# Reading in Virginia

Virginia State
Literacy Association
**VSLA**

# Voices from the Field: Literacy Grows Here

# Reading in Virginia
## Volume XLV

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## Virginia State Literacy Association

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## Journal of the Virginia State Literacy Association

# Letter from the VSLA Board President and Editor



Laura Labyak
President, VSLA Board of Directors



Allison Ward Parsons
Editor, Reading in Virginia

Dear Literacy Leaders,

We are excited to share with you the 45th edition of the VSLA journal, *Reading in Virginia*, which features this year's theme of *Literacy Grows Here*. *Reading in Virginia* is a double-blind peer-reviewed publication, which means that each article has been rigorously vetted in light of current literacy research, evidence-based strategies, and classroom application. This issue of *Reading in Virginia* represents those efforts and presents strong, research-based ideas to encourage and inspire excellent literacy instruction.

Articles highlight multiple aspects of literacy to meet the diverse needs of P-12 learners and educators. Articles are authored by our own VSLA members around the Commonwealth, including classroom teachers, university faculty and doctoral students, as well as authors from other parts of our nation. Topics are intended to spark thinking and literacy learning across the lifespan.

If you are seeking ideas to support word work, including spelling and morphology instruction, please see articles by Maria Meyers (page 65), and Anna Myers, Lauren Houser, and Victoria VanUitert (page 57). If you're looking for ideas to support students' fluency development, check out Samantha Smigel's article on page 14. If you need research to support upper grades students' ability to write across disciplines, then read

the article from Vicky Giouroukakis and colleagues on page 39. April Mattix Foster and colleagues share research to support teaching with children's literature to support anti-racist pedagogy and global competence on page 30. Joanna Newton and Kristin Bennick describe the importance of administrators participating in professional learning and coaching to better support effective literacy instruction (page 24). For readers interested in developing strong, welcoming family-school relationships,  check out Faye Bradley's research-backed implementation and engagement ideas (p. 49). We close this issue with unique insights and application ideas for rural students and schools from Rachelle Kuehl and Amy Price Azzano (page 1).

Reading in Virginia is a peer-reviewed journal with the mission of supporting the professional learning of literacy educators and researchers in Virginia and beyond. The journal is intended to be shared widely, and is included in the EBSCO Digital Repository. Manuscripts are currently  being accepted for the 46th edition and should be submitted to Joan Rhodes (joan.rhodes@vslatoday.org) by November 30, 2023. We sincerely hope you enjoy reading this edition, and find it useful to spark your professional thinking!

Yours in Literacy,

*Laura Labyak*

Laura Labyak
President, Virginia State Literacy Association, 2022-23

*Allison Ward Parsons*

Allison Ward Parsons
Editor, *Reading in Virginia*

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# Critical Pedagogies of Place in the Language Arts Curriculum

*Rachelle Kuehl and Amy Price Azano, Virginia Tech*

The push to diversify children's literature and to provide all children with access to books that serve as windows and mirrors (Bishop, 1990) must include rurality as a point of difference. This article provides actionable ideas for teachers to embed middle-grade literature set in central Appalachia into language arts lessons as a way to encourage students' critical thinking about rurality and place while introducing them to rural literature. While rural children may recognize themselves in these books, children who live in urban and suburban places can use this literature as a window to see what life is like in rural places, thus helping to dispel unflattering stereotypes of Appalachian people. Using a critical pedagogy of place as its theoretical grounding, this article encourages critical discussions about how power and privilege impact social and economic situations while offering passages from mentor texts to guide young writers in telling their own placed stories.

The enduring metaphor of books as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) has helped the field of English Language Arts by conveying the importance of diversifying book selections for student readers. Scholars (e.g., Crisp et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2017; Koss, 2015; McNair, 2016) have pointed out the need for diverse books for young readers to include texts about people of various races, ethnicities, gender identities/roles, and abilities. Others (e.g., Enriquez, 2021; Tschida et al., 2014) have called to extend Bishop's metaphor from classroom libraries into teaching practice. Here, we suggest further expanding this notion to include the experiences of rural students, whose identities are not represented adequately in children's literature writ large (Kelley & Darragh, 2011; Kleese et al., 2022; Parton, 2020, 2022).

Rural students often find it challenging to locate books that serve as mirror texts (Ruday et al., 2022), meaning they don't see characters like themselves represented and thus have a harder time making meaningful connections to literature. Likewise, students who don't live in rural places miss opportunities to "walk through in imagination" (Bishop, 1990) to experience what life is like for rural people. Simply including more rural books in a teacher's repertoire, however, can be problematic because, unfortunately, books set in rural places sometimes serve to reinforce negative stereotypes,

presenting rural people as simple, "backwards," or lazy (Kuehl & Eppley, 2023; Eppley et al., 2022; Theobald & Wood, 2010). Books often depict rural places as idyllic, nostalgic, or pastoral, reinforcing the idea that rural people are separate from mainstream culture (Donehower et al., 2007; Eppley, 2010; Longhurst, 2012).

In the Central Appalachian region where we live and work, students face unflattering depictions of their culture in popular media (Peine et al., 2020; Lyon, 2010), leading some to internalize these negative stereotypes in such a way as to threaten (Aronson & Steele, 2005) their self-efficacy as learners (Azano et al., 2021). As such, we adapted an existing evidence-based language arts enrichment curriculum for gifted learners in grades 3 and 4 (Callahan et al., 2016) to include stories that celebrate Appalachian people and illustrate the rich diversity that exists in the region. Each of the lessons in the revised curriculum includes explanations of various literary concepts, examples from literature, and writing exercises for students to practice these skills. As a culminating project, students are given the opportunity to apply their new knowledge by writing their own fiction story.

The purpose of this article, then, is twofold: (a) to introduce teachers to high-quality literature set in Appalachia that they can share with students as a way to dispel negative stereotypes about people in the region; and (b) to demonstrate practical ways teachers can use passages from these books

to teach necessary language arts skills while encouraging students to take up fiction writing as a way to tell their own stories.

## Theoretical Framework

A critical literacy pedagogy can help students recognize the power differentials affecting their communities (Comber, 2015), equipping them with "the skills and sensibilities to ask demanding questions of the ideas, concepts, and ideologies that are presented to us as fact" (Morrell, 2008, p. 38). This has become increasingly important in the current age of misinformation ("post-truth") in which people obtain information from sources curated through bias-confirming social media algorithms, engage in debates of false equivalency, and fail to trust valid researchers and scientists, preferring to arrive at their own conclusions based on "common sense" (Janks, 2018). Because critical literacy pedagogy is action-oriented (Lewison et al., 2001), rural students taught to think critically may begin to see their own agency as advocates who can bring about innovative solutions to community challenges (Eppley & Corbett, 2012; Means et al., 2021; Petrone & Olsen, 2021).

Our work is further grounded in a critical pedagogy of place (Greenwood, 2003), or the notion that students and communities benefit most from place-based instruction that encourages positive place connections while building critical understandings of how power relationships affect opportunities for the people who share a space. Whereas place-based pedagogy is mostly celebratory, a critical pedagogy of place helps students critically examine which aspects of a place should be *remembered, restored, conserved, changed,* or *created* (Greenwood, 2013).

## Technique

In this article, we highlight passages from middle grade novels set in Appalachia that can effectively teach reading and writing skills aligned with the Common Core State Standards and the Virginia Standards of Learning (see Table 1).

We chose each passage with special attention to how diversity (in terms of race, geography, ability, gender, and so on) is "reflected in the content, author, writing style, and language used" (Enriquez, 2021, p. 106), and the way each passage lends itself to critical examination of power and privilege. For example, we sought texts that featured characters of color to better represent Appalachia's racial diversity (e.g., *As Brave as You* [Reynolds, 2015]; *Stella by Starlight* [Draper, 2015]). Additionally, we drew from a few novels set in the past (e.g., *Belle Prater's Boy* [White, 1996]; *Shiloh* [Naylor, 1992]), but deliberately included many texts set in present-day Appalachia to dispel the persistent "bygone" images of rural places (see Table 2.)

Our hope is that the passages will spark teachers' interest in using these books for whole-class read-alouds or small group novel studies, prompting deep discussions about "the known economic and cultural structures that seemingly oppress rural communities" (Azano & Biddle, 2019, p. 5).

In the following sections, we highlight specific language arts skills (Crafting a Good Opening, Describing the Setting, Using Compelling Imagery, Developing Characters, Recognizing Stock Characters, Incorporating Dialogue, Distinguishing Points of View, and Building Conflict) alongside place-conscious passages from middle grade novels set in Appalachia that teachers can use as mini-mentor texts to guide and inspire student writers. We offer brief descriptions of the passages as well as "for consideration" questions teachers can use to plan critical reading and writing lessons.

## Crafting a Good Opening

To grab readers' attention, authors need to craft a compelling opening that will draw readers in and make them want to continue reading. In this excerpt from the beginning of Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons* (1994), readers learn a great deal about the protagonist, Sal ("a country girl at heart"), where she comes from (beautiful Bybanks, Kentucky), and the central conflict that begins the story (Sal's unhappiness about moving away).

