud.

You may also model how nonfiction readers might practice reading aloud with a partner in such a way that they emphasize the big ideas or main topics. Perhaps children will pause between the labels on diagrams, linger on captions and headings, and put stress on bolded and italicized words. Perhaps they will reread sentences to think about what is really important and use their voice to place extra stress and emphasis on those words. Doing this will allow them to teach others. After they have read a page that says, “Seals have flippers to help them swim,” they can go back to the diagram or picture to look closely at the label pointing to the flipper. Teach your students to notice all the parts of the page first—not all your students will be completely familiar with illustrations versus diagrams, captions, charts, and so on. You may need to explain these items and also explain what sidebars are, as well as blow-up balloons that give close up views.

After you’ve done the introductory work of pointing out all the ways that nonfiction reading is unique, you’ll sink into the real work of this part, which is to help children read longer stretches of nonfiction text with engagement. To do this, young readers need to learn strategies that will help them constantly monitor for meaning. You might want to set up temporary partnerships for the next few lessons in this part, so that for a small time each day, readers are accountable to retelling whatever they’ve read to a

partner. This is an important skill of the listening and speaking section of the Common Core State Standards. Partners can help each other hold on to meaning by asking each other, “What does that really mean? Can we give an example of that information?” The promise of audience, attention, and input from a peer will do wonders to make children hold on to meaning more conscientiously and provide that much more sticking power to your teaching on “monitoring for meaning.”

The Common Core State Standards emphasize that first graders need to be able to analyze how specific pages and larger portions of text relate to each other and to the whole. “When reading nonfiction we don’t just roar on, tearing through the text at the speed of a Ferrari,” you might say to start this work. “We pause quickly and often, to think about what we just learned. We think, ‘What have we learned so far?’ or ‘What was this part about?’ And then we read on, holding this information in our minds.” Then you might teach your first-grade readers to predict what information the author will tell us next. Many of the texts that children are reading are still highly patterned, and if children use the information that they are learning, they can anticipate the information that follows. You may demonstrate such anticipation by tucking it into your read-alouds: “This page taught us about hurricanes and how they damage things, and this page taught us about tornadoes and the things that they damage,” you may say thoughtfully. “Next, I bet that the next page is going to teach us about another kind of disaster—maybe earthquakes? I bet it will tell us about the things that earthquakes damage.”

Like fiction, nonfiction texts include details that are key to understanding the larger meaning. The Common Core State Standards remind us that children need to ask and answer questions as they read to help pay attention to what the text is saying. You will want to help your students read, thinking, “What is happening in the text?” and “How does that really work?” as well as “What does that mean?” As students ask and answer questions, they will also need support distinguishing important details from ones that are more trivial—you’ll want children to constantly prioritize the bigger ideas in texts rather than getting hooked or fixated on a tinier, tangential detail.

Children also need to learn how to chunk and categorize the information that they are learning. Depending on the text length and difficulty, some kids might think about this on the page, across pages, or across paragraphs. Many of your students will be reading around level G and above. Books like *The Life Cycle of a Dragonfly*, from the Weekly Reader Early Learning Library (a level G book) do not set readers up to read the page and say, “This page is about how dragonflies are born, and this page is about what a dragonfly looks like.” There are no headings. Readers need to do the work of creating the category or “mental box” where the information belongs. In *Bears and Their Cubs*, by Linda Tagliaferro (a Pebble Plus book, level H), the text helps to chunk the information into sections. You will want to draw your first graders’ attention to using these headings both before and after they read a section to help categorize and think about what information this book taught. Teach children that sometimes we make the categories or “mental boxes,” and at other times, the headings or subheadings do this for us. Where a text provides a broad heading for a large chunk of text, you might ask partners to work together to figure out a better name for the section, one maybe that is even more specific.

To extend this work on categorizing you might teach children the phrase, “This picture shows. . . and that goes with. . .” or “This page says. . . and that goes with. . .” We can teach them to introduce books to each other by saying, “This is a book about squirrels and it teaches about what they look like, where they live, what they eat, and how they hunt for food.”

In addition, you’ll want to teach your readers that sometimes they learn something later in the book that sends them back to reread an earlier part to sort and categorize across the book with that new information in mind. For example, a reader might discover later in a book that some insects have wings, while others do not. After discovering this, the child might decide to look again at all of the pictures in the book that show insects and make a list of insects with wings and those without wings. Partners can meet and share with each other how they have sorted their book into categories.

Even though this work of chunking and categorizing is important for nonfiction reading, you want to move with caution. Remember: The bigger work of nonfiction reading is to “become smarter about our world and the things in it.” Resist the urge, therefore, to overteach these skills simply because they are featured on high-stakes tests. The bigger work that your children are doing continues to be that of immersing themselves in the wonder of how dolphins communicate, how a plant grows from a seed, or how the cocoa bean becomes a Hershey bar. It is important to remember that the skills we teach, no matter how crucial, are mere *tools* to facilitate the bigger work of allowing children to enjoy and become hooked on nonfiction texts. The good news is that this larger focus will enable the smaller skills to become natural, automatic, and second nature.

## Part Two: Nonfiction Readers See More Than the Text on the Page

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Once you’ve set your readers up to do the basic work of monitoring their informational texts for meaning and reading these with engagement, you can graduate your teaching to make children more sophisticated nonfiction readers. Specifically, you’ll want to show them that good nonfiction readers don’t just do the obvious work of taking in the words on the page, that there are strategies to make meaning beyond what is explicitly written. In other words, you’ll nudge readers into responding to illustrations and, of course, to textual content itself.

As children move up reading levels in fiction texts, their reliance on visuals and illustrations gradually diminishes. This won’t happen as fast (in some cases, *at all*) for nonfiction texts. The photographed close-ups, detailed drawings, or labeled diagrams in nonfiction books serve more than just to support or extend meaning. Many pictures in nonfiction actually convey meaning in their own right and can stand independently of the text. In such cases, text might actually be secondary in importance to an illustration and refer directly to this to adequately explain an idea. Texts explaining the life cycle of a tadpole, for example, or the parts of a flower are scarcely adequate without the accompanying labeled diagrams. Similarly, children cannot be expected to accurately visualize unfamiliar environments such as outer space or oceanic ecosystems

on the basis of textual description alone. Nonfiction is a precise genre, *not* one where authors might leave things to the reader's imagination. Consequently, the illustrations in nonfiction texts also often serve a precise informational function: to clarify text or to provide their own informational content on a topic.

Teaching students to "read" the illustrations in nonfiction, therefore, is important, and you want to begin this work early. "Nonfiction readers look hard at the pictures in our books," you'll want to tell children. "We ask, 'What is this picture teaching me about the topic?'" Teach children to make active connections between texts and pictures: "Nonfiction readers look at the pictures in our book and search for the words on the page that explain this picture, and we read those words closely, then look at the picture again, to understand it better." This is important to emphasize because you certainly don't want your first graders to be looking at pictures and not reading any words! Tell them, "If after searching, we find that the page *doesn't* have words to explain the picture, we might think up some words of our own. We'd ask, 'If I had to describe this picture to a friend, what parts would I think are important to explain first?' and especially, 'How would I connect the picture with what I've read on that page?'" Imagine you hear a kid read, "A river starts on a mountain top." You look at the picture and notice a snow-capped mountain. You would then want this reader to think about how what she just read fits with the picture. If this kid is actively trying to get a clear sense of this, using both the picture and the words, her response might sound something like, "Well, the sun is out. That starts to melt the snow that is here, on the mountain. And it starts a trickle of water that becomes like a river."

You will also want to teach your students to use the illustrations in the text when they encounter difficulty. Teach them to imagine the action on the page as if it is moving. Show them how to use the other images they know from books, as well as their imaginations, to create movies in their minds as they read. Demonstrate how, as you read the page that says, "The snake coils around the prey and squeezes until the prey stops breathing," you picture the snake's body moving tighter and tighter and can see in your mind the prey's breath leaving its body. As children read about the tadpole's legs growing from its body, we want them to picture the legs actually sprouting and growing bit by bit as the hours tick away on the tadpole's childhood. Partners can help each other envision parts, using gestures and facial expressions and pointing out things in pictures to each other as they read to help create a more complete visualization of what is happening in the text. Children could make quick sketches of what they are picturing happening next and then after that. When they do this, it's as if they are making the picture on the page move forward based on the information they read.

Looking at illustrations as a way to extend the words on the page can be the start of an entirely new way of looking at their books. You want your readers to understand that nonfiction readers do more than just read the words on the page; they actively co-construct meaning by *responding* to the text. "Reading is not a one-way highway," you might announce. "It's not just that the words fly off the page and through the eyes, enter our brain, and that's it. Once they get in there (point to your head) they stir things up. They get all the other stuff in our brains *moving*. They make us have ques-



tions, new ideas, they remind us of *other* things we've read and seen. When our brain takes words in, it spurts out ideas and questions!" In a nutshell, you'll have taught your first graders Rosenblatt's reader-response theory.

Of course you'll want to show your readers *how* one might respond to texts—the best way to do this is to insert a think-aloud into your read-aloud. That is, as you read nonfiction text aloud, you'll want to pause and, in a thinking voice, show kids what kinds of questions and ideas you are having about the topic from the words and pictures that are on the page. You'll want to extend this teaching by saying, "We need to pay attention to all these questions and ideas that our brains have as we read." That is, you'll want children to catch the thoughts and ideas that reading evokes and either say these aloud to a partner or jot them down quickly for future conversations or inquiry. Teach children that they can connect what they read on the page with examples. Coach kids to think "off the page." "What is this similar to? What does it remind you of? What are other examples?" Children may be able to find more examples in the same book, from real-life experiences, or even across different texts. For instance, a child might come across a book on rabbits and decide that rabbits have a lot in common with the pet guinea pig she has at home—this child might then make a note of this fact and jot the similarities. Teach this student also that she might ask questions of the text and jot these. Could one then keep a rabbit in the same cage that currently houses a guinea pig, since they eat the same foods? You'll want to get your readers into the habit of quickly jotting responses to text, either on Post-its or on a mini-pad.

Meanwhile, you will want to coach kids to think about what the author of a text is trying to say or teach us about the topic, both through the pictures and the text. You can help kids do this by considering why an author would write about a particular topic. Children might ask themselves, "What big thing might this author be hoping readers get out of this text?" or "Why is it important for us to read this book?" It is these kinds of higher-level questions and compare/contrast work that the Common Core State Standards spotlight as the big analytical work first graders should be doing in informational texts.

## Part Three: Tackling Tricky Words in Nonfiction

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Before moving readers into the final part of the unit, you'll definitely want to spend a day or two teaching word study and active decoding strategies. Many words will be automatic to our readers as they will recognize sight words and words that appear also in their fiction reading. One unique aspect to nonfiction reading, though, is that they will also encounter words unique to the content they're learning about. And these words are of utmost importance as they put names to the concepts and objects and parts of their topic of study. You will want to remind your readers to draw upon all that they have already learned to understand a new concept. Readers at levels G or H and higher might read before and after words they don't know and ask themselves, "What kinds of words would make sense?" "What word would sound right here?" They may



search for more information in the picture and photographs. Model for children how when you come to an unknown word, you make a big deal out of wanting to know *not only how to say the word* but also how to *make meaning* of it. For example, a reader who encounters the passage, “Squirrels use their tail to help them balance. A squirrel’s tail distributes the squirrel’s weight as it runs across narrow branches,” could read beyond the word *distribute* and then think of other words or examples that could fill in the missing concept. A child might say to herself, “Its tail helps even out its body,” or “Its tail makes it so it doesn’t fall off the branch.” This strategy helps readers to navigate those tricky words by replacing a word they cannot decode with a concept or definition that makes sense. Of course, you will rally your children to always follow up this strategy by looking at the word and saying a word that looks and sounds similar to the word on the page.

You might teach your readers to also check the pictures in a book to see if an unknown word is labeled, and then to study the picture and use words to describe what they are seeing. Take the word *antler*. As a reader looks at the picture and the label, you might teach her to talk her way through to meaning. She could say, “Hmm. It’s on top of the deer’s head. It looks kind of like a hat. And it has spiky things on the end, almost like a weapon. Hmm. These must be used to protect the deer somehow. Like a hat would protect a head, or maybe the deer uses these to fight other animals or protect itself.” That is, instead of simply saying, “I don’t know that word! Help me! Help me!” a reader might think through what a tricky word is apt to mean, and they can make comparisons. Even if they can’t pronounce *antlers*, children will know how to look at it and how to think about its function and importance. You’ll encourage children to do their best to pronounce any new vocabulary they encounter, and you’ll also want them to try to figure out what the word might mean. Some teachers find it helps to show readers that they can add a Post-it beside the tricky word, signifying that this is a place where some help from a partner might be good. Of course, kids need not rely on partners to figure out what tricky words mean. They can rely on themselves, too. Substituting the synonym in place of the word in the sentence, readers can try on different possible meanings. The text features of nonfiction texts—labels, arrows, close up pictures, captions, and glossaries—can all be used to figure out unknown vocabulary. If you want more strategies for teaching children to figure out the words in their books, Kathy Collins’ *Growing Readers* offers a repertoire of strategies kids can use in fiction and nonfiction.

You will want to remind your readers to draw upon all that they have already learned to understand a new concept. Readers can read around words they don’t know and ask themselves, “What word would sound right here? What kinds of words would make sense?” Model for children how when you come to an unknown word, you make a big deal out of wanting to know *not only how it’s pronounced* but also how to *make meaning* of it. For example, a reader who encounters the passage, “A coral snake is full of poison. Its bright colors warn predators to stay away” can read beyond the word *predator*, then stop and think about what type of word would sound right. Would it be a word that means a thing? Could one substitute a word like *people* or *others* or *animals*? Are those the types of word that sound right? And then of course a

reader could follow up to be sure she is cross-checking for meaning and taking a stab at saying the word the way it looks.

You will also need to help your level F, G, and H readers (many of your students will read at these levels) break down polysyllabic words and think about what would make sense in the context of the sentence and the page. Coach them to say the first part of the word and think about what is happening in the text, and to look through the entire word, searching for information in the text and in the picture that may help them think about what the word could be. You could also teach kids to return back to the beginning of a sentence and reread the sentence with better fluency thinking, “Does that make sense? What did this information just tell me?”

## **Part Four: Nonfiction Readers Can Read More Than One Book about a Topic to Compare and Contrast**

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The final leg of this unit needs to serve a dual purpose. It needs to build upon the first two, deepening and intensifying earlier teaching. At the same time, it *also* needs to serve as a living reminder to children that the real purpose of nonfiction is to grow smarter about our world and the things in it. To achieve these ends, you might create text sets around topics that have proved especially popular these past weeks and set up book clubs around each of these topics. One of the most important standards in the Common Core State Standards asks that students work both on the skill of comparing and contrasting information as well as on becoming proficient in speaking and presenting information. Club work helps to work on both of these skills. Arming each club with its own text set on a particular topic, you’ll encourage the collaborative study of multiple texts on a topic, so that children may compare and contrast the information and illustrations within these. You’ll aim also for book clubs to grow conversations from their collective study of a topic. As a grand finale, each club might produce a poster or big book page displaying all they’ve learned from reading about their topic.

As you and your students collect texts for this part of the unit, you will want to remember that many of your students should be poised to move up text levels within this unit. They’ll probably read the easier texts first, and those texts will provide readers with the domain-specific vocabulary and the conceptual knowledge so they are poised to be able to comprehend more challenging texts. They’ll also be reading alongside other inquirers, and the conversations around shared texts provide the same sort of scaffolding that you provide during guided reading sessions. Then, too, you can take any text set inquiry group and think of that group as a guided reading group, working with them to be sure they have the requisite skills to read texts of increasing difficulty.

This is the first time that your kids will be working in clubs, and you will want to start by teaching the habits and protocols that make for effective membership. Throughout this part, you will want to confer with clubs about taking turns while talking, “listen-

ing with their eyes, their ears, their minds and their bodies” whenever another club member is speaking, and about coming for club work prepared. Encourage clubs to choose a name for themselves and to create and maintain a “club folder” as a container for their Post-its, ideas, and collaborative work. You may decide to create reading clubs by putting two partnerships together at the same reading level. We want children to be matched to books, even during their club time.

If the contents of your nonfiction library permit it, you will want to arrange for clubs to choose a nonfiction topic rather than assigning topics. You might send clubs out to shop for their own topic from within the library and then fish for all the texts that cover this topic. However, if you are confined by a limited range of books in the library, you might study whatever titles you do have and create a list of feasible topics for clubs to choose from. (If supplies are particularly short, you might share materials across the grades.) It is important to remember that your aim is *not* to initiate a topic study or a content study, but rather the allocation of a topic per club serves the purpose of making your first graders better nonfiction readers. Even though to students it may seem as if they’re studying content on a topic (and they are, of course), your instructional focus must be to develop students’ skills at *reading this genre*, that is, informational texts. Make sure that your teaching reinforces this. You won’t be sitting with a club asking, “Which is the world’s longest river? Name the cities that are located along this river,” but instead, “Nonfiction readers decide what parts about a topic they want to read more closely. I want you guys, as a club, to come up with three different things you want to study about rivers. You decide.” Because indeed, *children* ought to be deciding what to read (as much as possible) within reading workshop. You (their teacher) will merely be helping them use and understand the genre’s mechanics so that their decisions are powerful.

Across your room, students should be starting to talk about their topics. Before they get too far in their club discussions, you might ask them to identify big categories that they want to focus on, before their talk starts going into too many directions. A club studying birds, for example, might decide they want to know, “where birds live” and “what makes birds different from reptiles” rather than looking at every category on birds that multiple books have to offer. You might urge readers to look at topic headings in the various books to see ones that overlap and ones that are unique to certain books alone, before they decide.

Once clubs identify the two or three categories about a topic they want to study, they can compare how books differ in their treatment of these categories. “Yeah, in my book my birds also live in forests. Can birds really live in the ocean? Mine is a penguin, and I read that they live in the ocean. So what is the same about where they live?” It seems like most children might compare illustrations between books, finding ones that contain more labels or information. Or, they might find an illustration in one book that is better explained by the text in another book. Essentially, your readers will be doing a compare and contrast of the books within their text set. To develop language that will set your readers up for comparing and contrasting, you might chart the following prompts:

On this page\_\_\_\_\_ but on this page\_\_\_\_\_. Or in this book\_\_\_\_\_ but in this book\_\_\_\_\_.

The difference between\_\_\_\_\_ and\_\_\_\_\_ is\_\_\_\_\_.

What's the same about these two\_\_\_\_\_ is\_\_\_\_\_.

Unlike the\_\_\_\_\_ in this book, the\_\_\_\_\_ does or doesn't\_\_\_\_\_.

If you want readers to ask questions of their texts, you might teach them some questions that almost always lead to deeper thinking: "How do . . . ?" "Why do . . . ?" "How come . . . ?" "Why would . . . ?" Teaching children to pursue a question in a book and across books will drive a child, partner, or club's reading. Imagine a club reading through all of their insect books looking for the answer to, "Do all prairie mammals have fur that blends in with the prairie?" Then too, you may decide to deepen children's talk and thinking by teaching them that when they have conversations with a partner or their club, they can also talk across the categories on a chart. One way they do that is by talking about how something is the same or different (as in the example above).

Once club members are actively comparing and contrasting multiple texts, you'll realize that there are plenty of potential teaching opportunities to be gleaned from this work. Clubs are an important part of the Common Core State Standards speaking and listening section. You might teach clubs that reading across texts allows us to construct a cumulative understanding, to develop schemas on a topic that borrow and build themselves from multiple sources. "Different books can teach us different things about the same topic," you might say. "Once we read our *second* and *third* book on a topic, nonfiction readers can mix and match information from all these books." You'll need to demonstrate to children how they might "mix and match" information from several books.

Of course, a process such as "comparing" will feel somewhat meaningless and empty unless there is some sense of purpose or a project driving all this cross-text comparing and note-making. In *Time for Meaning*, Randy Bomer writes, "I always read with a sense of project. . . I'm always getting ready for some conversation that's yet to come, putting an anchor down at some point in the future and dragging my life's thought and energy towards that future." The "anchor" in this unit will be the final celebration or small project that will mark the culmination of your unit of study and pull your children's thoughts and energies toward it.

Toward the end of the unit, children will share the expert knowledge that they grew as a club and will reflect on how and why others might need to know this information. Kids in one club could get together with kids in another club and teach each other about their topics. You might have a "museum" share where visitors come to each reading club to hear what children have learned. Others might choose to give an oral presentation. Some might share a series of diagrams that helps them answer the questions they posed. During these shares, the children in each club will assume the role of teachers, teaching the information from the texts they have read. No matter how clubs decide to present, all will want to use their explaining voice as they present the information that they learned, either to other clubs or to another class.

## Word Study/Phonics, Interactive Writing, and Shared Reading

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If you reassessed your students' phonics knowledge, chances are there are some concepts you will need to review at this point. If up until now you have been doing mostly whole-group work, you might shift toward small-group word study to meet the needs of all your students. For example, based on your assessments, you may have noticed that some students still need to work on some of the concepts you introduced in the previous months, such as blends and digraphs, while others still need to work on ending sounds. You might manage your classroom so that students can work in partnerships. During this time all students can do the same activities, but each would work on the features they need to work on. For example, groups can work on sorting pictures and words, but the content would be different for each of the groups. If you haven't done so already, you might also introduce word hunts. During word hunts children can look for the features (blends, digraphs, and so on) they have been working on in word study in their own independent reading texts. You will also want to continue to do some work in phonemic awareness. According to the Common Core State Standards, students should be able to isolate, blend, and segment single-syllable words. For example, students should be able to hear and isolate the beginning sounds and ending sounds in a word such as *chop*. When working on blending, say the sounds in the word, and the students has to blend them together to say the word. For example, if you say /ch/ /o/ /p/ the student should say the word. Segmenting is a more difficult task and requires the student to break the word up into sounds. Many teachers use Elkonin Boxes, a reading recovery method, to facilitate students' ability to hear the individual sounds in words. When using the Elkonin Boxes you will want to help students represent each sound in each box using a chip. As you or the student says the sound, they can move a chip into each box. This is all highlighted in the language and fundamentals sections of the Common Core State Standards.

This month you may want to create a nonfiction text like the ones the students are reading. You may write other kinds of nonfiction that students see in their lives, such as a sign, a poster, or a letter. In any case, you will want to help students make nonfiction writing in which they use topic-specific vocabulary, create headings for the pages, and so on. You may call on certain children who are working on spelling words with inflected endings, initial blends and digraphs, final digraphs, short vowel patterns repeated, short vowels, short vowel patterns, and high-frequency words depending on their developmental stage of spelling or word study group.

Continue to introduce three to five high-frequency words a week. It might be necessary to differentiate your instruction so that children have opportunities during the week to work with the words they still need to acquire. You might have all of your students make the words they struggle with using magnetic letters and writing them on dry-erase boards.

During a nonfiction unit of study it's helpful to read nonfiction texts during shared reading. You could model the different ways to approach nonfiction texts and how to read them, how to decide where to start on a particular page, how to deal with unfa-

miliar vocabulary or polysyllabic words, how to study a topic of interest, and how to synthesize text into one's own words. For example, if you were reading about flowers, you might do a shared reading of the book *From Field to Flowers* (National Geographic, Windows on Literacy) and demonstrate a word work and vocabulary-building strategy, using pages 2–3. The text reads, “Look at all the flowers. They are for sale in a flower store” (page 2). “A person who sells flowers is called a florist. Where does the florist get all the flowers?” (page 3). *Florist* may be an unknown word for many students. Drawing on the strategy of using the first part of the word (consonants) plus the next two, you could mask the *ist* in florist, leaving *flor* exposed. You’d tell children that if they read the first part they’ll see a consonant team and a word they know. Students will say, “/flor/!” You’ll say, “I know you know this word,” writing “list” on a white board. Students will say, “/list/.” Then you’ll ask, “What’s left if I take the *l* away?” Students will say, “/ist/.” You’ll say, “Now I think you can read this word,” uncovering the *ist* in *florist*. Students will say the word, and you’ll ask them if they can reread or remember the two pages to tell what this word means. An effective reader might think, “I have one of these flower stores on my street. That word *florist* is in the sentence about the person who sells the flowers, and it says, ‘is called a florist.’ I know that *a* is a noun marker that tells the name of someone. So a person who sells flowers must be a florist!” Remind children that they will use these same strategies when they read their own nonfiction books.

We have included the following chart, which we hope will help you locate resources for your word study/phonics instruction.

If you decided to teach...	Suggested lessons in <i>Words Their Way 4th Edition</i>	Suggested lessons in <i>Phonics Lessons 1st Grade, Pinnell &amp; Fountas</i>
Inflected endings (-ing, -s, -ed)	*Use activities that students know from beginning sounds	WS2, WS3 (pp. 377–384) WS5 (p. 389)
Initial blends and digraphs (e.g., /st/, /th/) Final digraphs	Adapt 4-27 to 4-31 (pp. 123–125) 5-6 to 5-10 (pp. 157–159), 5-15 (p. 162) (These can be adapted to final blends and digraphs.)	LS7 to LS11 (pp. 221–240) LS17 to LS18 (pp. 261–268)
Short vowel patterns (CVC)	pp. 148–150, 5-12 to 5-19 (pp. 160–164) 5-20 to 5-24 (pp. 165–168)	SP1 to SP4 (pp. 283–298)
Short vowels	pp. 182–183	
High-frequency words		HF1 to HF8 (pp. 325–356)



## Additional Resources

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One of the most predictable issues you may face when launching the nonfiction reading unit is a shortage of materials. The Common Core State Standards emphasize that half your students reading be nonfiction, meaning that you need books at appropriate levels to support this. You will want to be sure that you have gathered up a substantial nonfiction library. You may decide to share books between classrooms, have students read out of shared bins (at their just-right book levels), or visit your local libraries to get the materials that your students need.

You will also want to consider the levels your children are reading to be sure that the plan that follows will meet their needs. If your children are reading longer, more sophisticated texts (levels H or higher), you will want to look over your running records and conferring notes to figure out the specific needs of these readers. For example, you may decide to adapt this unit plan to include a string of lessons on determining importance or summarizing—it is predictable that readers will need support with this, especially if they are reading longer books. You'll also want to keep tabs on book logs for these readers to be sure that their reading volume is sky high. You can refer to Unit Four in the second-grade curriculum calendar for higher-level comprehension strategies.

For children still reading below level F, you will want to pull out all the stops to be sure that they are getting the support they need to read on grade level. Study your assessments, including running records, spelling inventories, word lists, and observations to determine what it is that is holding these kids back. You may want to review some of the strategies in Unit Two in the first-grade calendar. You'll probably want to plan to do lots of book introductions and guided reading, you may want to help children find sets of texts that fit together on a topic, and you might do nonfiction shared reading or read-aloud in small groups with these children—and of course you'll want to find more time (in terms of actual minutes) each day for children to read, whether it is by extending your reading workshop, having a second reading time each day, borrowing five or ten more minutes here and there throughout your day, and pushing kids to read more after school or at home.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### **Part One: Nonfiction Readers Read to Become Smarter about Our World and the Things in It**

- “Readers, I need your help today. We need to get our library together for our new unit of study in nonfiction reading. Today I want to teach you how we, like librarians, can get our classroom ready for the important reading work we are about to do. As we are looking through our nonfiction books and trying to organize them, we need to decide how our books should go. We may decide to organize them by author, subject, level, or kind of book (informational or story).”

- “Today I want to teach you that you can use everything you know to get ready to read nonfiction books. It’s not that different from what we do when we read fiction (teachers could pull out repertoire charts from earlier in the year). As we are getting ready to read, we make sure to read the title, study the cover, take a picture walk, and think, ‘What do I think this book is about?’ We do this to help us understand our books.”
  - *Tip:* “As we are looking through our books, we may ask ourselves, ‘What words do I expect to see in this book about (topic)?’”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that as we get ourselves ready to read, we think about how our books work. As we preview our texts we may ask ourselves, ‘Are there headings or sections to guide me?’ ‘Is this all about one subject, or is it a different kind of book?’ ‘Are there different text features to support me and help me understand more?’ Knowing how our books work helps us to predict what our books will be about.”
  
- “Readers, I know that you can name just about every text feature! Today, I want to teach you that we can use the text features to help us learn and understand more about our subjects. We can ask ourselves, ‘What new information does the photograph teach me?’ ‘How does the label identify the new information?’ ‘How do the headings help me to think what is the section mostly about?’”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that when readers read nonfiction books we use a voice in our head that sounds like a teacher or a narrator of a documentary. We decide what information in the text is important, and then we read those parts with special emphasis to bring out their meaning. Our voices can sound like we are questioning, surprised, secretive, dramatic, and so on. This makes the information more engaging for the listener, and it helps them to know what to pay attention to.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that nonfiction readers always want to make sure that we are thinking about what our books are mostly about. Sometimes there are several meaning chunks throughout the book. As we are reading we can ask ourselves, ‘How does the information over the next few pages go together? What is it mostly about? What can I call it?’”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that our reading partners can help us understand the information we are reading. Our partners may ask us questions to find out more about our subjects. We might ask, ‘Can you tell me the big ideas in your book?’ ‘What does that really mean?’ ‘Can you give me an example of that information?’”

## Part Two: Nonfiction Readers See More Than the Text on the Page

- “Today I want to teach you that readers want to understand as much as we can about our subjects when we are reading informational books. One way we can do this is by looking closely at the illustrations/photographs and thinking about whether they help us understand what the page is teaching us. We can ask ourselves, ‘How is this picture helping me understand this word, part, page, or book?’”
- “Today I want to teach you that as we are reading our informational books, we’ll have lots of ideas that come into our minds. I want to remind you to use your Post-its to help you get these ideas down. Some ways that we can do this are jotting the questions and answers we have from our reading, jotting new ideas we have, and even jotting what this information reminds us of.”
- “Readers can have reactions to the information presented in our books. We can think about how we feel when we read a fact, and make a statement about what our response is. We can say ‘Cool’ or ‘Wow’ or ‘Gross’ and explain why we are reacting that way.”
- “Remember when we are reading stories that one way we can try to understand everything happening in that story is to make pictures in our minds. Well, we can also make pictures in our minds when we are reading informational books. One way we can do this is by reading a section, then closing our eyes and picturing how our subject changes or moves or acts to understand our topic better.”
  - *Tip:* “I want to teach you another way that we can see more text on the page and understand our books. We can act out parts of our informational books, we can sketch a few frames to picture how our subjects change or move, and we can use gestures.”

## Part Three: Tackling Tricky Words in Nonfiction

- “When we are reading our informational books, we can sometimes come to words that are new and tricky. Today I want to teach you that when we come across such words, it helps to be resourceful, to not give up, and to choose the tricky word strategies that may help us figure out the tricky words. Remember, we can look closely at the word, get our mouths ready, and read across the word, keeping in mind what the page is teaching us about.”
- “Readers, sometimes when we’re reading informational books and we are learning about a topic, we come to words that look scary to figure out. We need to remember that we may actually *know* the word, but maybe we haven’t *seen* it

before. We look at the first part of the word and then we think to ourselves, 'What are all of the words that that word might be?' We can take a good look at the picture, then look at the first part of the word and then take a good guess at what the word could be."

- "Just like when we get to tricky words when we read stories, readers can break up words starting from the beginning and moving all the way across the word to help us problem-solve in informational books. We can look at the vowels and the few letters after the vowel and try to read the word in parts."
- "Today I want to teach you that we need to do more than figure out how to read or pronounce a word. We need to also understand what the words mean. When we come to words whose meanings we don't know, we need to stop and figure these out. We can say to ourselves, 'What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean?' 'Let me reread this part to see if that helps me.' 'Can the picture help me?' 'What is it? What is it not?' 'Is there a glossary that I can use to check my idea?'"
- "When we are reading our informational books and get to tricky words, we can use the photograph on the page to help us figure out that word. Today I want to teach you that readers can search the picture and say aloud what we are seeing in the photograph. We can use the words we say to help us figure out the tricky word. We can ask ourselves, 'Would \_\_\_\_\_ make sense here?'"
  - *Tip:* Teach students to use labels in pictures to help them when they get stuck on tricky words.
- "Today I want to teach you that sometimes, even when we work really hard to figure out a tricky word, we can still be stuck. After we have tried a few ways to figure out a word and can't seem to do it, we can place a Post-it on that page or jot that word on a Post-it note. We can then ask our reading partner to help us with the word at a later time."

#### **Part Four: Readers Can Read More Than One Book about a Topic to Compare and Contrast**

- "Today I want to teach you that when we are meeting with our nonfiction reading clubs, we can decide with our clubs which parts we want to closely explore and make a plan for our reading. If we are reading about birds, for example, we may decide to collect information and discuss how birds take care of their babies, how birds' beaks are all very different, one from another, or the patterns of bird migration."

- “Today I want to remind you that as we are working in our nonfiction reading clubs, we make sure our clubs are as successful as possible. We not only want to come to our clubs with important information to share, but we also want to make sure that we are working on listening to and understanding our club members. One way we can do this is by listening with our eyes, our ears, and our bodies.”
- “As we are working with our clubs and thinking about ways that our nonfiction books have information that we can compare and contrast, we can use some specific language to get us started. Today I want to teach you a way that you can use language to help you compare and contrast information across your nonfiction text sets. Some ways we can start our conversation are ‘On this page. . . but on this page. . .’ or ‘In this book. . . but in this book. . .’ ‘The difference between . . . and. . . is. . .’ ‘What’s the same about these two. . . is. . .’ ‘Unlike the. . . in this book the. . . does or doesn’t. . .’ and so on.”
- “Today I want to teach you that as we are talking about and discussing our information across our clubs, there are questions we can ask that will lead us to think deeply about our books. We can ask questions while reading and discuss our questions with our clubs members. We may ask questions like ‘How do. . . ?’ ‘Why do. . . ?’ ‘How come. . . ?’ ‘Why would. . . ?’ And so on.”



## UNIT FIVE

# We Can Be Our Own Teachers When We Work Hard to Figure Out Words

**FEBRUARY**

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

In general, there is a logic behind the primary units of study. In some, you'll focus on comprehension, and in others, you'll emphasize word solving. This unit falls into the latter category; it aims to help readers be more resourceful and active when they come to hard words. The most important lesson about word work that you can teach right now is that when a reader is stuck on a hard word, the child should reach for not just his or her knowledge of letters and sounds. She should also reach for knowledge of what the text is about. You will see that this unit glues together comprehension work and word solving as the Common Core State Standards demand.