> Gramps says that I am a country girl at heart, and that is true. I have lived most of my thirteen years in Bybanks, Kentucky, which is not much more than a caboodle of houses roosting in a green spot alongside the Ohio River. Just over a year ago, my father plucked me up like a weed and took me and all our belongings (no, that is not true—he did not

*We adapted an existing evidence-based language arts enrichment curriculum for gifted learners in grades 3 and 4 (Callahan et al., 2016) to include stories that celebrate Appalachian people and illustrate the rich diversity that exists in the region.*

**Table 1**

*Common Core State Standards and Virginia Standards of Learning Alignment*

| Standard | Description | Skill |
|---|---|---|
| CCSS.ELA-Literacy. RL.4.2 | Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions). | Setting<br>Dialogue<br>Conflict |
| CCSS.ELA-Literacy. RL.4.6 | Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations. | Point of View |
| CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.3 | Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences. | Imagery<br>Setting |
| CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.3A | Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally. | Openings<br>Characters<br>Characterization |
| CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.3B | Use dialogue and description to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations. | Imagery<br>Dialogue<br>Conflict |
| CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.3D | Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely. | Imagery |
| CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.9A | Apply grade 4 Reading standards to literature (e.g., "Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text [e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions]."). | Setting<br>Characters<br>Characterization<br>Dialogue |
| VA English SOL (Reading) 4.5 | The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of fictional texts:<br>(b) Describe how the choice of language, setting, characters, and information contributes to the author's purpose.<br>(e) Identify the problem and solution<br>(g) Identify sensory words | Dialogue<br>Setting<br>Characters<br>Conflict<br>Imagery |
| VA SOL 4.7 (Writing) | The student will write cohesively for a variety of purposes:<br>(c) Use a variety of pre-writing strategies<br>(e) Recognize different modes of writing have different patterns of organization<br>(i) Utilize elements of style, including word choice and sentence variation | Fiction Writing |

**Table 2**

*Excerpted Books*

| Title | Time Period | Location | Protagonist Race / Ethnicity | Themes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Walk Two Moons | Present | Kentucky, Ohio | White, Native American (Seneca) | grief and loss, extended family connections |
| Belle Prater's Boy | 1950s | Virginia | White | mental illness, storytelling |
| Missing May | 1990s | West Virginia | White | foster care, grief |
| As Brave as You | Present | Virginia | Black | racism, family estrangement |
| Ruby Holler | Unknown | Unknown | White | foster care |
| Shiloh | 1980s | West Virginia | White | boy/dog bond, animal rescue |
| Free Verse | Present | West Virginia | White | foster care, poetry |
| The Parker Inheritance | Present | South Carolina | Black | racism, segregation, LGBTQ+ families |
| Stella by Starlight | 1930s | North Carolina | Black | Jim Crow South |
| Last in a Long Line of Rebels | Present | Tennessee | White, Black | racism, reconciling history of slavery |

*Note:* Many of the books are set in fictional towns, so it would be impossible to say for certain whether they are part of counties designated as Appalachian by the Appalachian Regional Commission (arc.gov). All of West Virginia is included, so we know that the three books set there are situated in Appalachia; for the other books, we used clues from the text and our best judgment as Appalachian scholars to conclude that the setting is within the region.

bring the chestnut tree, the willow, the maple, the hayloft, or the swimming hole, which all belonged to me) and we drove three hundred miles straight north and stopped in front of a house in Euclid, Ohio.

"No trees?" I said. "This is where we're going to live?"…I looked up and down the street. The houses were all jammed together like a row of birdhouses. In front of each house was a tiny square of grass, and in front of that was a thin gray sidewalk running alongside a gray road.

"Where's the barn?" I asked. "The river? The swimming hole?" (pp. 1–2)

Creech uses dialogue, figurative language, and direct and indirect descriptions of characters and setting to draw readers into her story. Choosing the expression a "caboodle of houses," for example, prepares readers to expect the narrator to use colorful—perhaps colloquial—language throughout the book. She establishes the narrator's rural identity by describing Bybanks and the many offerings she is forced to leave behind, against her wishes, illustrating a critical tension that occurs when children feel they have no agency in major life decisions. Creech uses personification to describe Bybanks as "roosting" along the Ohio River like a bird, she uses simile to describe Sal's father having "plucked [her] up like a weed."

## For Consideration

- Did these opening lines make you want to read more of this book? Which parts did you find compelling?
- What did you learn about the characters mentioned in the passage?
- Look through some other books in your classroom. Which other novels have captivating openings? (Incidentally, Creech's 2020 novel, *One Time*, features an inspiring teacher who assigns this very task to her students!)

## Describing the Setting

The late Ruth White, author of *Belle Prater's Boy* (1996), modeled Coal Station, Virginia, after her own Appalachian hometown. Her protagonist, Gypsy, lived "in town" and enjoyed many conveniences White lacked in the coal mining camp where her family had lived (the setting for her other, more autobiographical novel, *Little Audrey* [2008]). With that context in mind, we can see how the idyllic home White created for Gypsy was the type of place she would have dreamed about living as a child, and teachers can point out

the power writers have to rewrite their personal stories through fiction.

Our house was a modern, one-story brick ranch, with white shutters, a front porch, and the only picture window in town. We had a telephone, two radios, a phonograph, a refrigerator, a stand-up freezer, and an electric stove. Next door to us Granny and Grandpa Ball had the same conveniences in one of those big old white, green-shuttered, two-story houses with a wraparound porch on both floors… Surrounding our two houses was a wide expanse of cool green grass and about fifty apple trees which we called the orchard. What a wonder and a joy to behold in the spring when they all bloomed! There were also azaleas, pink and fuschia. Not to mention the lilac bushes down by the creek, and the wild dogwood. People walking by our houses would sometimes stop there on the road and look and look, like they couldn't believe their dadburned eyes.

To illustrate how White's rich descriptions create pictures in her readers' minds, give students a blank piece of paper and invite them to draw a part of the setting that stands out to them (Gypsy's house, her grandparents' larger house, the flowering trees outside, etc.). Then, have them compare pictures with a classmate, explaining which details from the passage they each chose to include. Finally, after discussing the way White's masterful use of description communicates the setting of her story, invite students to write a setting for their own story using plenty of details.

*In this article, we highlight passages from middle grade novels set in Appalachia that can effectively teach reading and writing skills aligned with the Common Core State Standards and the Virginia Standards of Learning*

## For Consideration

- What details help the reader know when the story takes place?
- What lines from the passage show how the narrator feels about her home?
- Why do you think Ruth White chose to set her story in town, rather than further up the mountain, where she actually grew up?
- If you were going to use your own home as the setting for a story, how would you create a picture in the reader's mind? What are three specific details you would include?

## Using Compelling Imagery

Cynthia Rylant is another author who grew up in rural Appalachia and who uses some of her writing to explore critical themes. In *Missing May* (1992), the narrator, Summer, lost her parents at a young age and was welcomed into the home of elderly relatives May and Ob, who dote on her and make her feel special and safe. At the beginning of the novel, May has recently passed away, and Summer and Ob are left to grieve. In this passage, the duo—along with a talkative neighbor boy—take a rare trip out of town, in part to take their minds off their sadness.

Rylant, in Summer's voice, uses sensory details to describe the experience of seeing the West Virginia state capitol building for the first time (e.g., "its giant dome glittered pure gold"). She uses simile to compare the concrete sides of the capitol building to a regal queen spreading out her petticoats; this is also a form of personification because it assigns human characteristics to an inanimate object.

> Then, there it was, and I know it was better than all three of us figured it would be. The capitol building sprawled gray concrete like a regal queen spreading out her petticoats, and its giant dome glittered pure gold in the morning sun. I felt in me an embarrassing sense of pride that she was ours. That we weren't just shut-down old coal mines and people on welfare like the rest of the country wanted to believe we were. We were this majestic, elegant thing sitting solid, sparkling in the light.

*The late Ruth White, author of Belle Prater's Boy (1996), modeled Coal Station, Virginia, after her own Appalachian hometown.*

This passage shows the hurt caused by repeatedly hearing "your people" described negatively—an experience common to rural Appalachian students. Sharing this passage can generate a discussion of the harm in stereotyping others and the related danger (i.e., *stereotype threat*; Aronson & Steele, 2005) of coming to believe in negative stereotypes about a group to which one belongs. In this passage, Summer's preconceptions of what West Virginia's capitol would look like are disrupted. She perceives that West Virginians are looked down upon by other Americans, and seeing the extravagant beauty of the capitol building seems to force her to reconsider the verity of these stereotypes while, perhaps, providing some validity to her own deeply-buried belief that West Virginians are just as deserving of such finery as anyone else—a notion that connects back to her earlier experience of joining a loving family.

## For Consideration

Before sharing this passage, teachers might want to ask students to jot down a few words they associate with West Virginia. (To avoid perpetuating any negative stereotypes, don't share these lists aloud.) Then, show students an image of the capitol building in Charleston.

- Why does Summer feel "an embarrassing sense of pride" when she sees the capitol building?
- How did stereotypes about Appalachian people affect the way she felt?

## Developing Characters

Authors reveal information about characters in both direct and indirect ways. Direct characterization, or simply telling the reader what each character looks and acts like, can be dull for the reader (e.g., *Doug was tall and thin with brown eyes and short brown hair. He enjoyed sports and was very friendly*). In the following passage from *As Brave as You* (2015), author Jason Reynolds mostly uses indirect characterization to describe protagonist Genie and his family, allowing readers to learn about their personalities through their interactions with one another, but he includes a few instances of direct characterization as well.

> The boys had arrived [at their grandparents' house in rural Virginia] two nights earlier after a long, cramped ride in the back of their dad's old Honda. Cramped at least for Genie, because Ernie, in a cheeseburger coma, had stretched out on the backseat as if it were his own personal couch, forcing Genie to be smushed against the window for most of the trip. Genie had thought about playing

Pete and Repeat by mimicking Ernie's nasty snores, but then he realized it wouldn't matter because Ernie wasn't awake to get annoyed by it anyway. And that was the whole point of that game.

So to take his mind off the discomfort of being trapped under Ernie's leg, stewing in the thick silence between his folks, who had managed to not talk to each other for the past four hours, Genie flipped through pages of his notebook—where he kept his best questions…

Genie was the kind of kid who kept a small jacked-up notebook and pen in his pocket just so that he could jot down interesting things whenever they came….

Ernie, on the other hand, was the kind of kid who wore sunglasses 24/7 just to make sure everybody knew he was cool, and to him, the biggest mistake anyone could make was not to be (pp. 6–8).

### For Consideration

- What did you learn about the two brothers from this description of the car trip? What words would you use to describe each brother (e.g., Genie: *curious, inquisitive*; Ernie: *sleepy, inconsiderate*)?
- What did you learn about their parents' relationship?
- Jason Reynolds gives the reader a hint that he's about to share a direct description of each brother by writing, "[Genie/Ernie] was the kind of kid who…" Why do you think he chose to be so direct in this instance?

At this point, you might ask students whether Genie and Ernie are likable characters and whether these few paragraphs make them want to read more. Explain that when they write their own stories, they'll want to provide character descriptions that keep their readers interested in what happens to them.

### Recognizing Stock Characters

Stock characters, like a mechanic or an absent-minded professor, are easily recognized characters. This excerpt from Sharon Creech's *Ruby Holler* (2006) takes place near the beginning of the novel, when twins Dallas and Florida still live at the Boxton Creek Home for Children under the oppressive rule of the Trepids, who are instantly recognizable as villains because of how they dole out immediate, severe punishments for questioning their authority.