Those of you who followed last year's curricular calendar will probably notice that the strategy instruction we suggest in this unit is quite similar to what we suggested in last year's December unit. We have revised the drumroll to the unit because we felt that last year's unit didn't recruit kids' energy as well as some others did. We have also revised the architecture of the unit to embed small-group work into its infrastructure. Our hope is that you will feature small-group work, especially as your readers move to more challenging books.

In this unit, your message will be that children can be their own teachers. That is, readers take charge of our own reading work; we don't have to ask for help when we get to tricky words. You'll want kids to know that they have strategies to get through these hard parts. Now the work is to figure out how to use not just one strategy but as many as they need for any given word or passage. They can move past the initial impulse to say, "Help me, help me, help me!" when faced with a tricky word or when meaning breaks down and instead take a deep breath, have a little courage and say, "I can solve this myself!" You'll show your first graders that they can be their own teach-



ers, solving their own reading dilemmas by drawing on the tools and strategies they've learned from minilessons and small-group work. And you'll teach them strategies to balance their reading energies between word solving and meaning making so that their experiences with texts are well-rounded and thoughtful, efficient, and proficient.

The Common Core State Standards' "foundational skills section" says students need to know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words. To be a fluent reader you need to use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary. This is why this unit will be extremely important for your first-grade readers.

## How Might this Unit Go?

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At the beginning of this unit you will likely pull out your ever-growing chart of reading strategies and say to your students, "Look at all you know about how to read tricky words!" You'll read the chart together, cheering and giving "shout-outs" for favorite strategies—showing your excitement and amazement about how much readers know. Then you'll lean in close and say, "These strategies are strategies you will use your whole life whenever you are reading and you get to an unfamiliar word. Here is the thing—now you are about to take the next big step in reading. You are about to see how you can't just use the strategies that are easy for you. Now you need to learn how to find the strategies that will fit together to help you read harder words and more interesting books."

"I was thinking about you all and your reading the other day while I watched Marcus building with Legos. He saw me watching and said, 'I'm going to build our school!' Then he dug through his Lego bin looking for just the right pieces—yellow bricks for one side of the school, light green for the other, window bricks—not the small square ones, the larger rectangular ones—and a few flat foundation plates. As I watched him, I realized something. 'What a deliberate builder he is,' I thought. 'He has a plan and a vision of what he is going to make. He is thinking about the whole building first, and then choosing just the right pieces to make it—planning and choosing with that big building in mind.' Well, readers, that is just what you will need to do now in reading. These strategies are the bricks, and your books are the buildings. Gone are the days when you just use the strategies you like. Now you will need to start looking at the book first and think, 'Which strategies are going to help me read this book? Which strategies are going to help me understand the whole book?'—and then use those!"

After you have helped your students to see that reading is not about one tricky word or one strategy, you will want to plan your teaching to ensure that this "whole-picture" view helps your students employ more advanced reading behaviors. Your whole-class teaching, as well as your small-group work and conferring during this unit, will focus on helping children become more independent readers who monitor for meaning, cross-check, and self-correct. This means helping your children to see that just knowing the strategies is not enough. Now they must employ them collectively to do the bigger work of putting the whole book, and its meaning, together.

You will want to reassess your students and analyze their running records to notice patterns in children's reading behavior. Many children will have moved since your last assessment window. Chances are that you will notice patterns in individual children's reading as well as across your whole class. This is a great opportunity for you to alter your teaching to make sure that you are meeting students' needs. For example, if many of your students are the kind of readers who only stare at the word when they come to a difficult word, you will want to shift your teaching to get students to search for more meaning cues when they are problem-solving words.

You want to be sure that all readers are growing across the year and keep an eye on how kids are progressing through the levels of text complexities. Who has stagnated and hasn't moved as a reader? Do you know what is holding those kids back? Who could move if they just worked more on cross-checking? Who seems to be finishing their books quickly and reading with strong fluency? If some readers' speed moving through books has increased, that, too, can be sign they're ready to move up.

You will probably want to put some readers into 'transitional baggies' containing some of the easier books at the text level, and then you will want to provide extra support in those harder books. Familiarizing yourself with each student's needs and specific goals will allow you to help them progress.

If kids entered the year at level D they should now be at level G. If kids entered above grade level, around level H, many of those readers will be at level J approaching K. If you have students who entered below grade level, around level B or C, those readers should also have made great gains in the year. Many of those readers should be at level E or F working toward F and G.

Many children will be reading at or around levels G, H, and I during this unit. You'll notice that your beginning readers are figuring out words with more confidence and reading books that contain longer text and less supportive illustrations. They will no longer be well advised to read words letter by letter but instead to break words into chunks, reading them part by part.

Book choices are key during this unit. It is important for your children to have a mix of fiction and nonfiction, a "balanced diet" of books to read. Research by Nell Duke and others shows that some struggling readers prefer reading nonfiction and make greater gains when given strategy instruction within this genre. According to the Common Core State Standards, students should be immersed in both genres to achieve success.

## **Part One: Readers Use Everything We Know about Reading to Get Through the Hard Parts—We Can Look in Our Toolkits and Think, "What Else Can I Try?"**

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As your children grow, they will face heavier demands at each new level. Sentences will become more complex and vocabulary more sophisticated—meanwhile, texts will become less supportive. It will be important for readers to be able to rely upon a range of print strategies. In this first part, you will want to make a big deal for your readers that

they already know a lot about how to get through the tricky parts. Now their job is to put together everything they know about the meaning in the book, how the letters, sounds and spelling patterns work, to help them read.

Therefore, this part will be less about teaching new print strategies and more about helping readers use all that they know to monitor, search, and cross-check as they read. This will include making many connections from one part of their literacy instruction to another. You'll want to help kids carry over to reading what you have been teaching them about words during word study. The Common Core State Standards suggest that students should be able to decode regularly spelled one-syllable and two-syllable words following basic patterns by the end of first grade. You will have likely taught this skill quite a bit in word study at this time of year. In reading workshop, you will want to coach readers using specific strategies. These tools include thinking about the first part of a word and the sounds those letters make, looking all the way across a word, chunking, and relying on parts of words they know to figure out what they don't know.

Teach them how to search for specific features (e.g., spelling patterns, blends, and so on) of words you've taught in word study. So if you've been teaching kids about blends and digraphs, you'll want them to use that knowledge to be efficient problem-solvers of words. For example, perhaps a child reading the book *In Our Yard* encounters the words *slug* and *stick*. We would want this student to think about what fits with the story and to use what she knows about *s* blends to figure out these two words. Help children use anchor words from their sorts during word study to problem-solve new words in reading. For example, if you've been studying short vowel patterns during word study, then the child who is reading *In Our Yard* might make a connection to the word *rug* when trying to problem-solve the word *slug*. You might say, "You know the word *rug*. What part in *rug* is like this word here?"

Sometimes when kids begin encountering more challenging texts, they respond by decreasing the amount of information they take in, narrowing their focus and becoming myopic. Instead of drawing on all sources of information, children sometimes bang away at letters alone, as if sounding-out will work in isolation. The problem is that the letter *o*, for example, makes sixteen different sounds. Phonics will work only if is used in combination with other sources of knowledge. One way to make it more likely that children hold onto comprehension and phonics simultaneously is to engage them in meaningful strategies that help them think about the whole text and not just one word. We can teach children to "storytell" a page by looking at the pictures and thinking about what is happening in the book, before they even try the words on the page. This will help children to keep the whole book in mind as they embark on the hard work of figuring out longer words. You will also want to teach your children to stop and think about what they are reading, even retelling the book at times, to set themselves up for the work of tackling longer pages with more print that may overwhelm them. For example, the child who is reading the book *In Our Yard* will be expecting to find the words for things that exist outside, in a yard, in the text. When the child reaches the page where the little boy sees a bee on flowers, you could guide him to use his thinking about the plot as he gets ready to read the words *bee* and *flowers*. If the child is suc-

cessfully doing this, then he will already be thinking that the words will say something like, “I see a bee on the pink flowers” before reading the sentence.

The Common Core State Standards clearly state that students need to be able to determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade-one reading and content, choosing flexibly from an array of strategies.

- Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- Use frequently occurring affixes as a clue to the meaning of a word.
- Identify frequently occurring root words (e.g., *look*) and their inflectional forms (e.g., *looks, looked, looking*).

During this portion of the unit you’ll use minilessons, conferences, and strategy groups as opportunities to show kids how to cross-check once they have figured out a word, asking, “Does this look right, sound right, *and* make sense?” Imagine a child encounters a sentence such as this: “The kitten ran out of the closet and quickly climbed on top of the dresser.” The child reads it this way: “The kitten ran out of the (pause) close (pause). . . .” That is, when she comes across a part that is tricky for her, she makes an attempt at the word (*close*) and then stops. It doesn’t make sense, it doesn’t sound right. This pause—this stopping to think, “Huh?” is a huge part of growth in reading. When students self-monitor, they are beginning to take charge of their own reading. It is only when readers read with a certain degree of vigilance, like this child did, that they monitor a word level to make sure that their reading makes sense. If you notice the child doing this important work, you can insert a fast compliment without distracting her too much. “Great self-checking,” you can say, and let her go from monitoring to searching for fix-up strategies, which is the next step you want to see. Once she has noticed that something is not right in the word, for example *creep*, she will need to search again for more information. Perhaps she says *cep* for *creep*. She notices that something doesn’t make sense, so she stops. You’ll want to teach her to search some more so that she can try something else, and to use what she knows about words to search the word again. Prompt her to look at the first part of the word, *cr*, and then at the last part of the word, *eep*. After she has tried another word, you’ll want to get her to check the word again.

You’ll also probably do a lot of guided reading instruction, during which you’ll give book introductions to kids in ways that support your students in using all three sources of information. When you give book introductions, remember to think about the level of support you need to offer the particular children with whom you are working. If the students gathered are new to a particular reading level, consider planning extremely supportive book introductions. Look through the book and determine what you think might be most challenging for students, and be sure to include that in your book introduction. When thinking about the challenges of a text, first start with meaning and then move to structure and visual information—presumably you’ll remind readers that when they come to a tricky word, they can chunk it, think about what it means, and so forth. After the children read the book and you coach them on their reading, make

sure you talk about the text to check on their comprehension. In this way, your guided reading group will support the children in using meaning and syntax in addition to visual information, which can help them read with accuracy and comprehension. This instruction will also help children integrate their knowledge and understandings from across their reading instruction.

Through small-group work, partnership, and even minilessons, you will set children up to rely on meaning as well as print when they come to hard words. You will show them how to work with letters in ways that will pay off. You might take this opportunity to teach readers that sometimes they can call on words they know to help them with words they do not know. Encourage readers to be flexible word solvers, trying a word one way, another way, and another way to see if one way sounds right and makes sense. Show children that when they come to a tricky word, they do not want to just inch letter-by-letter through it but instead will want to chunk letters.

You might pretend to be a reader who comes to a hard word and starts at it, letter by letter, only to self-correct, to say, “Wait, I’m forgetting to chunk,” and then you can show children how you go about chunking. During the active involvement, you can put two large texts up on the easel, one an easier and one a harder text, each with a hard word underlined. You can suggest readers choose one of those texts and try to read the hard word, using the same chunking strategies you just used. In this way, you’ll insert just a tiny bit of shared reading into a minilesson. Using big books in your minilessons will help, because you can’t teach print work unless the children can see the print.

While most of your children will be moving right along, beginning to integrate word study and comprehension skills, monitoring and self-correction, you’ll probably have some other kids reading below benchmark who will need some word study instruction that focuses on what they need—to problem-solve words as they read. These children might not have many high-frequency words yet. They might have less than forty high-frequency words. You’ll want to differentiate your high-frequency word work for these children. This is suggested in the Common Core State Standards’ language section. Perhaps you may provide them with their own personal word wall so that the words they need to study are close at hand. These kids will benefit from lots of shared reading and interactive writing that contain the words they are studying. You’ll want children to see these words within the context of reading and writing, as well as to study these words in isolation. You may continue asking kids to make words with magnetic letters and write them on dry-erase boards. You might also ask children to practice their words by playing high-frequency word bingo and the memory game. These children may also know beginning and ending sounds of many words, yet they may confuse short vowels. If any of these kids are English language learners, you’ll want to allow them extra time to study short vowels because these are usually more difficult for them. You may begin your short vowel instruction by asking children to sort short vowel patterns by sound and by sight. You’ll want kids to listen to the part that sounds the same in the word. For example, you might begin with a picture sort of words that sound like *cat*, *fan*, and *map*. Once children have sorted the pictures, introduce the words so kids also notice the patterns in the words. Start with two-way



sorts (such as /at/ and /an/) and move on to three-way sorts (such as /at/, /an/, and /ap/). Ask children to make the spelling patterns with magnetic letters so they become flexible with their knowledge of spelling patterns.

## **Part Two: Readers Smooth Out the Rough Parts—After We Make Sure Our Reading Looks Right, Sounds Right, and Makes Sense, We Reread to Put It All Back Together**

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Now hopefully, your students are self-monitoring, cross-checking, and even self-correcting quite a bit. That is, you see a child read, “The deer *jacked* over the fence and almost landed on the picnic table.” Then you’ll see the child scrunch up her face, saying, “Wait a minute!” (This is monitoring.) “That doesn’t make sense. A deer does not ‘jack’ over a fence. The picture shows a deer jumping.” (This is cross-checking.) Then she says, “Let me read that again. Oh it says ‘*jumped*’ over the fence.” (This is self-correcting.) It may seem that once you have seen children do this, your work is done.

While this kind of reading work is in fact cause for celebration, there is still more work to do. The problem is that when children start to self-correct, we cannot give up our diligence. In fact, it can be trickier to tell if she is self-monitoring and self-correcting beyond the word level of the text when they are reading with accuracy. Sometimes a child will get the words correct, but that is no guarantee that she monitored for meaning on the story level. Self-monitoring is not just about getting words right. A child who is self-monitoring in a proficient, complete way makes sure that what she reads makes sense across sentences and from page to page.

In fact, there may be two problems coming up here. Some children read each word correctly, as they monitor and self-correct, but all that stopping makes it hard for them to hold on to the larger story. Others might read accurately but absent-mindedly, reading the words but losing the story. To help kids self-monitor for comprehension, you can teach them to notice when they aren’t able to follow the story anymore, have trouble retelling, or when it’s hard to picture the text (envision) as they read. You can teach them that when something happens, they should have a sense for why it happened. It does not just come out of the blue. You might teach students that sometimes reading and saying the words is not the tricky part, but understanding what’s happening in the story might be. You could teach children to read a section of the text and then ask, “Does that make sense? Does it fit with what I think the story is about?”

During this second part of the unit, you’ll spotlight the importance of rereading. Your children will see that readers do the hard work of reading to understand, learn from, and enjoy our books. This would not be possible if when we close our books, we forget to care about the information and the story. You might tell your students a story about a time when this happened to you. “The other day, I was on the train and I was reading this great book about a kid who was trying to write a song. I was just at the part when he was going to play it for his friend and see if the friend liked it. I was so excited for the character to hear what his friend thought, when the conductor of the train came on the loud-speaker to say the name of the next station stop. A minute



later the conductor came on again and said that we were stopping at the station. I looked down at the book and realized that I had just read two pages, but I had no idea if my character had sung the song to his friend or what the friend thought of the song! Readers, we get distracted sometimes when we read, whether it is by someone talking or by having to figure out a tricky word. When we lose track, we don't just keep on going! We stop and reread, because the most important part of reading is getting that great story in our heads!" According to the Common Core State Standards, we need to ask and answer questions to help determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases in a text so we do not lose track of what we are reading.

Over this portion of the unit, you will want to check in with your children frequently to make sure that they are attending to the rewarding work of "getting" their books. You will likely call together small groups of readers who are struggling with this. One strategy that you might teach is to have kids reread whole books that were tough on the first read. You might have children pause at the end of a book and say, "Now that I have read this once, do I need to read it again to really 'get it?'" Especially at the levels that many of your students are reading now—G, H, I—the texts are getting longer, and children's stamina for reading words *and* making sense at the same time may be suffering. By teaching kids to reread, we help them get the most out of these harder books.

Other children will still be working their way up to these levels, and you will find that extra support in shared reading will give them the opportunity to integrate word study work on beginning sounds, ending sounds, some short vowel spelling patterns, and short-vowel-patterned words with digraphs. According to the Common Core State Standards, students should be able to decode words like *ship* and *chin* by the end of first grade. While lower-level books do not require that in shared reading texts children do this kind of decoding work, children can work with harder books. This supports reading that calls on them to use more complex phonics and decoding. Then you can have these groups of children reread the shared reading books on their own, expanding their practice.

You'll also find that you may have some children who are reading at higher levels and are ready for more phonics instruction. Remember to make sure that children are transferring what they have learned during word study into their reading and writing. You might spend more time making connections between reading and word study. Research shows that children need to see what they are learning in many contexts to transfer it to their own independent work. Teach kids strategies for solving words during word study and also during shared reading small-group work. During word study, ask children to use magnetic letters to build words. Teach children to change the middle sound in a word to make a new word. For example, ask kids to make the word *snip* and then change the vowel to /a/ to make *snap*. If children change the middle short vowel with ease, you might begin to introduce long vowels. Start by asking kids to sort pictures of things by vowel sound. For example, you can start by asking children to sort pictures by short /a/ and long /a/. Of course, this is also a great opportunity to have partners coach each other on their self-monitoring, self-correcting, and fluency.