`Mr. and Mrs. Trepid were middle-aged, cranky and tired, and growing stiff and cold as winter-bound trees. They believed in rules, and their rules were posted on doorways and in hallways and above each child's bed. There were general rules and kitchen rules, bathroom rules and stairway rules, basement rules and outside rules, upstairs rules and downstairs rules, clothing rules, washing rules, cleaning rules, rules upon rules upon rules….
When Florida was caught breaking one of the rules, she was more likely to argue and, as a result, to earn extra punishments….
"What does that say?" Mrs. Trepid demanded.
Florida squinted at the sign. "No stupid running."
"It does not say that," Mrs. Trepid said, urging Florida's face closer to the sign. "Read it again."
"No stinking stupid running."
"Down to the basement. Two hours in the Thinking Corner."
"That's stupid."
"Followed by two hours of floor scrubbing."
"Putrid."
"Followed by two hours of weed pulling."
Dallas and Florida had racked up hundreds of hours in the Thinking Corner, the damp, dark, cobwebbed corner of the basement. They had worn the scratchy *I've Been Bad* shirts, shoveled manure, crawled across acres of fields pulling weeds. They had also peeled potatoes, scrubbed pots and floors, washed windows, and hauled boxes and broken furniture.
"Good hard thinking and good hard work never hurt anybody," Mr. Trepid would say. (pp. 3–6)

Florida's resistance establishes her as a rebellious orphan, much like the eponymous character in the musical *Annie*, and, of course, the Trepids bear an uncanny resemblance to Annie's nemesis, Miss Hannigan. Students will likely notice that the twins are being treated like another stock character, Cinderella, and the class could discuss whether this makes them stock characters or whether, instead (or additionally), the author is using a literary trope, or "a theme, motif, plot, or literary device that commonly recurs within a genre or work of fiction, especially when considered clichéd" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2020).

Because stock characters are so quickly recognizable in stories, they function in much the same way as stereotypes in real life. From a critical literacy standpoint, studying stock characters with Appalachian students can open up a wider interrogation of stereotypes about people in their region and how they can lead to misunderstandings and unfair treatment.

## For Consideration

After showing the "Hard Knock Life" scene from the 1982 film version of *Annie* (this can be found easily on YouTube), ask students to list similarities between the stock characters featured there and in *Ruby Hollow*.

- Do you think Sharon Creech was familiar with *Annie* when she wrote this story? How can you tell?
- How does stereotyping (that is, treating real people like stock characters) limit our ability to see them as complex human beings with a variety of strengths, weaknesses, and motivations?

## Incorporating Dialogue

The main character in Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's classic novel, *Shiloh* (1991), is Marty, a boy who lives with his family in rural West Virginia. Marty becomes concerned about a missing dog he calls Shiloh, who technically belongs to Marty's neighbor, Judd Travers. Marty believes Travers mistreats Shiloh, and in this scene, Marty is walking to town when Travers approaches in his pick-up truck. As you read this passage, direct students' attention to the words Marty says (external dialogue) and how they compare with what he's really thinking (internal dialogue).

> When I hear the sound of a motor and turn to see his [Travers's] truck slowin' down, I turn forward again and keep on walkin', but he pulls up beside me.
> "Want a lift?" he sings out.
> "No, thanks," I say. "Almost there."

*Because stock characters are so quickly recognizable in stories, they function in much the same way as stereotypes in real life. From a critical literacy standpoint, studying stock characters with Appalachian students can open up a wider interrogation of stereotypes about people in their region and how they can lead to misunderstandings and unfair treatment.*

"Where you goin'?"
I couldn't think fast enough to lie. "David Howard's."
"Hell, boy, you ain't even halfway. Hop in."
I know I don't have to if I don't want, but if he's already suspicious about me, that'll only make it worse. So I get in.
"See my dog yet?" First thing out of his mouth.
"I been lookin' over all the roads," I tell him in answer. "No beagle...You got to treat a dog good if you want him to stick around," I say, bold as brass.
"What do you know about it?" Judd jerks his head in my direction, then turns the other way and spits his tobacco out the window. "You never even had a dog, did you?"
"I figure a dog's the same as a kid. You don't treat a kid right, he'll run off first chance he gets, too."
Judd laughs. "Well, if that was true, I would have run away when I was four. Far back as I can remember, Pa took the belt to me—big old welts on my back so raw I could hardly pull my shirt on. I stuck around. Didn't have anyplace else to go. I turned out, didn't I?"
"Turned out how?" The boldness in my chest is growing, taking up all the air.
Now Judd sounds mad. "You tryin' to be smart with me, boy?"
"No. Just asking how you turned out, somebody who was beat since he was four. I feel sorry, is what I feel."
Judd's real quiet a moment. The big old wad of tobacco in his cheek bobs up and down. "Well, don't go wasting your sorry on me," he says. "Nobody ever felt sorry for me, and I never felt sorry for nobody else. Sorry's something I can do without."
I don't say anything at all. (pp. 53–55)

## For Consideration

- What did you learn about Marty in this passage? How is he being "bold as brass," and why do you think he speaks to Travers in this way?
- What does Travers reveal that helps explain how he treats Shiloh? Does knowing Travers was abused as a child make him more of a sympathetic character?
- What do you notice about the way Marty and Travers speak? How does it reflect where they are from?

## Distinguishing Points of View—First Person Perspective

Sarah Dooley's *Free Verse* (2005) is about Sasha, a 13-year-old girl from a small coal-mining town in West Virginia who is living in a foster home after her older brother, Michael (her guardian), passes away in the line of duty as a firefighter. With scarce job opportunities in their hometown, Michael had always insisted that Sasha do well in school so she could attend college and move elsewhere as an adult, a "narrative of leaving" (Parton & Kuehl, under review) that is common in rural places (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Sherman & Sage, 2011). In this passage, we see that Sasha has internalized this message to the extent that she expresses the same hope for her cousin, Mikey. In the following conversation with her foster mother, told from Sasha's perspective, Sasha considers for the first time what it might be like to *choose* her hometown as a place to live.

> "Mikey's only little," I say. "He should get to be normal and grow up normal and go to college."...
>  "Mikey'll be fine, Sash. He'll get to go to college, and so will you, if that's what you want."
> "It is....I want me and Mikey both to get to leave."...
> We drive on in silence for a minute before I think to ask, "Why did you never leave?"
> She glances at me. "Caboose?"
> "Yeah."
> "What makes you think I never left?"
> My head whips around. "You did?"
> [Phyllis describes moving west with her boyfriend when she was nineteen.]
> "Why'd you come back?"
> "Heath Christian didn't turn out to be quite the man I thought he was," she said, "and I found out I was expecting Sam. I needed help, and my family was here....This is where I choose to be, Sasha. My people are here."
> I try to imagine how it feels to *choose* Caboose. As long as I can remember, I've never considered that it was a choice. Michael wanted to escape so badly that his plan always felt like my own. Even now, as comfortable as I've started to feel with Phyllis, something in me still burns to escape. (pp. 134–136)

## For Consideration

- What does this passage reveal about Sasha's relationship with her hometown—her *place?* Why doesn't see consider staying there as an adult to be a valid choice?
- How does Sasha's perspective about her future shift during this conversation?
- How might this passage have been different if it was told from the third-person perspective, with Sasha referred to as "she" instead of "I"?

## Distinguishing Points of View—Third Person (Omniscient and Limited)

In first-person perspective, the protagonist and narrator are one and the same. With a third-person perspective, the narrator is either omniscient ("all-knowing"), meaning they have access to information outside of the protagonist's thoughts, or limited, where the narrator's information is limited to what the protagonist knows. To compare these two types of third-person perspectives, we first share an excerpt from Varian Johnson's *The Parker Inheritance* (2019), in which the protagonist, Candice, and her friend, Brandon, are exploring Candice's grandmother's attic in small-town Lambert, South Carolina.

> Candice poked her head into her mother's office to tell her what they were up to.
> "Be careful up there," her mother said. Any trace of anger toward Candice from before had disappeared. "This house has been boarded up for months. There's no telling what you could find."
> The entrance to the attic was in the garage. Candice was already sweating by the time she pulled down the ceiling door.
> Brandon flipped on the light, and they headed up the rickety stairs. The wooden slats groaned beneath them.
> The attic was even hotter than the garage. There looked to be nothing but junk up here—old Christmas decorations, a sewing machine, and spools of dated cloth.
> "Yuck," Brandon said, wiping at his face. "I just got some spiderweb in my mouth."
> Laughing, Candice walked to the far corner of the room.  Then she smiled. "Over here," she said to Brandon. There, against the wall, was a box labeled FOR CANDICE. (p. 27)

Because the narrator in *The Parker Inheritance* is omniscient, they are able to tell us about the past and present (e.g., in describing Candice's mother, they mention a "trace of

anger toward Candice from before" which now "had disappeared"). They can also tell the reader what various characters are thinking or feeling by offering descriptions. For example, we can infer that Candice is hot because the narrator tells us, "Candice was already sweating by the time she pulled down the attic door." If the story had a limited narrator, they could have communicated Candice's feeling of being hot differently because they would have access to her thoughts, perhaps stating, "Candice felt very hot. She was already sweating by the time…"

The next excerpt comes from Sharon Draper's *Stella By Starlight* (2015), which takes place during the Jim Crow era in a small North Carolina town. Stella has submitted an entry for a school writing contest and is listening to her teacher report the results. Because of the author's use of a limited narrator, we, as readers, have access to Stella's thoughts and feelings.

> Stella sat quietly, daring to be hopeful.
> "Our high school contestant will be Helen Spencer, who wrote a clever story called, 'Bucky and the Beaver.'"
> Everyone clapped politely, the Spencer children especially pleased.
> "Our middle grades' entry," Mrs. Grayson continued, "was written by Carolyn Malone. She wrote about the loss of her baby sister. Her essay is very brave."
> Stella bowed her head. Her essay hadn't gotten picked. She *knew* it. She just wasn't good enough. She was happy for Carolyn, but still…
> "And our final contestant, representing our littlest people, is Claudia Odom, who wrote a sweet and funny poem she calls 'Cornbread and Cows.' Let's give Helen, Claudia, and Carolyn a big round of applause and wish them the very best in the competition."
> Stella's arms felt like she'd been toting watermelons all day—everything about her felt heavy and slow and glum. So she was really glad when everyone had stopped clapping and cheering. (pp. 215–216)

With an omniscient narrator, it's up to the reader to infer characters' feelings based on the given information. In contrast, *Stella By Starlight's* limited narrator tells the story from Stella's perspective, but without using the pronoun "I". As readers, we learn about everything Stella thinks and feels (e.g., she was "daring to be hopeful" while she waited for the teacher's announcement; her body felt heavy and glum upon receiving the bad news; she felt glad when the cheering for her classmates stopped). This makes the narrator limited, because we only have one perspective—in this case, Stella's.

## For Consideration

- What specific examples do you see in the *Stella By Starlight* passage that show what Stella is feeling? How does this differ from the way we understand what Candice and Brandon are feeling in *The Parker Inheritance?*
- Find other passages written in third-person perspective. Compare them to these two excerpts and see if you can identify whether their narrators are omniscient or limited.
- Write a short scene using an omniscient narrator. Then, rewrite it using a limited narrator. Explain to a classmate what adjustments were needed to shift from one perspective to the other.

## Building Conflict

*Last in a Long Line of Rebels* (2015) by Lisa Lewis Tyre takes place in rural Tennessee. This excerpt shows Louise, the protagonist, who is White, overhearing an upsetting conversation between her older friend, Isaac, who is Black, and his girlfriend, Daniella. Each of the three main types of conflict found in literature (Person vs. Person, Person vs. Self, and Person vs. Society) are present in this passage.

> I picked up my trash and walked to the front. Isaac and Daniella were leaning against the wall waiting on their order. Their backs were to me, and I…heard Daniella whisper, "If you mess with Coach Peeler, you'll be the one that gets in trouble."
> I froze, straw in midair. Isaac leaned his head closer to Daniella, but I could still hear him.
> "I don't care. You get that, right? He ruined my chance to go to UT, and you want me to just take it? I've been dreaming about going there and playing football since I was five years old." His hand curled into a fist. "I've worked my butt off getting the grades to get accepted. That scholarship should have been mine, and if I were white, I bet it would have been!"
> Daniella shook her head. "What are you planning to do?"
> I slowly pushed the trash lid open, hoping they wouldn't turn around and see me as I tried to hear Isaac's answer….
> "Lou," Bertie yelled from across the room, "are you going to stand there all night?…We've got to go!"
> If Isaac answered Daniella about his plans, I wasn't going to hear it. Now I had another thing to worry about—Isaac getting in trouble.
> I barely slept that night, kept up by dreams of Isaac chasing Coach Peeler around the Dairy Barn. At the

first hint of daylight, I went to find Daddy....

"I wanted to tell you about something. Last night I heard Isaac talking about getting even with Coach Peeler. You don't think he'd actually do anything to him, do you?"

"I sure hope not," Daddy answered. "But I can't say that I blame him for thinking about it."

"How can the coach treat kids this way and get away with it?" I asked.

"Racism can be very subtle sometimes, Lou. It's not always something you can put your finger on. It might mean being harder on the black players and more aggressive in helping the white ones get a place on a college team. It doesn't help that we don't have a large black population here. It makes it a lot harder to prove a pattern."

"But what if enough people think that Isaac should have won and complain?"

"Peeler's brother-in-law is the superintendent of schools, unfortunately," he said. "And unless you can prove without a shadow of a doubt that he based his decision on race, there's not a lot we can do." (pp. 96–98)

Louise's desire to overhear what is being said even though she doesn't want to be caught eavesdropping is a Person vs. Self conflict. Isaac being overlooked for a scholarship by Coach Peeler is a Person vs. Person conflict, as is the difference of opinion between Isaac and Daniella about how the situation should be addressed. Finally, Isaac faces a Person vs. Society conflict—it seems he is being treated unfairly because of his race, and because of the power structures in place in the community, he has limited options for redress.

### Discuss

- What examples of conflict can you identify in this passage?
- Why did Louise have trouble sleeping after overhearing Isaac and Daniella's conversation?
- Louise turns to her dad for help. Which of the conflicts might he be able to resolve, and which are beyond his ability to help?

### Discussion

A recent conversation among prominent children's literature researchers focused on the need to move beyond looking at the texts to which students have access towards looking at *how* young readers actually engage with diverse texts, with "diversity" being defined much more broadly than in the past (Yenika-Agbaw, 2021). Here, we aimed to show how language arts lessons can introduce students to diverse representations of rural Appalachian people and places while teaching needed skills and inspiring critical conversations about power and privilege. These passages give a small taste of the high-quality Appalachian children's novels that are out there, but reading the whole book (as a class read-aloud, small group book study, or as independent reading) would provide many additional opportunities for students to grapple with these issues. Some of the excerpts describe everyday moments of powerlessness that children everywhere experience, like the sadness of moving away, the stress of parents' constant fighting, or the disappointment in not winning a contest. Other passages address large-scale societal injustices like historic and present-day racism, animal mistreatment, the long-term consequences of childhood abuse, cultural stereotypes, and the influence of poverty on life decisions.

To access more books set in rural places, we suggest visiting rural.vt.edu/rural-literature-library to browse an online collection of hundreds of rural books written for students of various ages. Additionally, LiteracyInPlace.com is a wonderful website featuring discussions of rural young adult literature across various media. As you read and discuss rural literature with students, we invite you to use the infographic found in the Appendix to help students critically consider the role of place in literature.

### Conclusion

Literary descriptions, like the characters' awe at seeing the West Virginia state capitol building in the *Missing May* passage, can open students' minds to a different way of experiencing something. In the story, this regal symbol of strength means so much to the Appalachian characters who surely grow weary of hearing the negative depictions of their state. Through Cynthia Rylant's beautiful use of imagery, students may come to understand on a deeper level that rural people deserve dignity and respect. Similarly, when reading about Sasha's angst about knowing she's expected to leave her hometown to be a success in *Free Verse* (Dooley, 2016), students can consider expectations they have about their own futures. And, experiencing Louise's reaction to the news that her ancestors had been enslavers while reading *Last in a Long Line of Rebels* (Tyre, 2015) can help students grapple with the ways in which racism affects their own lives. There are many more such examples in the literature we have shared. Studying them while also familiarizing students with concepts like personification, metaphor, and simile can empower and equip students with the tools needed to tell their own placed stories through writing.

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# Thinking Critically About Rural Literature

Whose perspectives are **privileged**?

Whose perspectives are **left out**?

Are featured rural communities diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, language, dis/ability, culture, gender identity, religion, queerness?

Is "rural" portrayed as a place of potential— a place of HOPE?

Is RURAL depicted as: *idyllic? pastoral? nostalgic? historic? quaint? "other"?*

Does it **matter** that the setting is rural, or could the story have taken place *anywhere*?

Do characters TAKE UP or DISRUPT stereotypical depictions of rural people and places?

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# Using Fluency in the Upper Elementary Grades

*Samantha Smigel, Henrico Public Schools*

As an elementary literacy coach and literacy specialist, I worked with a third-grade teacher implementing fluency strategies in her classroom. Within this action research project, I measured the effectiveness of different fluency strategies on student motivation and reading. Teachers commonly think of fluency in terms of words per minute or repeated readings, but it encompasses much more. At the time of this project, there were twenty students in the class. Of those, five had been identified as at-risk on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) at the beginning of the year, eight had individualized education plans (IEP), and three were English learners. As the reading coach, I planned with the classroom teacher each day and co-taught with her during the English language arts block. We worked together to implement 12 different fluency strategies in the classroom within the current English language arts curriculum. A fluency rubric and Motivation to Read Survey revealed more information about the students' progress in fluency. At the end of the eight weeks, all students successfully increased their correct words per minute, with many meeting their third grade target rate. The students' gains over the eight weeks were a surprise even to the students themselves. As a result, the trusting community formed in the classroom went beyond the eight-week project, showing that fluency instruction can boost students' self-confidence and allow them to see themselves as readers.

Fluency is one of the many foundational skills students need to be successful readers. In the upper grades when gaps in reading span multiple grade levels, there should be more of a focus on fluency to improve both students' reading and motivation. Fluency is rarely a key part of successful reading programs, and little research has focused on reading fluency and its role to improve motivation and comprehension for students in third through fifth grade (Cassidy et al., 2021; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Rasinski et al., 2009; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). The primary concern for readers increasingly focuses on vocabulary and comprehension in upper elementary classrooms. However, the link between reading words and comprehension is reading fluency (Rasinski, 2010; Rasinski et al., 2009). When students are focused on individual words and reading word-by-word rather than reading fluently, they are spending more cognitive energy decoding words and less on understanding the flow of language to help them read quickly and accurately (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Rasinski et al., 2009). This is when a student's comprehension breaks down, making the reading process laborious and slow. Using fluency activities where students are surrounded by examples of high-quality literature and can enjoy reading and performing with others can be beneficial. Research shows improvements in fluency can be directly linked to gains in oral reading and comprehension, and also reading motivation (Rasinski, 2010; Worthy & Prater, 2002).

The definition of fluency differs among researchers. Fluency is often measured by rate and accuracy, however, other components used to describe fluency are prosody and comprehension (Rasinski, 2010). In 1979, Samuels stressed the importance of building speed rather than accuracy so as to prevent overemphasizing accuracy and impede fluency. Almost ten years ago, Rasinski (2010) defined fluency as the ability of readers to effortlessly read words with meaningful expression. Valencia and colleagues (2010) and Marcell (2011) also stated that fluency is the ability to read quickly and accurately, with correct phrasing and expression, while being able to both decode and comprehend. Prosody serves as an indicator or reflection of the readers' attempt to understand the writer and their purpose (Rasinski et al., 2009). Studies by Young and Rasinski (2009) show students who read orally with expression have good comprehension

Keywords: comprehension, fluency, reading motivation, oral reading, upper elementary

when reading silently. There were thirty years between the research of Samuels (1979) and Rasinski (2010) and yet we still see the importance rate and accuracy play in the definition of fluency, as well as the significance of prosody and comprehension.

Repeated readings are the key to increasing a student's rate, accuracy, prosody, comprehension, and overall attitude toward reading (Rasinski, 2012; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). In Samuel's (1979) research, he found students who read the same text multiple times improved their rate and accuracy. This started the beginning of research into educational practices incorporating repeated readings to improve automaticity (Marcell, 2011; Samuel, 1979). Rasinski (2010) defined repeated readings as, "the repeated practice of reading one passage that allows students to develop mastery over a given text before moving on" (p. 88). Repeated readings reinforce good phrasing while incorporating corrective feedback and repeated exposure of language structure. Decoding then becomes more fluent with repeated readings, meaning minimal attention is placed on the words and more cognitive effort is used on making meaning (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Samuels, 1979). Giving students in the upper grades the opportunity to practice a text multiple times has benefits for all readers.