They can help with monitoring and self-correcting, and they can also remind each other to reread, making our reading sound smooth.

According to the Common Core State Standards, students need to understand and synthesize the fundamentals to be able to comprehend at a higher level. These standards are directed toward fostering students' understanding and working knowledge of concepts of print, the alphabetic principle, and other basic conventions of the English writing system. These foundational skills are not an end in and of themselves; rather, they are necessary and important components of an effective, comprehensive reading program designed to develop proficient readers with the capacity to comprehend texts across a range of types and disciplines. Instruction should be differentiated: Good readers will need much less practice with these concepts than struggling readers will. The point is to teach students what they need to learn and not what they already know—to discern when particular children or activities warrant more or less attention.

### **Part Three: Readers Can Show Off Our Reading**

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In this final part of the unit, you will want to keep the energy going in your classroom. You will likely want more time to be sure that your readers are working through the hard parts, monitoring and self-correcting, hanging on to the stories and information in their books. While you know that all this practice is just what they need, your students may need a little energy infusion to keep them going on this hard work. One way that many teachers have found successful is to return to the rally cry that started the unit. You might say, "Do you remember how we started all of our hard work this month? Remember I told you about Marcus and his Legos, how he makes a plan first and picks the right pieces and thinks about the whole building before he builds? Well, I have been watching all of you and I have been getting that same proud feeling I get watching Marcus build, watching you all read. Yesterday Marcus tapped me on the shoulder; in his hands was his completed Lego structure. He carefully placed it in front of me. 'Look,' he said, 'This is my completed school building—here is the front door, and here is. . . .' Right then and there I realized something! When you work really hard on something it makes it even better to show off your work to the people you love. Marcus showed off his building to me, and I think it is time for you to show off your reading, too. So this week, we are going to perform our reading for people we love."

The work that follows will likely be similar to the work you have done throughout the unit. You will teach minilessons, confer, and hold small groups that support your children with the ongoing work of monitoring, self-correcting, and rereading. But now you will have the added motivation that comes with performance. Perhaps you will invite kids to make a list of people they want to read to and then choose just the right books for those audiences. You can have children practice reading the chosen books during an extended reading time (thus helping them to build extra reading stamina) while partners listen in and coach, just as they did in the last part.

By the end of the week children will be excited to make appointments with loved ones and perform their reading. You might choose to have children write invitations drawing people to the classroom or some other special place, such as “My bedroom at 7:30—I’ll read to *you* this time!” Ending the unit in this way will allow children to show off and feel proud of all they can do as readers.

### *Read-Aloud*

Students will spend much of their time during this unit developing strategies to figure out tricky words. Of course, you will not want to neglect the important comprehension work that has grown out of the previous units. You will want to prepare students to continue digging deep into texts to prepare for the work they will begin in the upcoming character unit. The Common Core State Standards support the importance of teaching children to comprehend high-level texts, even as they tackle just-right texts on their own. Often students working toward higher-level thinking are best suited to books that are beyond their current independent reading levels. Therefore, read-aloud will serve as an opportunity to engage students in the hard work of thinking clearly about longer, more complex books and in tracking action and thinking across those texts.

Read-aloud should be enmeshed with opportunities for students to engage with the text. To promote higher thinking, you should both model your thought processes through think-aloud and also give students room to practice expressing their own thinking. You may do this through turn and talks. Another option is to have students stop and jot their ideas on Post-its. Read-aloud offers students an opportunity to grow their thinking through talk and writing around a shared text. You will want to choose key moments at which to prompt students to talk or write, explicitly teaching students what sorts of thinking will push their understanding in different parts of the texts.

You will want students to explore both informational texts and fiction stories during read-aloud. Since your children will be familiar with both kinds of books at this time of year, they will be ready for more. At this point, you will want to encourage students to seek out authorial purpose. As you read aloud to students, you can encourage students to think, “Why did the author write this?” and “What lessons are we learning here?” Additionally, students will do well to rekindle some of their thinking about character as they prepare to enter a new unit on the topic.

### *Word Study*

You’ll want to continue providing direct instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics this month. This unit of study supports students’ transfer of word knowledge into their reading, but you will want to continue to build their knowledge of words this month during your twenty- to thirty-minute time for word study.

<b>If you decide to teach. . .</b>	<b>Suggested lessons in <i>Words Their Way, 4th Edition</i></b>	<b>Suggested lessons in <i>Phonics Lessons 1st Grade,</i> <b>Pinnell &amp; Fountas</b></b>
Initial blends and digraphs (e.g., /st/, /th/) Final digraphs	*Use activities that students know from beginning sounds Adapt 4-27 to 4-31 (pp. 123–125) 5-6 to 5-10 (pp. 157–159), 5-15 (p. 162) (These can be adapted to final blends and digraphs.)	LS7 to LS11 (pp. 221–240) LS17, LS18 (pp. 261–268)
Inflected endings (s)		WS2, WS3 (pp. 377–384)
High-frequency words	pp. 182–183	HF1 to HF8 (pp. 325–356)
Spelling patterns CVC	pp. 148–150, 5-12 to 5-19 (pp. 160–164)	SP1 to SP4 (pp. 283–298)

## Additional Resources

As you head into this unit, keep in mind that you and your students are just coming out of a nonfiction unit, where the emphasis may have been on talking and lingering on the pages, examining each picture for detail, with less focus on reading book after book. As you head into this unit, take a quick look at your students' reading logs—you may find yourself needing to revisit a few strategies for stamina and volume, reminding your students that readers read and read and read.

This is the time of year when a group of your children might be reading longer texts, possibly level J or higher, and in this case you will want to adapt this unit by introducing a more formal book log with page numbers and minutes (in place of the simple tallying log that most first graders begin with) so that you and your students can track the number of pages they've read each day and how many minutes it took to read them. You might decide to incorporate a string of lessons on goal setting and using book logs to guide volume and stamina if you think your students are in need of it. You could refer to second grade's first unit for information on this.

This is also the time of year when many of you are conducting running records. As you do this, keep a running list of the main things you are learning about your students. Do they struggle with fluency? Retelling? Inference? Word solving? Use this information to adapt this unit as necessary. For example, if you've realized that a large number of students aren't able to read at the next level up because of fluency, then you will want to adapt this unit to address fluency sooner, rather than later. Many of your students will be reading around level G/H. It is important to keep in mind that students are still moving up the levels of text complexity. Make sure that your word-solving strategies are becoming more sophisticated and support new features of phonics that children are learning during word-study time.

Last, if it seems that your entire class is struggling, then you will want to pull out all the stops. Think about the phonics/word work levels and think about how you are

helping students to use these features as they read. Make sure that your minilessons are tailored to the reading behaviors and skills that your students need. You may need to rethink your daily schedule to find more time for reading and extra time for read-aloud and shared reading, and perhaps enlist the help of another teacher or literacy coach in your building to help you brainstorm new ideas for supporting students whose reading levels have not moved.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### **Part One: Readers Use Everything We Know about Reading to Get Through the Hard Parts—We Can Look in Our Toolkits and Think, “What Else Can I Try?”**

- “Readers, we have so many strategies for helping us read tricky words! Let’s take a look at all of our strategies and read the “Readers Have Many Strategies” chart. As readers read new and harder books, we have to return to the strategies we know to help us through these harder books. More and more often we will need to use many strategies to get through the hard parts, not just one! We will need to look in our toolkits and ask, ‘What else can I try? What will help me to read *this* book?’”
- “Guess what? Sometimes reading *isn’t* tricky! When this happens, we still want to be the kinds of readers who check in on ourselves. It is so important to make sure that what we think is right, really *is* right. So, as I’m reading, I am always checking in with myself. I read a little bit, then I reread the page and I say to myself, ‘Wait, does that make sense? Does this fit with what is happening in the story?’ If it does, I just keep going.”
- “Readers, sometimes we get to the middle of our books, and we worry that the next page will just be too hard. When this happens, we can pause a moment, say what we think is coming next, and then use the story we have read and maybe even the picture on the page to ‘storytell’ what we think will happen next. This will help your brain get ready for the next part. Then you can read the next page using all you know about the story to help you!”
- “We know how it feels when we read something the right way, so we can pay attention to the feeling we get when something isn’t right. Like yesterday, Terrance thought what he read made sense, so he checked in with himself and said, ‘Wait, this doesn’t make sense!’ When that feeling creeps in, we need to stop and try something to figure out what’s going on. We can think, ‘What will help me figure this part out?’ And then we try it! Don’t forget our old trusty toolbox! If it helps, we keep going, and if it doesn’t we try something different.”

- “Not only can you look at the first part of words, but you can also look at the last part of words. We’ve been doing so much work around other parts of words, and now we can take that work and try it out in our reading work! We’ve been studying *-ing*, and *-ed*, and others. After I ask myself, ‘Does that look right? Does that sound right? Does that make sense?’”
- “There are going to be times when we come to words that are tricky because they are brand-new words. We’ve never seen or heard those words before! Readers, those times can be exciting and scary, all at the same time! When we come to a new and tricky word, we might guess that word because we do not want to skip over it. We read on and say to ourselves, ‘Did that make sense?’ You might Post-it to check with someone later to see if you really did understand the word.”
- “Sometimes when we are reading, there are parts that are confusing—really confusing! Like, all of a sudden, there’s a new character. Or everyone is in a new place. When readers come to those parts, we have to take time to retell what we’ve read to make sure it all fits together and makes sense.”
- “Readers, sometimes when we’re coming up to our words, we freeze. We’re like, ‘Holy moley! That word looks hard!’ We may *know* that word, but maybe we haven’t *seen* it before. We look at the first part of the word and then we think to ourselves, ‘What are all of the words that that word might be?’ Then I get a running start and keep thinking to myself, ‘What could this word be, what could this word be?’ I might think, ‘Let me make a good guess that would fit with what is happening.’ Then, I go back and get another running start and keep those same questions in my mind: ‘What is this story about? What could this word be?’ I say the first part of the word and make my best guess.”

## **Part Two: Readers Smooth Out the Rough Parts—After We Make Sure Our Reading Looks Right, Sounds Right, and Makes Sense, We Reread to Put It All Back Together**

- “Readers, we have been working so hard to get through the hard parts and make sure that our reading makes sense, but once everything looks right and makes sense, we still need to reread to make our reading sound smooth. So we read, fix up, and read again—putting it all back together!”
- “Readers, sometimes when we fix up our reading, it starts to sound a little robotic—we read, fix up, reread, read, fix up, reread, and in the middle of all that work we forget to care about the characters or the information or the book as a whole—what fun is that? Today I want to teach you that even after all that hard work, readers often go back and reread the whole book so they can learn and enjoy!”



- “Readers, we can share books with our friends by telling them about the story. We can also read the parts we love so they can hear what made us laugh or smile or sit on the edge of our seat. When we read to our friends, we can ask them to help us read smoothly by telling us if something sounds not quite right.”
- “Reading partners have very important jobs to do. We have to be good listeners and really think about the story that our partner is reading to us. Partners, we need to think to ourselves, the whole time we listen to our partner read, ‘Do I understand what is happening? Does the story make sense?’ If the answer is yes, we tell our partner to keep going. But if the answer is no, we ask our partner to stop reading, and then we figure out what’s happening in the story together.”
- “Reading partners can remind us to do our very best smooth reading. We can say to our partner, ‘Why don’t you go back and read that part again?’ Or ‘Let’s read that part together and make our voices really smooth.’”

### **Part Three: Readers Can Show Off Our Reading**

- “Readers can perform our readings for our loved ones. A way that we can get ready for our reading performances is to read and reread, revising the way we read and then choosing the way that sounds best.”
- “Readers can choose someone to read to and then pick a book that we know that person will love to hear. We can think of all the things that person likes and then try to find a book that matches that person’s interests.”
- “Readers practice reading their books so that it not only sounds smooth but has feeling in it. When we read, we can think of parts that make us feel something. Then when we read we can try to show those feelings with our face and our voice.”
- “Readers can help each other make our reading great. We can coach our reading partners as they read. We can suggest that our partner read more slowly or smoothly, or even tell them what they are doing well.”



## UNIT SIX

# Reading across Genres to Learn about a Topic

## *Informational Books, Stories, and Poems*

### MARCH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Organizing for the Unit

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

## Part Two: Growing Ideas from Information

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

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

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

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

### *Readers Figure Out Tricky Words and Learn New Vocabulary*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Word Study

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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





## UNIT SEVEN

# Dramatizing Characters and Deepening Our Comprehension in Reading Clubs

**APRIL/MAY**

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

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**I**n this unit on dramatizing characters, you will let children know that readers step into the shoes of the characters we meet in books, bringing those characters to life. This supports the work on characters from the literature section of the Common Core State Standards. That is, there is a thin line between reading well and dramatizing. Readers of stories often find ourselves almost becoming the main character, seeing through his or her eyes, experiencing all that the story brings.

You will help readers envision by inviting them into the world of acting and, through acting, into the important role of coming to understand characters with greater complexity. This unit combines two of last year's units into one extended six-week course. Our rationale is this: There is a playful yet vital relationship between reading and drama. When we read, both embodying the character and seeing through his or her eyes, what we really are doing is putting ourselves into the drama of the story—and this means coming to understand it in richer ways.

This character unit is distinct from the one you taught in November. Then, your focus was on helping readers get to know the characters in their books by paying close attention to their actions. Your readers, now approaching levels I/J/K, will have learned to synthesize the pages of their books into coherent storylines and to think about the relationship between the characters and the plot, to use a sense of story structure to support comprehension, and to retell. This unit aims toward quite different and distinct goals. This time, your goals are to help readers envision as they read, to use this capacity to envision to help them read with increasing fluency and richer comprehension—and to share this new understanding with other people.

You might decide to launch this unit with an invitation to children to become movie stars or directors, or you might instead put a spotlight on the idea that when we read with investment, we come to know characters so well that it's almost as if we *are* those characters. We become Ruby and Little Bear and the smallest Billy Goat and Koala Lou, stepping into their shoes and hooves and paws and claws. However you decide to rally children around this month's work, you'll want to convey that this unit is all about coming to know characters with even greater intimacy—and bringing characters and stories to life through storytelling and drama.

We've designed this unit so that children are reading independently and with partners during the first part of the unit and then in clubs for the rest of the unit. We think the first part of the unit can act as a rehearsal for the directors later on in the unit, collecting their thinking—their director's notes—about how a character might think and feel and how someone might act that out. According to the Common Core State Standards' speech and language section, students should be able to participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade-one topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups. They are asked to follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion) and to build on others' talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges.

Before the unit begins, you'll need to pull together a library that can help sustain your children's interest and reading levels. Pull out from your library all the beloved characters like Piggie and Elephant, Mr. Putter and Tabby Cat, Houndsley and Catina, Fly Guy, Iris and Walter, and George and Martha. Be sure that you find books at every level. For your beginning readers, the *Brand New Readers* series are lovely. There are many characters to study in this series: Dinah, Rosa, Ethan, Worm, and more. *PM Readers* from Rigby also has a series of easy character books. Children could study Bear and Ben or Sally and Tom. Remember, the books you select don't have to be from a series. They can be any book that features dynamic characters.

As you collect the books from which students will make their selections for the first part of the unit, remember that later in the unit you and your first graders will reorganize the books for reading clubs. If possible, you could put together sets of multiple copies of titles for clubs to share or baskets of separate books that feature the same character. Some classrooms decide to organize their baskets according to character attributes or hobbies instead of by series. You might have a basket of books that include Bossy Characters, Shy Characters, Characters Who Are Animals, and yet others that include Characters who Go to School or Characters Who Have Pets or Characters Who Love Sports. Clubs reading easier books (level G or lower) may need to share baskets like these since it can be difficult to find easy series that feature the same character in all the books. Some teachers choose to use some simpler fairy tale reader's theater texts for the final parts of the unit instead. There are many wonderful resources for reader's theater in the publishing world and on the Internet, and many teachers have started to collect these resources for just this unit. Remember that each reading club basket should contain at least six books so that partners have enough

books to make connections among them, but not so many books that kids never reread or stop reading long enough to talk and act out.

Be sure you keep in mind that readers who were assessed may well be ready to move up to more challenging books already. Some of them will be ready to move up to another level of text difficulty. The good news is that they'll be reading fiction books this whole month—so now is a good time to think about making those books be more challenging for those who are ready. This is something that the Common Core State Standards endorse as they discuss range of reading complexity. You needn't do fancy running records on assessment passages to move kids up—instead, ask them to read aloud bits of a leveled book and listen for fluency and accuracy, and then talk to determine comprehension. If you have some readers who have not progressed as you'd expect over the course of the year, now is a good time to blow the whistle, to declare this as an emergency, and to gather all stakeholders together around an intervention. Does this reader need to spend an hour after school, in the building, reading? Does this reader need to double the amount of reading he or she is doing at home?

## **Part One: Readers Read and Reread, Paying Attention to What Characters Are Thinking and Feeling, and Use Smooth Storytelling Voices to Bring Out Characters' Thoughts and Feelings**

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You might begin the unit with an invitation: "To kick off our new unit we are going to be *movie stars*! How many of you watch *Max and Ruby* on TV? How about *Little Bear*? Do you know that movie stars play those characters? Well, guess what? We are going to *become* those characters in our books!" Or you might instead begin this unit with a little read-aloud work during which you get children to act out parts in their spots as you read. Some teachers may choose to use characters from modern-day fiction that children know well, while others may choose to use familiar fairy tale and folktale characters that children studied in kindergarten. That is, you have choices.