An engaging alternative to repeated readings is reader's theater, which is the performance of a written script requiring both repeated and assisted readings while being an engaging and motivational activity for students (Young & Rasinski, 2009). Students learn to take risks as they engage in authentic reading using their voices to convey the meaning of the script. The greatest benefit of reader's theater is the added motivation to perform. Worthy and Prater (2002) found this activity to be the single most motivating and effective reading activity they used with intermediate-age students. When used with a fourth grade class, Griffith and Rasinski (2004) found reader's theater allowed students to make substantial gains in reading development. Students willingly read higher-level texts because of their excitement to read and perform, making grouping students by interest instead of reading ability the most important aspect (Marcell, 2011; Rasinski, 2010; Worthy & Prater, 2002; Young & Rasinski,

2009). Students are motivated by reader's theater for its authenticity and defined purpose (Marcell, 2011). Reader's theater is a fluency activity suitable for all grade levels, content areas, and reading abilities. They can be purchased or written by students, creating a positive social interaction focused on reading.

The divide between student's reading abilities compared to their peers widens as students progress through elementary school, as does their motivation to read. Students are still developing their identities as readers in elementary school. Reading motivation can be defined by an individual's self-concept of reading and the value the individual places on reading (Gambrell et al., 1996; Malloy et al., 2013). Understanding students' self-concepts as readers and the value they place on reading can be helpful for teachers. Students with high self-concepts of reading are more likely to approach reading with enthusiasm (Malloy et al., 2013). Students who put value in reading and think of it as an engaging task that will help them in the future are more likely to participate in reading (Malloy et al., 2013). In 1996, Gambrell and colleagues created the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) to provide teachers with a quick and reliable way to assess reading motivation quantitatively and qualitatively. Later, in 2013, Malloy and colleagues revised the Motivation to Read Profile to incorporate cultural and linguistic changes. Understanding a student's self-concept of reading and the value they place in reading allows for personalized plans to be created supporting each student in developing their identities as readers and increasing reading achievement.

All students benefit from daily fluency practice within their reading instruction to improve rate, accuracy, prosody, and comprehension (Rasinski, 2012). Engaging students in different oral reading activities in front of an audience builds their appreciation for reading and helps them to become more fluent readers (Rasinski, 2010). Research shows students' improvement in oral reading fluency correlates with improvements in reading comprehension (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Valencia et al., 2010). Helping students in upper elementary grades improve their fluency will also help them become more confident readers as they continue in school.

## Project Overview

During this action research project, as the reading coach and specialist, I worked with a third-grade teacher implementing fluency strategies in her classroom. I measured the effectiveness of different fluency strategies on student motivation and reading. This took place at an elementary school in a Virginia public school system. This elementary

*Research shows improvements in fluency can be directly linked to gains in oral reading and comprehension, and also reading motivation*

school is a suburban school with a high English language learner population consisting of students from 40 different countries. At the time of this project, there were 20 students in the class. Of those, five had been identified as at-risk on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) at the beginning of the year, eight had individualized education plans (IEP), and three were English learners. The classroom teacher had a background in teaching special education and worked to support each student's individual needs. As the reading coach, I planned with the classroom teacher each day and co-taught with her during the English language arts block. We worked together to implement 12 different fluency strategies in the classroom within the current English language arts curriculum, which are outlined in the appendix.

### Project Goals

The purpose of this action research project was to introduce fluency strategies to one class of upper elementary students and measure how fluency impacts reading and motivation. Because fluency is a major component of reading, I was able to focus on fluency in an upper elementary grade classroom and provide students with explicit instruction for eight weeks. Students' fluency increased throughout this project, which had an impact on their reading motivation. My goals throughout this project were to collaborate with the classroom teacher to implement different fluency activities with her students, support students' literacy learning through a variety of activities, assist the classroom teacher in helping students set fluency goals for themselves, and increase students' motivation to read.

I supported the classroom teacher with the writing of lesson plans which included the implementation of assisted readings, repeated readings, and performance readings. Together, we successfully used assisted readings which provide readers with scaffolded support while reading. Examples of these types of readings include choral readings, paired readings, antiphonal readings, echo readings, call-response readings, waterfall readings, and buddy readings. We also taught

*An engaging alternative to repeated readings is reader's theater, which is the performance of a written script requiring both repeated and assisted readings while being an engaging and motivational activity for students.*

students different forms of repeated readings which require repeated readings of the same text. Examples include radio readings, character readings, and mumble readings. Finally, I assisted the teacher in leading performance readings which engaged students with reader's theater and poetry readings. Students read a variety of different passages for fluency practice and were able to put them into a book at the end of the project. I worked with students individually and as a group to help them with their fluency, and during this process, I recorded audio and video of students' readings. Engaging instruction included reflection when recordings were played back for students to analyze their own fluency, expression, and accuracy.

Fluency goals were set using the REAL Student-Friendly Fluency Rubric (Marcell, 2011) through a pre-and post-assessment. Those results were graphed to see patterns and changes from the pre to the post-assessment (See Figure 2). I supported students in setting goals and met with students regularly to review their progress. Then, to measure student motivation, students completed the Motivation to Read Survey-Revised (Malloy et al., 2013) as a pre-and post-assessment. A graph was made with the results of the student survey (see Figure 4). I assisted the teacher in using a variety of high-interest resources to increase the student's motivation toward reading. I wrote daily observational notes and kept a reflective journal to make instructional decisions and view trends in student data.

### Findings and Experiences

My first goal was to collaborate with the classroom teacher and implement different fluency activities with her students. The teacher and I created a timeline aligning our fluency activities with the third grade curriculum emphasizing student engagement with reading. I started by teaching fluency to the students because she was unsure how to teach fluency lessons but over the next few weeks she began co-teaching and co-planning with me. The implementation of this project encouraged her to take on fluency as a skill she taught during whole-group and small-group instruction. She incorporated it within other content areas and continued to talk about fluency with her students even after the project was complete. I effectively met this goal and wrote during week seven of the project in my reflective journal:

> I am continually impressed by her implementation of fluency strategies naturally within the whole group and small group instruction. She reads a poem out loud first then has the class choral read with her. I could immediately see improvement in the student's reading and fluency. But most of all,

the students were engaged. Having all students read aloud kept students paying attention and following along.

Through daily fluency practice students were engaged, eager, and reflective about their reading. Our fluency activities were shared with the team of third grade teachers at grade level meetings and conversations about fluency instruction and activities began to occur. Students participated in fluency activities individually, with partners, in small groups, with the whole class, and digitally with websites like Seesaw. Sharing fluency digitally allowed parents to become engaged in our fluency activities and monitor student progress.

My second goal was to support students' literacy learning through a variety of different fluency activities. I successfully met this goal and worked with students daily as we implemented different fluency activities each week. At the beginning of the project, students were hesitant to share their ideas out loud and read in front of their peers. Recognizing this apprehension from students, this project started with understanding *what* is fluency, *how* to read fluently, and *why* we want to read fluently. The classroom teacher observed how I introduced fluency to students during the first week of fluency lessons. By week two, we were planning together and co-teaching the lessons. Our plans followed a predictable routine each week as new fluency activities were taught to students. On Monday, the new activity would be introduced and the initial text would be modeled using that technique. On Tuesday and Wednesday, students would work in small groups with teacher support to practice reading the selected text using the fluency activity. On Thursday, we would have a "dress rehearsal" practicing the text one last time in small groups. Friday was our big performance where students would perform their fluent reading for their classmates and other guests to the classroom. We continued to remind students what fluency was and what fluency was not, which became a powerful reminder in the daily Google slides (see Figure 1). For example, students made a video presentation of a famous person they had researched in the early weeks of the project. Students were to record themselves reading their own writing in this activity. They had been learning what fluency was and what it sounded like and with this presentation students were applying the practical application of using fluency to communicate clearly with an audience. By the end of the second week, students knew why fluency was important for readers. During week three, the classroom teacher explained to students how fluency was more than just memorizing a poem or story, but instead, about thinking deeper within the text.

Many students who had been apprehensive about reading were participating during the final week. One of the students was an English learner who volunteered to lead the class in our ritual poem. He went to the front of the class, pointed to the first word, and began to read it as the class joined in reading the poem in unison. When he returned to his seat, he said, "I'm not nervous anymore," with a smile on his face. During the final performance, our selectively-mute student with an individual education plan read her reader's theater performance within her group. We could see the growth students made in their self-confidence about reading in front of their peers. The community built from our fluency activities had an impact on our students' reading engagement. I wrote in one of my reflective journal entries in week eight of the project:

> Students were more willing to work with anyone in the class as it was obvious that there now existed a community within the classroom. Students were supportive of each other and willing to take risks in front of others. It is hard to believe we started reading everything aloud as a class and now I had almost every child in the class willing to read out loud by themselves. Students have grown in their self-confidence as readers and have even begun to apply past fluency activities to daily reading activities.

Fluency was well understood by the students and they knew how to continue practicing even after the project finished.

**Figure 1**
*Example of a Google Slide on Fluency*



The classroom teacher and I realized that students had a false sense of their own fluent reading during weeks four and five of the project. Rasinski (2010) recommended beginning a fluency lesson as a ritual; he encouraged beginning and ending each read-aloud session with a quote or poem to help students see the importance and value of the lesson. To that end, students read a poem by Lee Bennett Hopkins (1990) entitled "Good Books, Good Times!". This became our ritual poem we used to start and end every

fluency lesson. It also gave students the ability to become fluent with a poem through repeated readings. I recorded students reading the ritual poem aloud, then played the recording back for them to hear and analyze. Students could hear their flat, robotic voices in the recording. I noted in my observational notes how students had good advice for one another and offered tips to improve their expression. This was an example of students taking ownership of their learning. They were coaching each other on their fluency and being critical in their reflections on their readings. Students were beginning to understand *how* to read fluently and now had the language to explain the process.

The classroom environment was also changing. This became a space where students felt comfortable taking risks, making mistakes, sharing their ideas, and trying new things. Later, I asked students to verbalize the hardest parts of our ritual poem. One student said, "I used to think the words *adventures* and *beginnings* were tough because they were big words, but now I don't because I know what they are." Students were candid about their struggles and shared their successes. Our ritual poem united the class which reinforced how fluent reading can change student's identities as readers. This demonstrated the power of student reflection in a safe classroom environment.