However you decide to launch this unit, you will want to set all of your children up to reenact, in unison, as they listen. That is, if you read aloud, "He leaned forward and listened, straining to hear a sound," then you can expect your children, all sitting on the rug before you, to each lean forward, cocking an ear, straining to hear. You'll find this works well if *you*, as you read, register what you are reading on your face, with your hands, with your shoulders. According to Webb's Depth of Knowledge, this is a level four skill for first graders. You won't actually expect children to stand up and walk around as you read aloud, but it is amazing how much acting can be done while sitting in one spot on the rug! For example, you might read *The Three Little Bears* and say something like, "How about if we try standing in the shoes of our characters—right here, right now. I'm going to read *The Three Little Bears*. So right now, while you are sitting here, each of you can *be* Goldilocks." Then start reading aloud. Model acting out different parts and show what you are thinking. "What is Goldilocks thinking inside her head?" You'll make sure that your face, gestures, and intonation register these thoughts and encourage the children to join in. You might stop when the three

bears come home to find Goldilocks asleep in bed and say something like, “Right now, think about what Goldilocks might be thinking. Partner A, pretend be Goldilocks and say those feelings aloud to Partner B, who’s going to pretend to be the baby bear. You might even pretend that you are saying it in a surprised voice. Turn and *act*.”

After you’ve engaged the class in a dramatic read-aloud, you could say to children, “Oh my goodness! You all are so good at almost becoming the character as you read! I’m thinking that what we just did with the read-aloud book could be something that we do in our minds as we read *any* book! It would mean trying to become the character as we read, thinking, ‘I bet she’s really mad now,’ and then giving the words that the character says a mad tone. And it would mean using our best storytelling voices to give that character expression. And it would *also* mean noticing when the character’s feelings might be changing, and making sure that the voice in our head changes with the character’s feelings. Do you think you’re up for that?” This will all feel very natural for your students—most of them were born to act!—but meanwhile, you will know that as they do this work, they are having fun. In fact, they will also be doing important work outlined by the Common Core State Standards in the fundamentals section under fluency; they will be finding character feelings and identifying point of view in various parts of their books. And they will be practicing reading grade-level texts orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression.

After the class has had a go at a shared acting experience during this first read-aloud, you’ll tell them that they can do this sort of acting or stepping into a character’s shoes with *any* book and with *any* character. You’ll tell them that as they read on their own and later with clubs during this unit, they’ll want to read paying particular attention to how characters speak and act—to the tones of voice and gestures they imagine characters might use if the book were to be produced as a movie or a play.

As your children begin stepping into the shoes of their characters, you could set them up to do a little character study work. You might suggest that they leave Post-its in places where a character’s feelings really change. Then—and this is the important part—when children meet with a partner after independent reading, be sure that one partner actually reads aloud a section of his or her text to the other. The conversations will go like this: “I think in this part she is really sad because she was left behind, no one is with her, and she’s even getting scared that she’ll be forgotten. So it goes like this. . . .” And then the child would read that part aloud. With your help as a coach, in time the listening partner should be able to talk back to the first reader, saying something like, “You said she was getting scared, but you gotta make her voice sound that way,” and then the listening partner will also read the excerpt aloud. Even if the children struggle a bit to talk back to each other’s enactments, be sure that one person after another reads the excerpt aloud. Your goal for this unit is not only character work but also reading with fluency, prosody, and phrasing. Research has shown that reader’s theater and multiple rereads make the world of difference.

You might let kids in on a secret about acting—you have to *read* the story, many times, until you can read it very smoothly. Even professional TV actors sound choppy the first time they read their lines. Help children work on fluency through rereading and storytelling both portions of texts and entire texts multiple times. Some teachers

we know have used *iCarly* to introduce children to the world of actors—and the work actors do as they get ready to say their lines. “Table read” clips from *iCarly* show a roomful of actors reading a new script to prepare for each week’s show. These clips show children that when actors are preparing to storytell or act, it’s essential that we read and reread multiple times, so that we get our voices as smooth as can be—and so that we get the intonation and expression just right. Your young readers will learn another important lesson from *iCarly*, too: Just because these actors play the same character again and again doesn’t mean that they can stop practicing. Stepping into the shoes of a character means coming to know that person so well that you can play the part in your sleep—and getting to that point only happens when you read a script (or a book, in the case of our children) again and again and again. Practice makes perfect.

For those of your students who are reading below level I, most of their partner time will include reading whole books or large parts of books to each other, with the listening partner learning to coach that reading, as described above. At this time of year, however, a good number of children in your class will likely be reading higher-level books as well. For those students who are reading level J and above, you will want to support them in choosing at least one “twin book” per week. Twin books are titles that children choose to read together with their partners. This is important for readers who are reading longer books that cannot be read aloud in less than ten minutes. With longer books in hand, partners often run into trouble in their partner time. Either they spend their whole partner time reading one child’s book out loud, or they read such small portions of their books that the listening partner has a hard time knowing what is going on in the book and thus lacks focus as she listens. If the children each have a copy of their twin book to read independently, then the partners can choose important parts of the twin book that they have both read and do deeper thinking work as they act out and discuss those parts.

You will also teach your children to think about what’s happening to a character to match their voices to the story. A character who is being bullied will need to sound defeated and scared. Meanwhile, a character who is being praised by a coach will sound confident and happy. Punctuation, too, can guide children’s voices. “We are going to the park?” will sound different than “We are going to the park!” It also means something different. Teach children that tag words such as *yelled*, *shouted*, and *whispered* give readers cues about how to read a line. Then, too, you’ll want to point out that readers need to differentiate between when a narrator is talking and when a character is talking and to alter their voices accordingly. In writing workshop, your children will have begun to use (or approximate the use of) quotation marks, and they can also rely on these as *readers* as signals for when a character is talking.

During independent reading, children can read, putting Post-its on places in the text where the character has strong feelings. In partnerships, they can revisit these parts. For example, if a child discovers that a character is feeling angry, she will read the bit of text that conveys anger with a sneer on her face and in a harsh voice. If her partner questions that the character is angry, she could reread that part of the text, this time trying a new facial expression and tone of voice that better matches this new vision. Perhaps the character is, in fact, nervous, not angry. If so, the child could now



read the text with a shaky, worried voice. Partners would then discuss which feeling matches what has happened in the story. They will return to the text to point out parts that prove or make the case for one feeling over another.

As children grow more confident, making conclusions about how characters feel and why they act the way they do, remind them that characters are complicated. Characters in books, like people in real life, don't only act one way all the time. Then too, characters change. Nudge children to read on in a text, thinking, "Do these pages of the text go with my ideas about how the character is feeling, thinking, or acting?" and to Post-it parts where they notice the character change. You may want to teach children to think between two or three related pages of text—say, a page at the start, one in the middle, and one at the end, to talk and think very specifically about how a character changes across the storyline. In this way, we can pull in some of the work we did in the earlier character unit on retelling and finding key details. Then, we can add this more complex work of thinking about changes not just in feelings but in the way the characters think or live.

Though children will likely be reading different books than their partners (though if they can have the same books, that is always helpful), they can still read and reread significant parts of their books to their partners, thinking about how they will read aloud these parts and be ready to explain why they read the way they did. Then the two partners can decide together whether the intonation and expression used actually reflect how the characters feel. The listening partner may give alternative suggestions about how to read a part, or the two might divide the parts in that section and "play" it out together. Partners can also give each other advice, prompting one another to read a section with more feeling or to read it with a different feeling. That is, although the focus of this part is on stepping into the shoes of a character and acting, children will also begin to step into the role of director, which they will adopt in the next part.

## **Part Two: Readers—Like Actors and Directors—Find the Important Moments in Stories and Talk and Think More Deeply about Them**

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During the first part of this unit, you invited your students to think like actors as they read, studying the characters' feelings, words, and actions and then acting out their stories or scenes. Your students used gestures and expressions that reflected the characters' feelings and intentions that they inferred from the words and pictures. In this part, as a way to help your students think more deeply about their characters, you'll teach them about the role of the director. You'll teach your students how to read their texts more closely, similar to the way that directors read scripts. You'll teach them how to choose critical scenes in their stories to act out. You'll show them how to envision everything about the scene, including the setting and where the characters might be situated, as well as details of the characters' expressions, tone, and body language.

For this part, then, your students will work on envisioning with power and detail, using text evidence to support their ideas and images. They'll also orchestrate comprehension strategies in this part. They'll use all they know about inferring, while



integrating the story elements, to make vivid mental images. As directors, they'll determine importance as they read and summarize the text (or scene) for their actors, helping them to envision the scene before acting it out. Because your students' texts may offer less picture support than they have in the past, it's an opportune time to teach your kids to envision well. After all, studies show that envisioning is an integral part of reading with engagement, and the act of making mental pictures as one reads is strongly linked to deeper comprehension. As the texts get longer and the picture support diminishes, many young readers need to learn how to rely on vivid mental images to help them hold onto meaning.

To envision well, readers need to read closely enough to pick up and use clues from the text that inform meaning, and they need to draw on all they've experienced themselves to add more to the text than what's explicitly detailed. You'll want to model this during read-aloud by pausing to look up from the text to say, "I'm trying to imagine in my mind what this looks like. I've never been to this school but I'm picturing it is like our school—red brick, three stories tall—I'll read on and see." If you have English language learners in your class, as you envision aloud you might quickly sketch what you imagine on a white board or chart paper. As you read on in the story about the school, it's likely that new information in the text will lead you to revise your initial mental pictures. "Oh, now I realize it's a *white clapboard* schoolhouse! And I'm getting the idea it's much smaller than our school, because. . . ." Be sure to point out explicitly the ways in which close reading informs your mental pictures, helping you continually revise those pictures in light of new information. All of this will help your children dramatize their books—and it will be fun.

You might begin with a minilesson that explains the turn they'll take in their work with texts. "First graders, you have been doing such a good job of reading like actors, using your voices and gestures to actually *be* the characters. But now I want to teach you about another person who works in movies—the director! The director has a very important job. Just like the actors, the director reads the story or script and marks it up with notes. But directors don't just focus on one character—they study everything. They know the story and the characters better than anyone!" You'll go on to tell your students that as the director, they'll have actors act out the most important parts of the story while the director watches carefully to see that the actors are portraying the characters with emotion. "You see, the director is the boss—and she can say 'Cut!' at any time. After the director yells, 'Cut!' she gives advice and ideas about how the actors can do a better job being the characters."

At the beginning of this part, you will want to help your students establish a routine within their partnerships to do this actor and director work. One possible routine is to have Partner One be the director who identifies an important chunk of text and a character for the actor, Partner Two, to try. Then Partner Two acts out that important part from the book, with the director watching closely. The two partners then discuss the scene, possibly trying it again a little differently, as per the director's suggestions. Finally, the partners can switch actor-director roles and do it again in a different part of the book or in another book. In this routine, it's vital that both partners know the book

well, so they either need to read it together during partner time or during independent reading time to be ready for their partner work.

If your students are going to choose parts to act out and also give each other advice, you will want them to choose these parts of the text thoughtfully. Finding the most important part of a story in level H/I/J and higher books will be harder than it was in earlier levels. Often the important or most dramatic part of level A–F stories is in the last couple pages of text—when the laugh comes or when the text on each page is summed up by the last page. Higher-level books like *Titch* and *Mr. Putter and Tabby*, on the other hand, have more pages and chapters, and thus more parts that feel important. You might teach your students some ways to sort through everything to get to the parts that matter. For example, you'll teach them to notice that when a character's feelings change suddenly—like when Piggie and Gerald go from being so excited about their new toy, to shocked and dismayed when it breaks—that is usually a good indication of importance. You may also show them the important part may be when the character gets something in the middle of the book that he has wanted since the beginning of the story.

You might teach readers to reread and pick the places in their books where something big happens where a character has or solves a problem, where something funny or surprising happens, and act out those parts. Research shows that rereading and reenacting the story multiple times allows students to deepen their understanding of the text and provides opportunities to increase their fluency and improve their phrasing, as discussed in the NAEP Reading Frameworks (2011). You may have to teach your students about the kind of advice a director might offer. "Readers, the director is the one who guides the actors to speak, move, and make facial expressions so as to bring out the meaning of the story. For example, the director might say, 'In this part of the book, Iris is very worried about Walter being lost. You need to sound more worried. Make your face look worried when you read.'"

You might also want to teach your students that directors can ask actors to try out a scene in a different way. For the demonstration you could enlist the help of another adult or a child. You could play the director and select the part of Puppy Mudge when Puppy Mudge first sees Fluffy the cat. For your first scene, you might suggest that your helper act bouncy and excited. Then suggest that your actor partner act more hesitant and mellow. You could demonstrate how you go back to the book to figure out which one was better, showing how to use text evidence to back up a particular dramatization. To reach all of our readers it's helpful to use an example in which the director's revision to the scene can be clearly supported through the illustrations and the text. You'll also want to teach your students that directors might prepare for a dramatization by telling the actor how the character is feeling, thinking, or acting. For example, the director might say, "In this part Mudge is feeling excited because in the book it says. . . and in this picture it shows. . . ." You may decide to teach the directors to put Post-its on the pages beforehand as a way to prepare. You might also teach your children that directors, too, leave little sticky notes in the text that help them direct their actors to more closely match the story. You could suggest that they even add speech and thought bubbles into the pictures.

For the last week of this part you'll want to reframe the structure for partnerships so that partners are working with another set of partners in drama reading clubs. Because many of your students by now will be reading level H, I, and J books, lots of partnerships will be reading in series, which means they will read several books featuring particular characters, and they'll get to know these characters with real intimacy. In this case, reading club baskets may be gathered around particular characters that appear in more than one text.

It's worth considering that your children may need reminders of what it means to be a successful reading club member. You may want to create a class chart that lists tips for how to be a good listener, how to give one another prompts, how to talk off of each other's ideas, and how to take turns speaking. The Speaking and Listening section of the Common Core State Standards states that children at this age should be able to participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade one topics and texts, and to follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion). It also notes they should be able to build on others' conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges and to ask questions to clear up any confusion about the topics and texts. You may want to scaffold children's conversations throughout the day, such as during read-aloud, to be sure they are on the right track.

Some teachers choose to build the excitement for reading clubs by telling their students that for the next week or so they will be joining a theater troupe (which will actually be their reading club). In their theater troupe (or reading club) your children will get together in groups of three or four to share their books and act them out. Typically, each club will have a few books in a basket that the students will have all read. You can also consider giving some groups of children read-aloud or shared reading texts to act out, because these provide excellent scaffolds for lifting children into higher texts.

Each theater troupe will divide up roles, and members will take on different characters in their clubs. For example, one child reads the text while the other kids in the club act it out. Or a child could take on the role of director and give advice to the other children as they act out parts. Some teachers will collect scripts to use in this part of the unit, giving their students the opportunity to read more dialogue and interpret stage directions. No matter which materials you choose for this, your students will now do the important work of acting out longer pieces of text, bringing many characters to life.

When you are ready to launch the theater troupe reading clubs, you might start by telling your students that in real life, there are theater troupes that dramatize specific playwrights, such as William Shakespeare or Anton Chekhov. "In our classroom, instead of choosing a playwright, your theater troupe will select a particular character or a series that you'll dramatize. The other thing about theater troupes that you should know is that the people involved switch roles and take on different jobs. One person might be the director for one scene and then an actor playing the main character in another, and a minor character in yet another. The important thing is that people in acting troupes are flexible as they get together to act out stories the best they can."

You might go on to say something like this: “Usually dramatic performances include several actors ‘on stage’ and a director who is behind the scenes, which means he or she is off-stage helping the actors do their jobs better. All of these people come together to tell stories as best they can. To pull off the best show possible means working together, and it also means being sure to understand the characters so well that you can predict how they will think and behave, not just in one scene or another but from the moment the character enters to the moment she exits.”

Children can take turns being the director, taking charge of the theater troupe, making sure everyone has a character to play, and stopping action to give advice to the actors. The child who assumes the role of director will need to look at stories and characters through a director’s eyes, thinking about how the author may have chosen to spotlight certain things to help the reader understand more about a character.

If the director isn’t quite sure about how a part should be acted out, you might teach your children about the idea of a “table read,” where the director and the actor(s) run through the text and figure it out together. Together they will decide how best to act out the part, using text evidence to back up their ideas.

As you progress through this unit, you’ll aim to lift the level of children’s envisioning and their dramatization of the text. Remind children that readers—and actors and directors, too—pay attention not only to *what* a character does but also *how* the character does these things. Does the text give any clues about the character’s gestures? About the way a character walks or sits or closes the door? If the text says that a character slumps in the chair, then the reader needs to ask, “Why does she sit like that? Is she tired? Bored? What’s going on?” Remind children that some of these clues are in the pictures and that strong readers use *all* the information they have to learn about their characters. Readers also pay attention to the way characters talk—the words they choose, their tone of voice, the emotional cues the author adds with dialogue. All of these give hints about what kind of people live in the world of a story. Children may point out that the text doesn’t always *say* how a character does an action. Help them understand that readers always fill in the gaps of a text as they read by drawing on all they know from this book, from other books, and from their lives. These strategies and ways of thinking about text are addressed in the Common Core State Standards.