As we moved into weeks six, seven, and eight of the project I noticed how the classroom teacher began implementing fluency strategies naturally within her whole-group and small-group instruction. I wrote in my reflective journal in week six:

*My goals throughout this project were to collaborate with the classroom teacher to implement different fluency activities with her students, support students' literacy learning through a variety of activities, assist the classroom teacher in helping students set fluency goals for themselves, and increase students' motivation to read.*

Her incorporation of this fluency activity into her small-group reading shows how our project together is transferring into her daily activities. She understands the usefulness of teaching fluency to students and sees it as an important part of reading. It also shows how my involvement in this project with her students has also helped her instruction.

The teacher was leading the daily fluency lessons with the class while we were still working closely to plan the lesson and find high-quality literature for our fluency passages. I wrote in my observational journal during week seven, how after a lesson she apologized for "talking so much" during the fluency lesson and not giving me the chance to co-teach with her. I reassured her how this was the plan all along. She was leading her students in fluency conversations where they now saw her as the "expert."

My third goal was focused on myself as a professional educator where I assisted the teacher in supporting students in setting fluency goals for themselves and striving to meet their goals. At the beginning of the project, students completed the REAL Student-Friendly Fluency Rubric (Marcell, 2011) which allowed them to reflect on their rate, expression, accuracy, and learning. This was used as a pre- and post-assessment to measure our students' fluency improvement throughout the project. Students answered questions on the rubric in the four areas of rate, expression, accuracy, and learning. There were three choices to select indicating in each area: 1) mastery or 2) occurs sometimes/needs more help, or 3) below mastery. Students were given a text and asked to read out loud to measure their rate. The correct words per minute (CWPM) were calculated after one minute. An average end-of-year reading rate range was used from Morris (2014) which indicated a third-grade oral reading rate between 90-135 words per minute. This became each student's goal for their rate. Initially, only seven out of 18 students met their rate goal. I worked with students individually and in small groups over the next weeks to check their progress towards reaching their goals. Many students chose to focus on improving their expression after hearing their recordings. Next, students scored themselves on expression. Only six out of 18 students scored themselves as having met mastery with expression on the pre-assessment. The majority of students, 12 out of 18 indicated they did this sometimes. Another aspect of the rubric was accuracy. On the pre-assessment, 13 of 18 read with 99%-100% accuracy making only one or two miscues. The last section of the rubric measured student's comprehension of what they read. On the pre-assessment, 12 of 18 students indicated they missed some details in the story.

The scores on the post-assessment show notable increases in all areas with measured improvement from 10 more words per minute to 64 words per minute. One student achieved a 65% increase in his CWPM score from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment. He met his third grade goal of reading at least 90 words per minute and was so proud of himself he began to cry. Students have experienced the joy of reading and have the self-confidence to see their growth as readers. The growth of all students is described in Figure 2. On the rubric, 15 out of 18 students reached the third grade oral reading target rate between 90-135 words per minute. While not all students met their grade level target between 90-135 words per minute, they all showed improvement. On the post-assessment all 18 students indicated they read with proper expression. This was a significant increase from the pre-test where less than half of the students considered themselves reading with expression. In accuracy, 14 out of 18 students indicated they read with 99%-100% accuracy. Finally, with the understanding of the text, 11 out of 18 students indicated they understood what they read. Compared with the pre-assessment, more students indicated mastery of rate, expression, accuracy, and learning on the post-assessment.

My fourth goal was to collaborate with the classroom teacher to increase students' motivation about reading through the use of different fluency activities. I met this goal, but not based on the motivation survey. Students completed the Motivation to Read Profile-Revised (Malloy et al., 2013)

at the beginning and end of the project. This was used to measure the students' overall feelings about reading and their motivation to read. It consisted of two parts, a student survey, and a conversational interview. The student survey had 20 questions focusing on the student's self-concept of reading and their value toward reading. A sum score was collected for each student (see Figure 3). In looking at the sum scores, eight students increased from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment, three students' scores remained the same, and seven students had higher pre-assessment scores. I expected all students to be more motivated to read rather than only eight students. While my quantitative data from the Motivation to Read Survey did not reflect that all students were more motivated to read, my qualitative data of the observational notes and reflective journal entries do indicate students were more motivated to read. I found students were more reflective about their reading from participating in these different fluency activities.

Each question on the survey was scored out of four points. There were a total of 10 questions on the survey about a student's self-concept as a reader and 10 questions about a student's value of reading. A positive answer about one's self-concept of reading or value of reading was given a score of three to four. Likewise, a lower score of one to two indicated a lower self-concept or value of reading. Figure 4 shows the average score for each question for the pre-and post-assessment. Average scores ranged between two and three levels for each question. When considering

**Figure 2**
*Individual Student Pre-and Post-Correct Words Per Minute Scores*
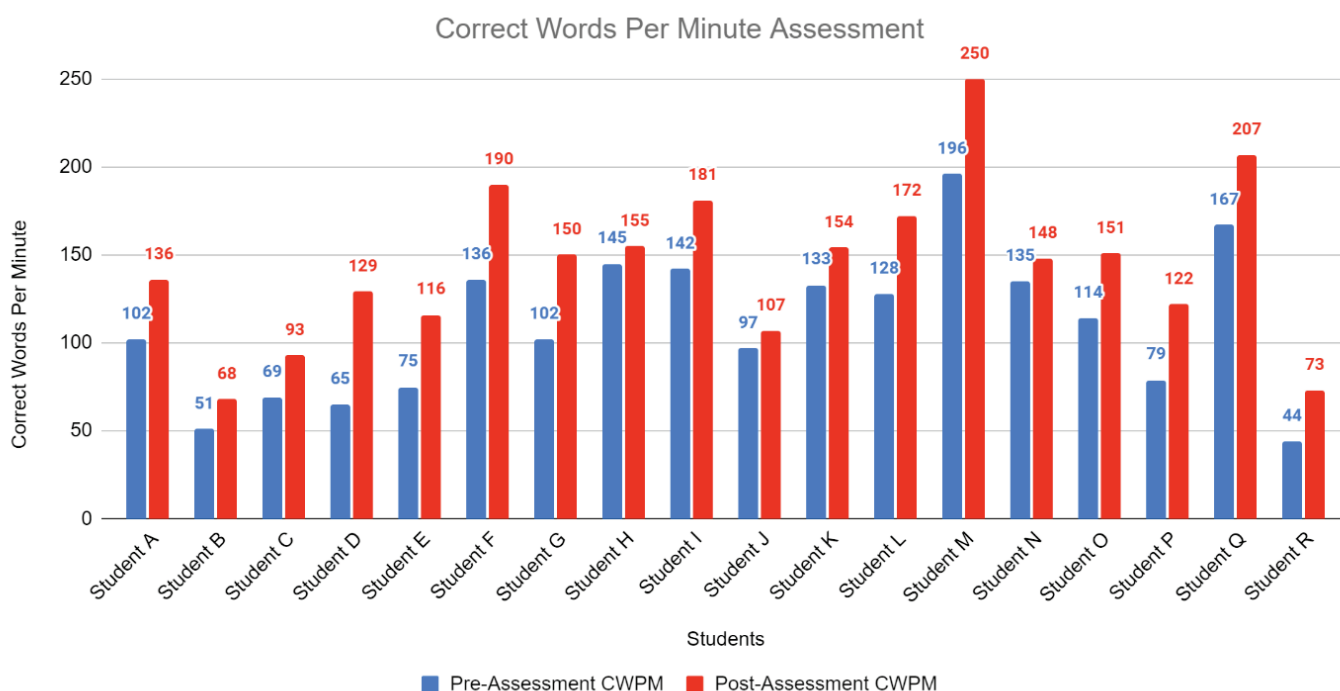
**Figure 3**

*Individual Student Sum Scores for Pre-and Post-Assessment*



Motivation to Read Survey
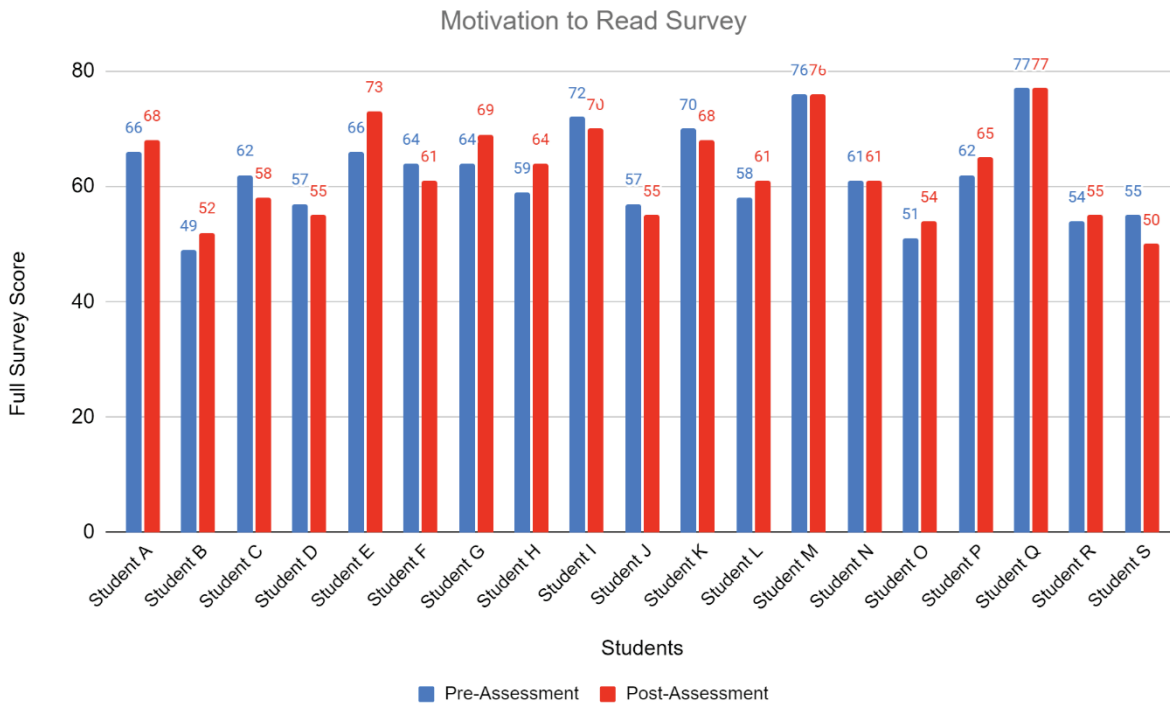
the average score of each question comparing the pre- with the post-assessment, 10 out of 20 questions showed an increased average, three questions did not change, and seven questions had a higher average on the pre-assessment. Of the seven questions showing higher scores on the pre-assessment than the post-assessment, all were questions about students' value of reading. This indicates that students valued reading more before the fluency project, than after the project. Further analysis of students' responses was conducted to see if this was true.