You will also want to convey to students that a character might feel more than one emotion in a scene. To get a character just right, a director will often have an actor try on a number of ways to read one bit of dialogue, pushing that person to interpret the text in a few different ways—and to switch from one emotion to another if needed. Readers might look to the pictures, the whole of the story, and personal experiences to decide how best to read each part of the text. This helps children think and talk about the characters in their texts. Many teachers have even created charts off of these mini-lessons titled, “CUT! Try It Again and Think About. . .” or “Advice Directors Can Give.”

You might also capitalize on the director’s role children are playing to help your class think about the whole story. Teach them that it is the director’s job to think about *all* of the characters and to consider how one character’s actions fit with another. This is an opportunity to teach your students about character relationships. Guide your students, as directors, to look at a whole section of text and ask questions like, “How

does this character need to act for the other character to say what she says?" So, for example, if the bully says, "Get out of my way!" and then the little boy jumps and says, "Yes, sir!" then the director needs to think about how the bully should sound for the little boy to jump. This work will remind our students to think about the whole story even as they select smaller parts to work on with partners.

### **Part Three: Readers Pay Attention to Patterns to Predict and Understand Characters—And We Share Our Discoveries to Grow Our Understandings**

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Now that your students are doing strong club work, imagining and acting out their characters, you'll want children to make new discoveries and find new insights about the stories that they are trying to dramatize. You'll also want to steer them to do even deeper character work, noticing patterns that help readers predict what a character might do next and who that character is as a person. That is, you'll be pushing your readers to get inside a character not only moment to moment but across an entire story, synthesizing what they notice throughout the course of the text.

The work with characters can gain depth if you use experiences within your classrooms to teach children to observe astutely and to make and revise theories about characters. For example, you might point out in one day's minilesson that in life as well as in books, we watch how people act, noticing especially how they respond to events; from this we formulate tentative theories about them. You might say something like, "I noticed the way you all pulled together the other day when Jeremy was hurt. I saw Randalio making a bandage out of a paper towel, and from his actions I got the idea that he is quick thinking and resourceful. And I watched the way Leo kept out of everyone's way and then found quiet ways to help, and I thought, 'That's just the way Leo acts during morning jobs, too.' I saw a pattern! So I thought, 'This gives me the idea that Leo is observant, and that his quietness helps him be especially thoughtful.'" Then debrief by saying something like, "Do you see how I made theories about Leo and Randalio based on their actions? Readers do that, too." Tell children that just as we grow theories about people around us, we can also grow theories about characters in books. "Our characters also behave in similar ways. We can follow their actions and behaviors and see if we can notice patterns as well. Patterns are in books for a reason," you might say to children. "When you see a pattern, it's as if the author is saying to the reader, 'Pay attention! This is important.' Patterns give us important clues about characters. They help us understand who characters are."

Recognizing patterns, whether this is a recurring setting/environment or a pattern of behavior, will get students to anticipate the next thing that will happen. Their predictions and ideas could become a springboard for conversations with their clubs. When club members share what they know about a character or what they know about how stories go, this can help the whole club put together the parts of their books. Children should read on the lookout for patterns. You may encourage readers to use Post-its to consider and then answer, "Why is this pattern happening?" They



may bring these Post-its to their club as material to spark a conversation. This practice is discussed in the writing section of the Common Core State Standards.

When students have set themselves up to think like this, to anticipate and predict based on what they've read, they often find themselves surprised by the actions of characters they thought they had down pat. Children can be on the lookout for the one time their character acts differently or for how the pattern will have a twist. Readers will begin to read with eyes wide open and an alertness to being surprised to catch the one time when the character or the plot does something unexpected. When students pay close attention to patterns, they find the things that characters always, sometimes, or never do, and they see the ways characters change and then act "out of character." When club members share the patterns they are noticing, it helps all the members of the club begin to understand character development and how stories work.

You will want your students to be able to compare and contrast their stories. The Common Core State Standards suggest that kids should be reading stories and thinking about how the events and the characters are similar and different. Invite kids to look for and think about how their characters are acting and behaving across books in their character club baskets. For example, when Cherry Sue invites Poppleton over for meals again and again, a student might name the action and then add what it teaches him about the character by saying something like, "Cherry Sue keeps inviting her new neighbor, Poppleton, over for meals. Hmm, what a friendly, outgoing neighbor she is!" Add on to this work by teaching your students that although authors provide us lots of information about characters, we can sort through the information to decide what seems really important. We might teach kids to ask, "What does my character do over and over across the books?" and "What problems seem to be happening over and over to my character?" The hope is that children will have thoughts while they read and will notice patterns in the kinds of thoughts they are having.

You may have reading clubs that aren't reading about any *one* character; rather, they are reading about types of characters (e.g., bossy characters, boys and girls who are best friends, or characters who own pets). As clubs are dramatizing their books they can also think about how the characters, problems, and events that occur in like books are similar and different. For example, characters in their stories may face a similar problem but will deal with it in different ways. Or characters may share traits or quirks. Club members can be on the lookout for patterns that don't just happen in one book, for one character, but that happen across books and characters.

As children do the work of this unit, they'll likely begin to form ideas about characters. Once they see that Frog continues to help Toad again and again, they'll realize that Frog is the kind of character who is a good friend, always there to help. Or they may do this in a more structured way, perhaps by intentionally collecting patterns they notice about their character across the books in their club basket. As they share these theories with their club members, teach them that sometimes theories need to be revised, especially as we read on in a book or across books about the same character. One of the strategies that provide foundation for theory development is accumulating the story across pages. Teach readers that they can stop after chunks of texts and ask themselves, "What is going on with our character so far?" or "What do I know about our character so



far?” As a child reads a second book she can ask, “How does this go with what I already know about this character?” The Common Core State Standards discuss these questions as “comparing and contrasting the adventures and experiences of characters in stories.”

As clubs look at their books together, teach them to talk about what the patterns teach them about how a character tends to feel and think—and how he might express himself. Children might also consider how their characters sound and the kinds of expressions and gestures they would use. Then they could each take on one character and act out a scene or two from the book, “becoming” the characters, as they learned to do earlier in the unit.

## **Part Four: Readers Read and Reread More Challenging Books with Our Book Clubs**

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For the final stretch of this unit, the last part, you will want to move each of your reading clubs toward more challenging texts. As they read in the company of others within their clubs, your students will help each other with text challenges, and they’ll make meaning through their talk. Of course, as you ratchet up their text levels, you’ll want to offer book introductions and small-group instruction to scaffold students’ reading.

Because you’re moving children toward more difficult texts, much of your instruction in this part might, in fact, revisit some of the things you’ve already taught during this unit. This will allow the students to solidify their understanding of this new work while also reading texts that may be at the edge of their comfort zone.

To organize for this part, your students will continue to shop for just-right books for their independent reading time, and during reading clubs, your students will work in a series (or with a basket of books) that is at or near their instructional reading level. As they read and work through the challenges, they’ll also focus their attention on the characters as they apply all they’ve learned so far. Again, because the reading will present more of a challenge, you may want to revisit some of the teaching you’ve done in the first few weeks of this unit.

At first in their reading clubs, the partners will read the same titles, offering each other support for word solving, reading with fluency, and monitoring for meaning. For example, if the partners were ratcheted up into *Franklin* books, they might make a plan to read the first book together, helping each other with the tricky parts. Once they read it and reread it so it sounds smooth, they’ll think and talk about the characters in their text, using all they’ve learned thus far about what readers do to deeply understand their characters and their stories.

As the week progresses, the hope is that your students will grow much more comfortable in these reading club texts, and this new level will become their independent reading level. For some children, this may take a bit more time, so their independent baggies will contain just-right books, of course, while their reading club might well have the more challenging texts. Other children will seamlessly transition, so what was the instructional level early in the week becomes the students’ new independent level by the end of the week.

For children who continue to be challenged at the earlier levels, this part provides a good opportunity to work closely with them in strategy groups and guided reading lessons to provide the extra support or the specialized instruction they may need.

As the unit begins to wind down, you will want to celebrate the hard work that your students have done by having clubs each perform a book. They can each choose a final story—the one that they most care about—to present to the class, to their parents, or to whoever you invite to their celebration. Have students revisit a story that they have worked on with their club, not just by reading it together but by having quite an extensive talk-around. Have them rehearse for a day or two and then have them present, with little attention to props and more attention to the tone, facial expressions, and enthusiasm that they bring to their reading.

## Word Study/Phonics/Shared Reading

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With only a few months left of school, you'll want to make sure that your instruction matches the needs of all your children. The tendency is to try to squeeze in what kids performing below the grade's benchmark need to know according to the CCSS. Unfortunately, this squeeze will only frustrate kids. Instead, continue to study the data you have collected to plan your next steps for these children. Kids scoring below benchmark know less than seventy-five high-frequency words and usually confuse simple short vowel patterns and simple blends (such as /bl/ and /cr/) and digraphs (such as /ch/ and /sh/). Some of these children might know these short vowel patterns (such as /at/, /an/, and /it/) in isolation, but when these children see these words as they read, they don't make the connection. According to the Common Core State Standards, students should be able to decode regularly spelled one-syllable and two-syllable words in their reading. You will want to support this work by doing plenty of work during word study on how we can help ourselves read a word. You might teach students how to break up words by onset and rime. For example, if they were to break up the word *chop*, you would want students to break up the word so that they first read the onset *ch* and then read the rime *op* and put it together. You might also teach them the strategy of using other words they know to help them read a new word. For example, if a student is reading the word *grip*, they can use the *gr* in *green* and the *ip* in *ship* to help them read the word.

Help students transfer this knowledge to their reading by working on these strategies within the context of shared reading. Prompt students to notice patterns as you read a text together. To get kids to use what they have been learning about breaking up words by onset and rime, you might say, "Look at the first part of the word and the last part of the word," to get students to attend to the parts of words rather than individual letters. You might start by collecting anchor pictures and words used during word study that children know well, and have these anchors available during small-group shared reading. You can help children make connections by saying, "What word on the chart can help you solve this new word?" For example, one anchor picture on the chart could be *can*, and the word in the text could be *fan*. Whether you use

simple vowel patterns or blends, helping kids make these connections will support kids in transferring what they learned in word study into their independent reading. Sometimes saying, “This is what we learned in word study; now let’s use it to figure out this word in our reading” will help children make the connection.

If most of your children know at least seventy-five high-frequency words, they use many short vowel patterns correctly, and they use many simple blends and digraphs, then they’re right where you want them at this point in the year. You’ll want to continue to support children with word work in these areas so that they are flexible with their knowledge and so that they use it to problem-solve in reading. You might challenge kids to conduct three-way and four-way sorts with patterns they have already learned. You might begin to focus on mixed vowel spelling patterns. For example, you might ask kids to sort *at/it/ot/ut*. This sort is more challenging because the vowels are mixed. You might also move onto doing mixed pattern sorting such as an */op/it/ug/* sort. You’ll also want to solidify kids’ knowledge of short vowels as they begin to move into long vowels and ask students to sort by conducting vowel sorts. Ask children to conduct a picture sort where they listen for the middle vowel. For example, they might sort pictures *crash/pig/nut* by the vowel sound they hear.

This unit may be a good time to practice reader’s theater as part of shared reading. Reader’s theater gives the children authentic reasons to do repeated readings of a shared text. This work leads to increased practice with fluency, comprehension, and decoding. Prompt students to notice the spelling patterns you have been studying during word study. During shared reading you may also want to zoom in on the work of reading with expression. The most obvious way to do this would be to help readers attend to punctuation. You may decide to write some reader’s theater pieces during interactive writing. As a class you can reread these pieces during shared reading!

<b>If you decide to teach. . .</b>	<b>Suggested lessons in <i>Words Their Way, 4th Edition</i></b>	<b>Suggested lessons in <i>Phonics Lessons 1st Grade,</i> Pinnell &amp; Fountas</b>
Inflected endings (-ing, -s)		WS2, WS3 (pp. 377–384) WS5 (p. 389)
Initial blends and digraphs (e.g., /st/, /th/) Final blends and digraphs (e.g., /mp/, /nt/, /st/, /sh/, /th/, /ch/)	*Use activities that students know from beginning sounds Adapt 4-27 to 4-31 (pp. 123–125) 5-6 to 5-10 (pp. 157–159) 5-15 (p. 162) (These can be adapted to final blends and digraphs.)	LS7 to LS11 (pp. 221–240) LS17, LS18 (pp. 261–268)
High-frequency words	pp. 182–183	HF1 to HF8 (pp. 325–356)
Spelling patterns CVC	pp. 148–150, 5-12 to 5-19 (pp. 160–164)	SP1 to SP4 (pp. 283–298)



## UNIT EIGHT

# Readers Can Read about Science Topics to Become Experts

MAY/JUNE

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

The classic image of breakthrough science is that of Galileo eyeing a swinging lamp in church, of Newton lazing under the apple tree, of Archimedes running out of his bath and into the streets, shouting “Eureka!” It was in church that Galileo discovered the pendulum, under a tree that Newton discovered gravity, and in his bathtub that Archimedes discovered how to measure density. It may seem that many scientists “discover” astonishing things alone, during the most mundane of activities. In fact, these scientists, and the generations of scientists that follow them, are part of a grand conversation with other scientists on the issues of the day. They study a topic with determined focus, they live, breathe, and talk this topic with a community of scientists. They ask questions, develop hypotheses, devise possible experiments to test these hypotheses—a process we refer to as the “scientific method.”

The vision that drives this unit is equally grand. It is children sitting around a table, talking animatedly about a scientific topic; asking questions, developing hypotheses, devising possible experiments to test these hypotheses. In this unit of study, we ask you to imagine the collaborative work of today’s scientists, the kind of work that goes on at Apple or Google or NASA, and believe that such creative scientific work can occur in your classroom. You’ll group your readers around a topic, teaching them to study this topic with focus. You’ll help them to develop a base of knowledge on this topic by reading and discussing it, adopting its “insider” language, comparing and contrasting various texts on this topic. Once readers develop this base of knowledge, you’ll want to push further, teaching them to question, hypothesize, experiment. We hope that in your classroom today, you’ll sow seeds for the “Eurekas!” of tomorrow.

This unit is integrative—it connects reading, writing, and science. Your students will be reading about science in the reading workshop, writing about science in the writing workshop, and functioning like young scientists in the science workshop. Think about the unit as linked to two sister units—one in the writing workshop (see that write-up) and one in the science workshop. The unit is aligned to the Common Core State Standards for first grade. The Common Core State Standards claim that by the end of first grade, students should be able to describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text—which is heady work for six-year-olds! The Common Core State Standards also suggest that first grade is a perfect age for students to engage in “shared research.” This unit provides opportunities for that research.

The unit that we describe here could be adapted for use with any variety of science units. We’re writing the unit as if you will put the topic Properties of Matter at the center of science time, but of course you could make a different choice. The reason we recommend this topic is because it has an elasticity that can allow a range of learners to become involved with the topic. It’s broad enough to pertain to lots of different books, experiments, and yes, to lots of different vehicles! For example, if you elected to engage the whole class in a study of the life cycle of a butterfly, there might well be more accessible texts on that topic. However that subject is a narrow one for a whole-class month-long inquiry. There are not as many subtopics or applications within a topic as narrow as “life cycles of butterflies” as there are within the subject Properties of Matter. Although Properties of Matter is a great topic for a science study and a write-to-learn study, it is less ideal for a first-grade reading workshop. Students who are, for example, reading books at levels I and J should be reading something like a book a day. Then provisioning your class with books for a month-long inquiry on Properties of Matter would require you to provide something like twenty books on this topic for your readers of level I/J books. The truth is, you’d be lucky to have four, not twenty, such books. Granted, the truly resourceful teacher can use the public library as a source for books, locate webinars on the subject, and so forth. Still, it is crucial that at the start of the study, you need to take stock of your resources and your children’s needs as readers, and proceed accordingly.

In a science unit on Properties of Matter, children might pursue an essential question such as, “What are some properties of solids, liquids, and gases?” This question could motivate a lot of experimentation involving different materials, such as oil, water, sand, plastic, rubber, and so on. As we explained in the writing version of this unit, Properties of Matter has the advantage of being a topic that is conducive to experimentation. First graders could speculate over how different substances mix with water—and the good news is, young experimenters needn’t wait long for data to be in. During previous years, we suggested children study insects during this science-reading-writing unit, and that topic has the advantage of being one with easily locatable texts. But collecting data on how animals grow and change won’t be able to happen in the same day, as an experiment on watching what happens when you mix oil and water will.

We recommend you collect a small text set of books on the topic you'll study that you can imagine reading aloud to the class. As you do this, be sure the books will support the instruction you want to give. If you want to teach the importance of headings and subheadings in nonfiction texts, be sure at least one of these books has those text features. As you do so, remember that some books may address the topic tangentially. A book on rocks, for example, could qualify as part of this unit! When you manage to collect relevant books, categorize them by both level of text difficulty and by subtopic so that children can read several overlapping texts. It is not an easy thing to provide a class of first graders with enough texts on Properties of Matter to keep students "in books." There are a few ways you can proceed. First, you can track down more books on the topic and purchase them. You can visit our website ([www.readingandwriting-project.com](http://www.readingandwriting-project.com)) for some links to vendors such as Booksource, as well as websites such as [www.zoobooks.com](http://www.zoobooks.com) or suggested titles that align to this topic of study as well as to your students' reading levels. Ideally, of course, you will sort your books by reading level and subtopic so that one basket might contain several level J/K books on a specific topic such as solids.