It was important to understand students' value of reading by analyzing the individual questions and how students interpreted them. The questions referring to 'what friends think about reading' went from higher scores of three or four on the pre-assessment to lower scores of one or two on the post-assessment. On the question, "*My friends think reading is___,*" each student rated a friend's reading interest (in other classes, at home, at other schools, or siblings) as an "*ok thing to do*" or "*no fun at all.*" This question, while demonstrating each student's value of reading, does not reflect the student's perception of reading, but their perception of their friend's interest. This must be considered when analyzing the data. The question "*I tell my friends about good books I read*" also received lower scores on the post-assessment. While it indicates the student's value of reading, if the same friends think reading is an "*ok thing to do*" or "*no fun at all,*" then students would not be encouraged to share good

books with them and would rate this as something they either "*never do*" or "*almost never do.*" While the overall survey data reflects that not all students are more motivated to read after the fluency project, their awareness of their own reading and fluency has changed since the pre-assessment. I indicated students were more aware of their own reading and their fluency in my observational notes. Students considered how they sound when reading aloud, listening to others, and reading with others.

I fully met my goals in this project as I collaborated with a classroom teacher to plan fluency lessons, supported students' learning with fluency, and assisted students in meeting their goals. While the survey data indicated that students were not more motivated to read, my notes indicated otherwise. Following a predictable routine and keeping expectations high for all students encouraged them to strive to read harder texts. Students applied fluency strategies to reading in other content areas and when reading their own books. These findings are reflected in their improvement throughout the project.

## Conclusion

Throughout this project, I was reminded how fluency in the upper elementary grades is rarely a focus, but needed for all students. Teachers usually think of fluency in terms of words per minute, or repeated readings, but it encompasses

**Figure 4**
*Graph Representing Motivation to Read Average Scores*

## MRP Average Pre-and Post-Assessment Scores
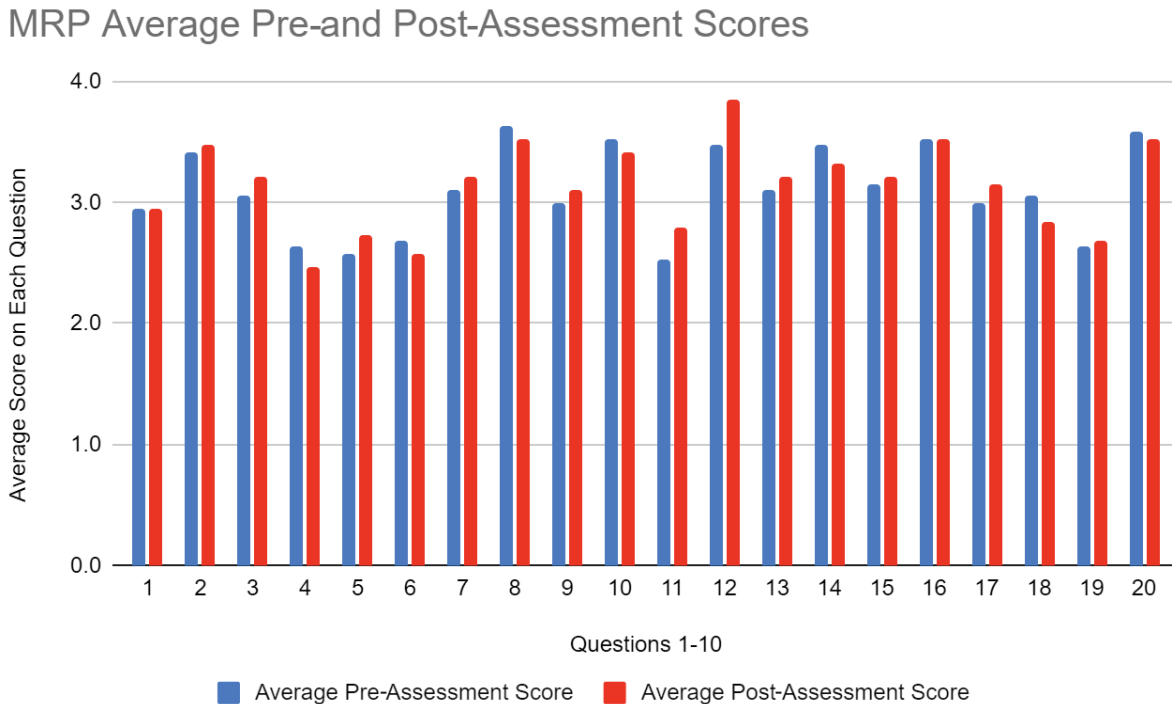


more. Working alongside a third grade classroom teacher to co-plan and co-teach fluency activities allowed her to learn new teaching methods and gave students the opportunity to improve their rate, expression, accuracy, and comprehension. Using a predictable routine every day including reading a ritual poem, introducing a new fluency activity each week, and performance readings on Fridays gave students the comfort to take risks. Teaching specific fluency lessons was new for everyone, including the classroom teacher. Students became more accustomed to the routines of our daily lessons as each week progressed and they grew closer as a community of readers. Using mindful questioning, students shared their challenges with fluency, freely admitting areas for growth in front of their peers. After eight weeks all students were willing to lead the class in reading our ritual poem. The safe classroom environment we created remained throughout the project and continued through the remainder of the school year.

The fluency rubric and Motivation to Read Survey revealed more information about students' fluency progress. Measuring students CWPM using the REAL Student-Friendly Fluency Rubric gave tangible goals for students to work towards (Marcell, 2011). Directly interacting with students throughout the project reminded them of their focus and what they wanted to accomplish. At the end of the eight weeks, all students had increased their CWPM, and most students had met their third grade target rate. Students could see for themselves the dif-

ference in the CWPM during the post-assessment and they were delighted to share the news with family and friends. The Motivation to Read Survey revealed students' initial and post perceptions of reading as related to their self-concept and value of reading (Malloy et al., 2013). While seven students had decreasing scores on the survey, eight students had increased scores. Further assessment of the individual questions indicates the possibility that student responses regarding their friends' perceptions of reading may have influenced lower scores. Contextualizing specific anomalies in the data and utilizing additional data from my journals both facilitate a more thorough understanding of a student's motivation to read. Fluency clearly plays a vital role in the success of readers in the upper elementary grades. This project demonstrates the role fluency instruction can play in boosting students' self-confidence by allowing them to see themselves as readers.

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| Type | Activity | Activity/Description | Text Connection |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Assisted Readings**<br><br>These activities have a gradual release of support and responsibility. They provide tangible, direct, and scaffolded support to the reader. | **Choral Readings**<br><br>All students read the same text together at the same time, reading in unison. | **Antiphonal Readings** - Divide the class into groups and assign a section of text to each group, read in order. | • *If Sharks Disappeared* by Lily Williams<br>• *Everything On It* by Shel Silverstein<br>• *Where the Sidewalk Ends* by Shel Silverstein<br>• Additional Poems:<br>  o *Caged Bird* by Maya Angelou<br>  o *I, Too* by Langston Hughes<br>  o *Talk About a Beanstalk* by Becky Ross Michael<br>  o *A Good Kid* by Becky Ross Michael<br>  o *Goldi* by Becky Ross Michael<br>  o *Instead of Red* by Becky Ross Michael |
| | | **Echo Readings** - One student reads a line; the second student reads the same line with the same expression as the first reader. | |
| | | **Waterfall Readings or Cumulative Choral** - One to two students read the first line of a text, then the rest of the students join in. | |
| | | **Buddy Readings** - Students read the same text together, as choral reading, echo reading, or alternating pages, then talk about it with each other. | |
| | | **Call-Response Readings** - One student reads a line or two of text and the rest of the class responds by repeating the lines or reading the next few lines. | |
| | **Paired Readings** | Students read a text with a partner, then pairs read the text aloud together after they have read it on their own. | |
| **Repeated Readings**<br><br>These readings require repeated practice of reading one passage. They allow the student to develop understanding of the text before moving on. | **Radio Readings** | Students practice the text on their own and make comprehension questions based on their given part in a text. They perform the reading as if they are an actor, then ask their questions to the audience at the end. | • *Yeh-Shen, A Cinderella Story from China* retold by Ruth Mattison<br>• *Ashley Bryan's ABC of African American Poetry* by Ashely Bryan<br>• *Soul Looks Back in Wonder* by Tom Feelings |
| | **Character Reading** | Students read the text as if they are a YouTube star making a video, having lots of expression and attitude. | |
| | **Mumble Readings** | One student reads a story independently in a low/soft voice, then reads it again to a friend. | |
| **Performance Readings**<br><br>This type of reading turns repeated readings into an engaging and effective form of instruction. It is an authentic form of reading where students perform for an audience. | **Reader's Theater** | Students read assigned parts in a story written like a script. Students transform into that character and perform with a purpose. | • Reader's Theater Collection by T. P. Jagger<br>• *The Veggie Thief* by Teresa McGee<br>• *The Hare and the Tortoise retold* by Martha Hach<br>• *Where the Sidewalk Ends* by Shel Silverstein<br>• *A Light in the Attic* by Shel Silverstein<br>• *Science Verse* by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith<br>• *Guyku* by Bob Raczka<br>• *Curious Creatures* by Barry Louis Polisar |
| | **Poetry Readings** | Students read a poem either by themselves, with a partner, or in a group, and use the expression in their voice to show the audience the mood and/or purpose of the poem. | |

# 2023-2024 VIRGINIA READERS' CHOICE TITLES

## Primary Titles

Are You a Cheeseburger? . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Monica Arnaldo
The Year We Learned to Fly . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Jacqueline Woodson
Except Antarctica . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Tom Sturgell
It Fell From the Sky . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . The Fan Brothers
Survivor Tree . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Marcie Colleen
I Don't Want to Read this Book . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Max Greenfield
Mindful Mr. Sloth . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Katy Hudson
The Library Fish . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Alyssa Satin Capucelli
Chester Van Chime Who Forgot How to Rhyme . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Avery Monsen
Digging for Words: Jose Alberto Gutierrez and the Library He Built . . Angela Burke Kunkel