On the other hand, even if you work hard to provision your students with some books on this topic, chances are really good that you won't have enough accessible books on Properties of Matter to sustain their reading lives across the length of the unit. That is okay, because if necessary you can use Properties of Matter as your whole-class shared reading inquiry. Meanwhile this whole-class work can serve as a demonstration, supporting children with their own, more independent inquiries that they'll conduct on topics for which you do have texts. That is, if you do not have enough accessible books for all your students to read about Properties of Matter, then you'll need to channel them to read about other topics. All is not lost, however—because your students can all be engaged in a study, and meanwhile you and the class can practice doing some work on the whole-class text set. Then students could apply and adapt that work to the text set of books they are reading at the time. If the topics for your baskets come from New York City's Scope and Sequence, these baskets would be labeled Properties of Matter, Animal Diversity, and Weather and Seasons. You might well decide to group books by your children's interests, in which case the "bins" might be labeled Dinosaurs or Rocks.

## Preparing for the Unit

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Preparing for any unit always involves collecting the texts that students will be reading and fore-fronting them. In this unit, you'll need to collect the texts around the whole-class topic, which we are assuming is Properties of Matter. You will also need to collect enough texts for kids to be kept "in books," which presumably means baskets of leveled books that cluster around other topics. It will be best if these other topics have been previously studied during the year. This means children will be able to approach those books with some of the same intellectual support that you are providing them in the work with Properties of Matter. That is, children already know a lot about insects, so they



can look at insect books and collect domain-specific words, then make a point of talking about the books and their ideas using those terms. This will be possible because of the whole-class work you have presumably done earlier in the year about that topic. Think about the other topics your class has studied, and see if you can also create text sets containing texts on those topics. As we describe some of the resources that you might gather around the whole-class inquiry, this should spark you to consider whether you can gather similar resources around the small-group inquiry topics. Remember, too, that part of the fun of an investigation is that learners go out on a search, turning the world upside down in an effort to find ways to learn about a topic. Your children will be happy to join you in collecting books, brochures, diagrams, videos, clips of television shows, podcasts, and the like related to the topics they're studying.

The portion of this unit focusing on the inquiry work children are doing during science time and the writing workshop will probably revolve around a whole-class inquiry based on a sequence of read-aloud texts. You may or may not have enough books for kids to extend some of that learning to texts that they can read on the same topics. This means that preparing for the unit will certainly require that you create a text set of read-aloud materials that can teach the big concepts and domain-specific vocabulary of your study. The class work with these books will also demonstrate to youngsters what readers do when we embark on studies of our own. It will therefore support the work they are doing in text-set groups around either more books on the same whole-class topic, or books on inquiry topics that children are pursuing in their small groups. *Solids, Liquids and Gases* by Carol K. Lindeen and *Mixing and Separating* from Heinemann are good choices for books you might read aloud early in the unit, as is the song "What Is Matter" by Pam Dillie. Books such as *The Everything Kids' Science Experiments Book: Boil Ice, Float Water, Measure Gravity—Challenge the World Around You!* by Tom Robinson and many others like this contain sections that relate to this topic. Once you collect your sources, try to organize them to show children that learners tend to read first the more accessible books on a topic. Then, as our background knowledge develops, we progress toward more demanding texts. You may want your text set to include some videos.

You'll want to use social structures within the classroom to facilitate the processes of questioning, wondering, and reading to learn. For many classrooms, especially those that launched reading clubs earlier in the year, this means that kids work together in reading clubs—two or three partnerships who share a similar topic and basket of books. If you decide to set up book clubs, for example, there are several logistical concerns you'll need to address. Will members in a club read an identical text? Will they compile a text set on one aspect or *feature* of the class' big topic to study in greater focus and detail? If your classroom library has enough titles to permit the latter option, it is certainly preferable. Imagine that your whole-class topic is Properties of Matter. Each club might choose to either study solids, liquids, gases, the water cycle, or sink and float, becoming an "expert" on that one subtopic.

You will probably also want to insert video clips into your read-aloud time, including perhaps the *Bill Nye the Science Guy* music video for the song "Solid, Liquid, Gas," which has kids rapping about the three states of matter ([http://wn.com/Bill\\_Nye\\_](http://wn.com/Bill_Nye_)

the\_Science\_Guy\_\_Solid\_Liquid\_Gas). The video “Solids, Liquids and Gases” can be added to your collection, as well as more academic videos such as one you could find on the website Brain Pop ([www.brainpopjr.com/science/matter/solidsliquidsand-gases](http://www.brainpopjr.com/science/matter/solidsliquidsand-gases)).

Eventually, as you begin planning the details of the unit, you can expect to treat the videos like you might treat a read-aloud text. You might tell readers that you read a bit of text and then stop to recall what you have read, adding it onto whatever you already knew. Similarly, you might tell video viewers that when you are learning about a topic, whether through reading or watching, you first think about what you already know, and then you learn some new stuff. Then you think, “How does this connect to what I already knew?” You could illustrate by recruiting the children to join you in thinking about what you already know about a topic—say, evaporation. Then you could watch a two-minute clip relevant to that topic and pause it to ask kids, “What new things did I learn about evaporation?” and then relate this to what you already knew.

Even just a two-minute clip can provide an abundance of information, especially if you revisit this same “text” several times, showing children how much more they can get out of each successive encounter. Children can turn and talk or stop and draw or pause to retell in the midst of a video just as they can do in the midst of a read-aloud. Some teachers find that when returning to a familiar video, it helps to sometimes turn off the sound and ask partners to talk about what they are seeing. Their discussion should make an effort to use domain-specific vocabulary as they watch and talk. All of this aligns to the Common Core State Standards, which calls for the use of multimedia and for supporting content-specific vocabulary.

As you prepare for the unit, think about how you will help children become engaged with science content vocabulary. Will you have a word wall for this express purpose? Key chains of word cards? A labeled mural that you and your students add to throughout the unit? Children will need multiple experiences seeing and using the new terms they learn. Of course, they’ll be using words and learning words during writing workshop and science workshop as well as during reading.

As you start this final unit, bear in mind that this is your last chance to provide readers with support moving up levels of text difficulty. Although you no doubt feel like you are ready to wind down your teaching, this is actually the month in which you are sending kids off to a summer of practice. So now is the perfect time to help students who are ready to break into another level of text difficulty. You know how to do this—put them in transitional baggies and provide text introductions and same-book partners. Support some of the new vocabulary that readers will encounter. But the real job is probably more around motivation. After all, kids will be entering a new grade next year. With a final push, they can enter that grade reading at a whole different level. And think about the texts that will become accessible to them as a result of this final push. You’ll absolutely want to do the book talks/buzzes that create excitement around the newly accessible books, using the social energy of kids who’ve loved those books to propel this final push.

## An Overview of the Unit

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The sequence of work in this unit follows the logic that before they can ask collaborative questions on a topic (or do higher-level work such as developing hypotheses and devising experiments), children need a base of knowledge. In the first part, therefore, you'll teach children to build up this base of knowledge, reading all about their topic. Of course this will mean reminding them of all the comprehension strategies for nonfiction that they learned earlier in the year, such as previewing texts, reading for main ideas, and using illustrations and other page elements to build up understanding. This also means teaching children to immerse themselves in domain-specific vocabulary so that they talk and think like "insiders" to this topic.

To build up their base of knowledge, you'll want children to read as many books on this topic as they can (or have access to). In the second part, readers will compare and contrast the information that they find in different books about this topic. This again, will reiterate some teaching from earlier in the year for nonfiction: that we can lay texts alongside each other to learn cumulatively from them, compare the illustrations in each, and ponder conflicting information. But you'll add a new angle to children's compare-and-contrast work, this time adding that such cross-textual work is essential to asking questions. You'll show children how to capture the undeveloped question forming while they read—to word it more fully, jot it down, bring it to club conversations, think deeper about it, and use it to spur other questions and theories.

By the end of the unit, young readers will have generated enough questions to pick one that they may pursue further to develop a theory or hypothesis about. "When science readers come up with a hypothesis," you'll teach, "we see if we can test it." A way to end the unit might be to nudge your clubs out of being "armchair scientists" into actually conducting a simple experiment to test a hypothesis developed as a result of their month's reading. If you worry that such experimentation isn't "reading" work and hence shouldn't be the concern of a "reading teacher," think of the powerful message that this unit will culminate with. Reading forms the basis of new thinking that we can actually test. The small jump from library to lab can be one way to celebrate that reading spills out of books to guide actual thought and action.

### Part One: Science Readers Build Up a Base of Knowledge on a Topic by Reading Deeply about This Topic

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In the first part, you'll be emphasizing strategies for reading to learn. Teach children to choose the easier texts first, to build background knowledge. Then they can use this knowledge to approach the next level of text. Dick Allington shows that readers *will teach themselves* to read nonfiction if they find the subject fascinating and if they have access to texts they can actually read. Within their clubs, readers will each begin a book on a shared topic. This is the start of a month-long collaborative scholarship and exploration of a topic.

As a way to start them off with the very first book on a topic that they will follow for the rest of the month, you might teach children to ponder the cover and blurb and the table of contents and study the organization of the book as well as the details of illustrations and their captions to learn *all we can* about this topic. You'll want to model that learners use more than the written text to learn about a subject, and that learning involves active curiosity about *all* book features. Remind readers to note that some words are written in a bold font, while others are in italics, some portions on a page contain all-about or informational writing, while the sidebar on the *same* page tells a small story all about related features of the same topic. Teach children to preview texts to gain control over the content that a book offers. Readers will want to ask themselves, "What big things will this text teach me?" and "What are some smaller parts that the book is divided into?" and to survey the headings and the subheadings.

Soon after this, you will want to teach ways for clubs to build conversations off the work that individual members are beginning to do. Sentence starters are helpful scaffolds to support children's practice of a skill. In this case, you'll want to provide sentence starters that will help readers share headings and subheadings with other club members:

- The topic of this page is \_\_\_\_, since it says that right in the heading. But as I read on, what I realize is that this section is really mostly about \_\_\_\_.
- The heading on this page says \_\_\_\_\_. When I turn that into a sentence, I would say that this page is mostly about \_\_\_\_\_.
- When I read the facts on this page and look back at the heading, I realize that a different way to say the heading could be \_\_\_\_\_.
- The heading says \_\_\_\_\_. As I read the words and look at the pictures/diagrams/captions and put all the information together, I realize it's really mostly about \_\_\_\_\_.

Often in the books they are reading, there will be a main idea of the whole page and a few facts given that elaborate on the main idea. You can teach children to chunk the text by using subheadings (if there are any) or section headings. At the end of each chunk, we can cover the text and say, "This part teaches me. . . ." And then, "It teaches me by giving examples or evidence such as. . . ." One word of caution—you'll really want to peruse the books your children are reading to be sure that they mostly have headings. If not, save this teaching point for either some small-group instruction or a mid-workshop teaching point. Instead, teach your children a strategy more appropriate for the format of their books. If you notice that most books are all about one topic, like Jennifer Dussling's *Bugs, Bugs, Bugs*, but switch subtopics halfway through, you might want to alert them to this format and to be aware that a topic will shift about halfway through the book. If you happen to have a lot of question-and-answer books, you can let your children know that the question is actually like a subheading, and they can read the following facts in the section to see how it answers the section. In doing this, you're addressing the Common Core

State Standards of “Identify the reasons an author gives to support points in a text.” The teaching in this part pertains to the first strand of standards in the Common Core State Standards documents, which asks learners to determine the “key ideas and details” of a text. This overarching goal has been addressed in previous nonfiction units this year in first grade. Therefore, you’ll want to up the ante and align your expectations to the increasing challenges that your children will face now that they are reading harder books. Now, the benchmark level is for readers to be reading levels I/J/K, though you may have a range of readers at levels G through M. Allow the actual levels in your class and the text difficulties within those levels to inform the kinds of strategies you teach within this goal. Begin this part by pulling out the chart that you began in January and added to in March.

Next, you’ll want to broaden your children’s vocabulary around a topic. You might tell them that while talking about a topic, scientists use “science words.” After all, how many scientists talk about what they know by using words like “thing” and “stuff” and “you know?” We want to teach even our youngest scientists to use the words of experts—to learn those words from their reading and use them in their writing and speaking about their topics. We can teach them ways to collect these words, bring them to their reading club conversations to discuss and use, and to have them ready during writing workshop as they write about their topics of expertise. This aligns to the Common Core State Standards that say students will “determine the meaning of words and phrases in a text.” When handling unfamiliar vocabulary, you’ll want to balance instruction around *decoding* strategies—how to read the unknown word—as well as *meaning* strategies—how to understand the word. Again, some of the instruction around vocabulary will reiterate strategies of the past. You may, for example, remind readers that they know to hold onto the overall meaning of the text by “substituting the hard word with another word that makes sense and then reading on.” You might also remind readers of decoding strategies you’ve introduced in other units of study, such as “break up the word into its parts and try to figure out what the word might mean.” Since authors of expository texts often use technical or content-specific words a casual reader isn’t likely to know, it’s important to have strategies to persevere and attempt to figure those words out.

Following this, you’ll want to teach clubs to use domain-specific vocabulary in conversations about their topics. Understanding domain-specific words is often integral to understanding the content. When these words appear in the text, the author often will define the word outright and explicitly in a marginal glossary feature or in the glossary in the back of the book. Other times, the word that the author wants us to learn is illustrated or pictured on the same page. You’ll want to teach children to look to the text features on the page for support in understanding what a domain-specific word might mean. For example, an illustration that accompanies text introducing “steam” to a reader will likely have a visual representation of what steam looks like. Children need explicit instruction to learn to “read” illustrative portions of the text carefully (e.g., photographs, quotes, timelines, charts, and maps). For first-grade nonfiction readers, it’s helpful to teach concrete ways to notice where in the context of the word the definition is likely to appear. Many nonfiction writers of nonfiction texts leveled



G–M will define the word explicitly in a nearby sentence. Consider the following lines from *Solids, Liquids, and Gases* by Ginger Garrett:

Watch what happens to liquid water in a teakettle. In time, the water boils inside the kettle. What comes out of the spout? Steam comes out. Steam is water, too. Steam is not a solid or liquid. It is a gas.

As you may have noticed here, the new word, *steam*, is repeated with a definition: “\_\_\_\_\_ is. . . .” Another common way that authors define words is in a glossary or “Words to Know” section. For example in the book, *Water as a Solid* by Helen Frost, one of the sentences says, “Frost is ice crystals.” The child can look at the picture to see what frost is, but the child might not know what the word *crystals* means. In the “Words to Know” section it defines a crystal as “a solid made of small parts that form a pattern; snowflakes and frost are ice crystals.” In this case she defines what the word means and then gives examples.

Even when the text makes overt efforts through context or text features to give young readers direct access to unfamiliar vocabulary, children will often resist adopting the new words they see in print. Technical vocabulary, with its infrequent real-world usage, unconventional spellings and vague pronunciation is not the most easy or natural for children to incorporate into their own language. This makes it doubly important that you teach club members to hold each other accountable for using the “science language” for their topic, wherever possible.

## Part Two: Science Readers Compare and Contrast Different Texts on the Same Topic

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It won’t be long before readers, in their clubs, finish the first and easiest of their topic books and reach in the bin for a second. You’ll want your teaching to respond to this shift into a second text, by showing children that this second reading will rest on the shoulders of the first. “When we read a second book on a topic,” you’ll teach, “we bring all we know from the first book and think, ‘How is the information in this new book the same or different from the first book?’ And when we begin the third book on this topic, we’ll do the same thing—we’ll bring all we know from the first two books to this third reading.” Remind children that they can place books side by side and compare illustrations. For example, an illustration of ice melting to water in one text might be supplemented by an illustration of the wax of a candle melting in a second book and perhaps a picture of butter melting in a third text. You’ll want to remind children also to read cumulatively, adding all they find out from the second book to extend whatever they read in the first. Again, this isn’t new work; children have compared and contrasted the information contained in multiple texts in the previous two nonfiction reading units this year (refer to the teaching points on comparing and contrasting texts from Units Four and Six, if you feel the need). But to keep this work spiraling upward, you’ll want to teach new, increasingly sophisticated ways of comparing and contrasting texts on a topic.



Early in this part, you will coach into the ways that clubs facilitate readers' responses to texts. Set up a practice where, during the course of his or her independent reading, each child jots or sketches at least two or three responses to the text and brings these back to club members to share. Jotting or sketching a thought and then articulating and defending it in front of an audience of peers is a big step for youngsters. Do make sure that you stop often in your read-aloud to respond to whatever you're reading. You might also devote a minilesson to demonstrating how a reader might capture a thought in writing or sketching and later bring it to a discussion. You may want to provide a list of thought prompts or picture symbols that make it easier for students to get started structuring a response to text, as you may have done in the last part of the unit. Examples of prompts are, "This makes me wonder. . . ." "Why is it that. . . ?" "It says here that. . . so that must mean. . . ." Examples of picture symbols are question marks, exclamation marks, thought bubbles, and so on. You might list these thought prompts or picture symbols (and others you devise) on a chart placed conspicuously in the room for clubs to view as they jot while reading and talking among themselves.

If your children have been writing or sketching worthwhile Post-its all along, they can use those Post-its to do some of this compare-and-contrast work. Worthwhile Post-its for this work would be ones that don't contain random factoids, but ones that address the main ideas the author is trying to put forth, asking deep and meaningful questions that reflect the reading of a section, not just a sentence, and those that grapple with the major concepts and the vocabulary to speak about that concept. You may launch this work by reexamining some of the jumbo Post-its that you wrote during one of your read-alouds. As a class, you could take your Post-its and plaster them on the whiteboard or on an easel for the whole class to see. You can ask them to sort these into piles, thinking, "Which of these Post-its talk about the same topic?" Maybe all the Post-its about liquids would go together, and all the main ideas and thoughts about solids would go on another Post-it. You can say, "In this book we read, two of the parts we learned about were solids and liquids. Let's return to our read-aloud and think about these two *parts* to the bigger topic of matter. What's the same about solids and liquids? What's different? Turn and talk with your partner."

You can then ask your children to take the Post-its for one of the books they read out of their folder and lay them on the table in front of them. Looking across them, see which are the ones that seem to "go together" in some way—because they are about the same topic or a similar topic. Your children might put all of the Post-its together that have to do with liquids, for example, and all the Post-its that have to do with solids in another. They could then look within the pile and across piles to compare and contrast. Now that they've had some practice with this concept, you can launch their reading for that day with the advice to write Post-its that will help you to do this work with your partner.

As children read on in their books, they should also be accumulating the text and thinking in a synthesizing, compare-and-contrast way as they read. If they've already read a part about ice melting to water, then when they go on to a section about a candle melting they should make some connections: "Oh! A candle is like water. It can start out solid but then turn to a liquid." By doing this more deliberate compare-and-

contrast work with the Post-its from their books, you're developing in them a mindset that will allow them to read this way with some reminding.

You'll also want to make the most of the fact that you're studying the content in science alongside this reading unit. They can and should think about what they're learning in science and compare and contrast it to what they're learning in their books. If they did an experiment where they watched butter melt by putting it near a sunny window, and then they see a picture of a lit candle with melting wax in one of their books, they should be able to talk about what's similar about the two (they are both solids and when they become warm they melt into a liquid, and so on).

As always, sentence starters and thought prompts help to push kids to talk in ways that practice the skill. When they are with their reading club, you may want to teach them some ways to discuss the similarities and differences in the parts they're noticing. You'll want to bring out old charts, particularly the one that lists thought prompts to use in club conversations while comparing and contrasting texts, adding a few new ones:

- "In science we. . . and in this book I'm noticing. . . ."
- "In this part it says. . . but here it says. . . ."
- "This reminds me of something else I read."
- "This is different from this because. . . ."
- "These are kind of the same and kind of different."

Next, teach children to look across books, at parts of each book, or at whole books. You might teach them, for example, to read what one author has to say about the process of the water cycle and then read a different author's explanation. They can talk about what each author helped them to know and understand. They can also look at the whole book and think about what one author thought was important about properties of matter and then see what another author thought was important. They can ask themselves, "What does each author want me to understand about the whole topic?"

### Part Three: We Learn by Asking Questions

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In the first two parts of the unit, children devoted their time to developing a knowledge base about their topic. Now that they know enough about this topic (having read multiple books on it and comparing and contrasting the information within these books), you can introduce them to bigger, deeper work on this topic. You'll teach your readers to apply the "scientific method" of asking a question, formulating a hypothesis, and designing an experiment.

How do chickens sit on eggs without crushing them? Why can I see through glass? How can flies always tell when you're just about to swat them? These are the kinds of questions that first graders, with their natural curiosity about the world, ask. Our children are halfway to being scientists if they look around them with wide-open eyes to

form questions about the universe. Thoughtful schooling not only preserves this habit of mind—asking questions about the universe—but it teaches children to approach these questions in systematic ways. The Common Core State Standards call it “asking and answering questions about key details in a text.” In the next few days, you’ll be telling your youngsters, “Readers make observations, ask questions, voice disagreements, or make additions to what we read.” This is exciting work. It has the potential to make children feel more in control, not only of their reading but also of their learning. When youngsters jot all the little thoughts and questions that the text inspires into the margin or on a Post-it, they are in fact bringing their own schema into play, actively coauthoring the text. This is a great unit to be focusing on this use of schema in their reading, because your science unit will be in full-force by now alongside this reading work. They should have much to discuss when using their knowledge together with the information their book is teaching them.

You may want to begin by teaching children that scientists can write quick jots (or sketch symbols) on the Post-its about questions that occur to us as we read. Thinking about what we already know about the topic, we consider what might make sense and predict/hypothesize about the answer. Your Post-it might say, “I wonder. . . and I’ll bet it’s. . . .” Other readers prefer to read through the whole page/chapter once and then reread it to jot their thinking. Either way, we bring these quick jots to our clubs to talk and think some more about them together.

Since clubs are reading in a basket of books, you can expect that they’ll do some work putting these books together to ask questions. You can teach them that scientists read across a few books to formulate a question. Teach that science readers think about how the information from one text helps us to understand information from another text more deeply, and then we ask a question about what we still want to know. You could also explain that scientists question when information from two different texts doesn’t add up. If your first graders are particularly advanced, you might even teach them that readers are on the lookout for contradictions and wonder about the author’s slant or perspective on a topic.

Teaching club members to raise questions from the text and then to bring these to their club conversations can be the first step to developing a collaborative inquiry stance on a shared topic. Ask club members to make a collective question chart or a question board to record their queries on the topic. As a next step, you might also ask them to add a second column, marked “Hypothesis.” For first graders, this new word might be a mouthful, so you’ll want to explain carefully. “Till now, you’ve been asking questions—and I see these questions up on your questions boards. They are smart questions, too, the kind that scientists ask. Now I want to teach you the *next* thing scientists do after asking questions such as these. *Next*, scientists take their questions and turn them over in our minds, talk to club members about them, and together, we come up with a possible answer. This possible answer is called a *hypothesis*.” Teach children to begin their hypotheses with prompts that establish their probable, unconfirmed status:

- Perhaps. . .
- It could be that. . .
- Maybe this is because. . .
- This may occur because. . .
- It might be possible that. . .

Teaching hypothesis writing is one more contribution to overall literacy, and you want to introduce children to this skill as early as possible. First-grade hypotheses will, obviously, lack the formal testable premise that can be expected in higher grades. For now, it is enough to teach children that a hypothesis is a scientist's way of thinking up a possible answer to a question, that these hypotheses may or may not be true, and that only experiments can confirm their validity.

You will want to model hypothesis writing for children by replicating the twin columns on clubs' question boards. In the first column, you might write a question—possibly picking up a question you've noted one of the clubs asking, for example, "I noticed that a feather floats and so does a heavy piece of wood, yet a little penny sinks. I wonder why some things float and some things don't?" You'll want to dramatically ponder the answer, scratching your head, holding your chin and saying, "Maybe. . . ." You want children to note that a hypothesis is a guess that needs to be tested to be proven and *not* the "correct answer" to the question. To fill out the second column, marked "Hypothesis," you might ask your readers to call out possible answers, for example: "It could be that long things float because a feather and piece of wood are long and so is a boat?" or "Maybe it has something to do with air, like a sponge floats and it has those air holes in it and wood floats, and that has little air holes in it, too."

Next, you'll want to make clear to children that developing hypotheses is the work of a science reader. "A hypothesis is not just any old guess," you'll teach. "It is an *informed* guess. That means the person making this guess must really know the topic, that the guess is based on some sensible understanding of how this topic works. To come up with a good hypothesis, we often have to go back to the books on our topic and figure out possible answers!" Encourage lots of questions and hypotheses, no matter how rudimentary or undeveloped these are. Remember, you're sowing the seeds for scientific and inquiry-based thinking, *not* using this month for children to solve the secrets of the world. Teaching habits of mind is enough at this stage. There are, however, plenty of small teachable points to watch. For example, you'll want to remind children that the hypothesis must be phrased as a statement and not as another question, and to use words such as *might* or *may* or *perhaps*. Similarly, during club conferences, you'll want to ask children to cite/show you the specific parts of texts that helped them develop a particular hypothesis. Also, you'll want to push children into reading and rereading as they develop more questions and corresponding hypotheses. You'll watch for clubs that are filling their question boards with plenty of questions and hypotheses, praising and guiding their efforts.

Depending on how your first graders responded to this instruction, you might very well decide to end the unit here, asking clubs to present their question boards to each

other or to an external audience, such as a neighboring class or to parents. Clubs may present by explaining the process they undertook to reach certain hypotheses. If clubs have dealt in detail with subtopics branching out from a larger, whole-class topic, it will make sense to reassemble these clubs to look anew at the whole-class topic. Each club might share their specialization on this whole-class topic with other clubs or even with another class. Remember, first graders are studying the whole-class inquiry topic in writing workshop as well. You may decide to combine the celebration into a large fair where clubs of kids present their information and new ideas to the world.

Another possible celebration of this month's work—particularly if your readers have shown aptitude for this—could be to take the “scientific method” one step further, teaching children to return to all the hypotheses they've written and think up ways that these might be tested through an experiment. To do this, you might team up with the science teacher. “This month, we've been armchair scientists,” you might say, “because researching and coming up with hypotheses is a great first step for scientists. But once we have a string of hypotheses to look at, we can ask, ‘Can I prove if this hypothesis is right or wrong? What experiment might I need to conduct? What materials would I need for this experiment? What possible steps would this experiment include?’” You'll want to scaffold this big work for your scientists—perhaps by looking across each clubs' hypotheses and facilitating their efforts to pick one that is easiest to test. You might recruit help from the science teacher lab teacher and help children set up simple experiments. In the end, the fact worth celebrating is that children's reading has paved the way for questioning, hypothesizing, and experimenting—that scientists are readers!

Since this unit ends around the same time as your unit in science and your unit in writing, you may consider having some kind of science fair where children can display their understanding through demonstration, writing, and speaking about their topic. You may have a space where children can replicate the experiments and activities they did in science for an audience. They may show people the writing they did. They may coach their audience to follow the procedures they wrote about in their writing by supplying the materials they have mentioned in their work.

### *Word Study*

During the last months, you will probably do much of your word study work in small groups to allow children to practice phonics concepts you've taught thus far. *Phonics Lessons for 1st Grade* by Pinnell & Fountas also provides assessments that you can use to assess what you've taught up to this point. Based on these assessments, you might find that you need to review concepts that are necessary for children to be prepared for second grade. You also want to review the skills standards students should have by the end of first grade. For about twenty minutes twice a week, you can have children work in small groups set up for phonics practice based on your assessments.

As the year comes to a close, you will want to take some time to assess your children with regard to their understanding of phonics and word study. You'll probably look at their writing to see that they spell word wall words conventionally and fluently and that their attempts to spell unknown words are grounded in all they know about

how words work. You'll want to see that they transferred what they learned in word study to their writing, and to their reading.

<b>If you decide to teach. . .</b>	<b>Suggested lessons in <i>Words Their Way 4th Edition</i></b>	<b>Suggested lessons in <i>Phonics Lessons for 1st Grade, Pinnell &amp; Fountas</i></b>
Short and long vowels	6-1, 6-2 (pp. 188–189)	LS12 to LS16 (pp. 241–260)
Long vowel spelling Patterns VCe (e.g., -ake, -ate, -ame)	6-4 to 6-15 (pp. 190–199)	SP5 to SP8 (pp. 299–314)
Compound words	7-1 (pp. 220–221)	WSA13 (p. 463)
High-frequency words	pp. 182–183	HF1 to HF8 (pp. 325–356)

## Additional Resources

In this unit your students will live like scientists. They will observe, question, and research content together during science and writing workshop. They will be discovering things around them and writing to teach others what they are learning. In reading workshop they will be reading about their science themes. Your first-grade readers will be reading at levels I, J, or K. This is your last unit—your last chance to push them as readers. Make sure that they have a high volume of reading going on in the classroom. If your kids are reading well below benchmark, you might turn to an earlier nonfiction reading unit (Unit Four or Six) or the kindergarten curriculum calendar's Unit Six to find ways of teaching comprehension skills in lower-level texts. Be sure to continue using their running records, spelling inventories, high-frequency word lists, and your conference notes to determine what exactly your readers need. You may find that many of your students need a substantial amount of work on word solving—you will want to add a part to this unit so that you working on these skills in this unit as well. If your data shows you that students are actually reading at much higher levels than the benchmark, you might decide to turn to next year's curriculum calendar to a nonfiction unit to see how you might add teaching points that are more sophisticated.

As you approach this unit, it will be important for you to read the entire write-up, not just the teaching points below, because, in the end, kids learn through the work they do, and the write-up is jam packed with ideas, activities, and teaching to help you organize and create opportunities for children to engage in work that matters. The unit write-up can help you issue the generous invitation that rallies kids not only to work with heart and soul but also to engage in deliberate practice, trying to get better at specific skills that the unit aims to highlight.

In the end, a good portion of your teaching will revolve around the responsive instruction you provide as you move kids along trajectories of skill development. This part of our teaching relies on you assessing your students often—not in big fancy ways but by watching the work they do—and on you seeing their work as feedback on your



teaching. If you have taught something and only a handful of kids are able to sustain that work to good effect, then you'll want to decide whether that skill was essential, whether you want to reteach it in a new way, or whether you want to detour around it. You'll want to become accustomed to fine-tuning your teaching through an attentiveness to student work, because the work your students do not only shows you what they can or can't do, but it also shows you what *you* can do.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### **Part One: Science Readers Build Up a Base of Knowledge on a Topic by Reading Deeply about this Topic**

- "Readers of nonfiction think about our book in parts. The whole book is about a big, watermelon topic. Today I want to teach you that each section is one smaller seed of that watermelon. One way science readers approach a new section to learn from it, we think, 'What is the small seed of the larger watermelon that this section is about?'"
- "Science readers always push ourselves to understand our reading so well that we are able to explain it to others. One way that we can do this is to say what we've read in our own words to make our learning stick. After reading a chunk, we might put the book down and think to ourselves, or say to our partner, 'What this means is. . .'"
- "Today I want to teach you that science readers think and talk about the main ideas in our books. One way that readers can prepare to come ready to discuss the information and ideas that we learned is to be thinking about the main ideas in each part of our books."
  - ▮ *Tip:* "Nonfiction texts use all the sentences on the page to think about what's most important—the big, main idea of that section. Readers often say our main idea not just as a word but instead as a phrase."
  - ▮ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "As readers we can chunk the text using the subheadings or section headings. At the end of each chunk, we can cover the text and say (or write on a Post-it), 'This part teaches me. . .' and then, 'It teaches me by giving examples or evidence such as. . .'"
- "Readers of nonfiction remember and use all we know about the topic when we are reading. Today I want to teach you that as scientists are studying, reading, and thinking about the main ideas about our books, we will also want to bring all that we know about our topics to our reading. We can recall our experiments, activities, explorations, and learning from science and writing workshops to help us explain and think about what we are learning during reading workshop."

- “Science readers build up our background knowledge quickly by starting with the books that feel like easy reads, the ones that can give us a quick and big overview of our topic. As we read, we orient ourselves to a new topic and quickly gain knowledge by skimming and scanning across all of the features of the page—not just text but also the photographs, maps, timelines, diagrams, charts, captions, and sidebars. Reading across the different features, we try to name the big things that we are learning.”
- “As scientists read, we keep in mind that we will be able to work with a partner to support and push our learning. Today I want to teach you that not only do you need to come prepared to your club, with important information and key ideas, but you will want to help your partners determine what is important as well.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “We anticipate that we can help each other to determine and hold on to the most important ideas and details by pausing in our reading and retelling the information. We might say, ‘The big thing that I just learned from this chapter is. . . and some of the most fascinating details about this are. . . .’”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “We also ask questions to each other like, ‘Why is that important?’ ‘How is that important to our topic?’ ‘Is that the most important thing in that part/section?’”
- “Readers of nonfiction collect and use the words that we learn when teaching and talking about our topic. One way we do this is by putting Post-its on places where we learn new words (and write down what we think we mean), or we can keep a running list.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “You will want to have these words with you as you are reading and talking with your partners and clubs.”

## **Part Two: Science Readers Compare and Contrast Different Texts on the Same Topic**

- “Today I want to teach you that readers of nonfiction carry all that we have learned from one book with us as we move to another book. One way that we do this is to look out for what sounds the same and also for what is different when it comes to the information we are learning.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “Come to clubs ready to discuss what is the same and different.”
- “Readers capture our responses to texts on Post-its and bring them for discussion and defense to our reading clubs. Remember, readers, that we defend our responses. One way that we can do this is to point to the page or parts of a text that caused us to respond in the way that we did.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “You many even need to read that section aloud. Partners should be listening in such a way that we think about if the idea matches the evidence.”





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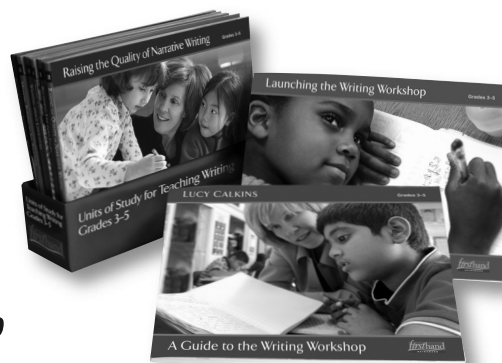
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