## Elementary Titles

Too Small Tola . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Atinuke
Stuck . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Jennifer Swender
Braver: A Wombat's Tale . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Suzanne Selfors
Measuring Up . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Lily LaMotte
Twins . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Varian Johnson
                                                                             & Shannon Wright
Nicky and Vera: A Quiet Hero of the Holocaust
and the Children He Rescued . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Peter Sis
Mimic Makers: Biomimicry Inventors Inspired by Nature. . . . . . . . . . . Kristen Nordstrom
The One Thing You'd Save . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Linda Sue Park
New From Here . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Kelly Yang
Planet Omar: Accidental Trouble Magnet . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Zanib Mian

## Middle School Titles

All He Knew . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Helen Frost
City Spies . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . James Ponti
Coop Knows the Scoop . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Taryn Souders
Flight of the Puffin . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Ann Braden
Race to the Bottom of the Earth . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Rebecca E.F. Barone
Star Child: A Biographical Constellation of Octavia Estelle Butler . . . . Ibi Zoboi
The Last Cuentista . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Donna Barba Higuera
The Magical Imperfect . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Chris Baron
The Mysterious Disappearance of Aidan S. (as told to his brother) . . . David Levithan
What Comes Next . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Rob Buyea

## High School Titles

All My Rage . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Sabaa Tahir
Black Birds in the Sky: The Story and Legacy
of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Brandy Colbert
In the Wild Light . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Jeff Zentner
Lore . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Alexandra Bracken
None Shall Sleep . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Ellie Marney
The Cat I Never Named: A True Story of Love, War, and Survival . . . . . . . . . . Amra Sabic-El-Rayess
The Electric Kingdom . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . David Arnold
The House in the Cerulean Sea . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . T.J. Klune
What I Carry . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Jennifer Longo
When You Look Like Us . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Pamela N. Harris

# "Learning It Together:"
## Administrators as Partners and Coaches

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Decades of research underscore the positive impact administrators have on professional learning outcomes when they position themselves as lead learners and instructional change agents within schools (Grissom et al., 2021). When administrators view professional development as a means of instructional change and work alongside teachers to engage in shared learning, collaboration, and ongoing reflection, they create conditions in which teachers are able to refine their instructional practices, leading to improved learning outcomes for students (Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004).

This article shares some of the findings of a larger study which explored the impact of professional development on teachers' beliefs and practices related to vocabulary instruction in one elementary school over three years (Newton, 2018). The larger study confirmed the vital role that administrators can play in enhancing teachers' professional development experiences and facilitating the instructional growth process. The article focuses specifically on the central role of an assistant principal, who worked in close collaboration with a literacy coach, to support nine teachers' efforts to refine instructional practices. While the assistant principal was involved in design and implementation, teachers identified other aspects of her participation as key to their success. A description of the experience and its findings will spotlight voices from three of the teachers who were involved in the year-long initiative. This will be followed by tips that administrators and content coaches can use to support their own school-based professional development initiatives.

## Coaching Challenge

The 500 students at Phillis Wheatley Elementary School (PWES), a kindergarten-sixth grade Title 1 school in a Mid-Atlantic state, were culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse. A majority of the students received free or reduced-price lunch and qualified as English Language Learners (ELLs). At the time of the study, students were underperforming on state literacy assessments. School-wide data indicated that academic vocabulary was a barrier to students' reading success.

Teachers at PWES expressed concerns about their ability to provide quality vocabulary instruction. Many cited concerns about limited instructional time and confusion about effective instructional methods. The challenge was to provide PWES teachers with high quality professional development about vocabulary instruction that addressed the unique needs of PWES students. To address this challenge, the school's assistant principal, Ms. Bennet, collaborated with a county-based literacy coach, Ms. Vlanton, to design and implement a year-long professional development on vocabulary instruction.

## Professional Development Design

Ms. Bennet and Ms. Vlanton worked together to design the professional development, drawing on recommendations from leading scholars to create a professional development experience that prioritized teacher collaboration, was extended over time, and delivered focused study about academic vocabulary and how to teach it (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Garet et al., 2001). Ms. Bennet and Ms. Vlanton also included classroom coaching as an ongoing component, since teachers who work with skilled coaches for extended periods of time are more likely to make instructional changes (Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2011; Knight, 2006).

## The Cohort

As assistant principal, Ms. Bennet used her knowledge of PWES to make strategic decisions about how to build the cohort. She used school data, coupled with what she knew about individual teachers as leaders and learners to determine who to invite. School data indicated that students in grades three and four were at the greatest risk of underperforming on state mandated reading assessments, so she selected third and fourth grade teachers to participate. All participants were invited by Ms. Bennet to join the cohort.

They received emailed invitations, expressing that they had been selected for participation. All participation was voluntary.

The teachers to whom Ms. Bennet extended invitations were informal building leaders, those teachers with a visible presence in the school who often assumed voluntary leadership roles (e.g., chairing a social club). In total, nine teachers participated. Three taught third grade and two taught fourth grade. There were three literacy specialists and one specialist in instruction for ELLs who worked with the third and fourth grade teachers in the group.

## The Sessions

The professional development cohort met once a month for learning sessions over the course of one academic year. Each session was 90 minutes in length. All sessions occurred at the end of the school day in the school library.

As a literacy coach, Ms. Vlanton used her knowledge of literacy instruction and academic vocabulary to design the content of the cohort sessions. Each session was designed to meet two objectives: (1) to build teachers' familiarity with the linguistic structures of academic vocabulary; and (2) to expand teachers' knowledge of research-based instructional methods.

At each session, teachers studied the morphemic structures of academic vocabulary and learned about instructional strategies. They engaged in facilitator-led demonstrations of instructional strategies, tried out new methods through teacher-led demonstrations, observed lessons from guest

*When administrators view professional development as a means of instructional change and work alongside teachers to engage in shared learning, collaboration, and ongoing reflection, they create conditions in which teachers are able to refine their instructional practices, leading to improved learning outcomes for students (Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004).*

teachers, and reflected on facilitator-led lessons in their own classrooms. Participants regularly reviewed student work samples as they measured the impact of their instruction on student learning. Each cohort session included time for collaborative planning of future vocabulary lessons.

## Coaching

Ms. Bennet and Ms. Vlanton used a combination of in-class coaching and coaching around video recorded lessons. Over the course of the year, each participant engaged in three in-person coaching sessions and three coaching sessions on video recorded lessons. Teachers determined the date, time and focus of the coaching session. After each observation, Ms. Vlanton or Ms. Bennet facilitated a coaching conversation, in which the teacher reflected on successes and challenges of the lesson, as it pertained to their chosen area of focus (e.g., student talk, clarity of teaching language). As part of these conversations, teachers determined areas of strength in the lesson and identified actions to improve upon for the next lesson. Ms. Vlanton and Ms. Bennet offered constructive feedback teachers could apply to strengthen vocabulary instruction.

## Findings on the Role of the Assistant Principal

The primary data source for this study was face-to-face interviews. Study participants were interviewed three times by Ms. Vlanton in a one-on-one setting over a three-year period. The first interviews were conducted at the onset of the professional development and probed participants' prior learning experiences with vocabulary instruction. At the conclusion of the professional development, each participant underwent a second interview. In this interview participants reflected on their experience with the year-long professional development cohort model. A third interview was held two years after completion of the professional development. These final interviews provided insight into how participants implemented and maintained changes to practice over time. Ms. Vlanton analyzed all interview data using the constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data analysis revealed that Ms. Bennet's involvement in the professional development was instrumental to teachers' successful implementation of new practices. Administrative involvement in three areas emerged as particularly supportive of teachers' learning and growth: 1) initiation of the professional development cohort ; 2) participation in cohort sessions; and 3) coaching teachers.

## Initiation of the Professional Development Cohort

Teachers largely credited Ms. Bennet's initiation of the professional development and her invitational approach with kindling their interest in vocabulary instruction. A fourth-grade teacher, Ms. Jones, explained, "The administration lit the fire. They sparked the importance [of vocabulary instruction] by having these trainings. If they didn't do that, then it might not be on my radar." Ms. Jones went on to add that Ms. Bennet's role as assistant principal was particularly meaningful to her. She said:

> The spark came from someone who's very knowledgeable and has a lot of classroom experience. And it's the assistant principal. Like if a random person came up to me who's a teacher but who's not as credible as say, an assistant principal, it might not seem as important.

She described a conversation with Ms. Bennet that was particularly impactful:

> She came to me and did this like, almost not a pitch, but she was just saying why it's really important to do this for our kids specifically. They're English Language Learners, high ESOL, high Spanish, and she gave me a book.

A third-grade teacher, Ms. Harris, also credited Ms. Bennet's invitation to participate and her spearheading of the group with her motivation to commit to a yearlong professional development. She elaborated:

> We were selected, thank goodness! It's awesome. I feel very lucky that I was asked....It's not just, you know, for recertification points or just doing it because I have to. Administration was on board, so I wanted to be better at it [vocabulary teaching] and to do what I can with it. I knew I always had the support of Ms. Bennet, which was huge.

Researchers have confirmed that when aligned with school-wide instructional goals, professional development can "foster coherence" (Garet et al., 2001, p. 927) among teachers and administrators, leading to instructional improvement. Teachers at PWES perceived the professional development cohort, and their own invitation to join, as part of a broader administrative effort to improve vocabulary instruction across PWES. This motivated them to link what they learned in cohort sessions to their own teaching situations and implement new instructional techniques in their classrooms.

## Participation in Cohort Sessions

Ms. Bennet was an active participant in each professional development session. During group discussions, she admitted when content was new to her and posed questions to deepen her own understanding. She shared her experiences as a former teacher, reflecting on the ways in which she was dissatisfied with her own vocabulary teaching. In reflecting on her own past experiences and sharing them with participants in this way, Ms. Bennet opened space for teachers to do the same. This established a culture of safety within the cohort. Ms. Jones encapsulated her experience, "I felt more comfortable. We're all, like, kind of on the same playing field, so it made us feel safe, not knowing a lot about what was about to be taught." Ms. Harris expressed similar sentiments when she said, "I felt very comfortable. I never felt like I couldn't be honest. I always felt like it was ok for me to say, 'I don't know.'"

Ultimately, the safe learning environment created opportunities for teachers to collectively problem-solve challenges to instructional implementation, alongside administration. A common frustration for teachers was limited instructional time for vocabulary teaching. Ms. Bennet actively listened to teachers' concerns and worked alongside them to find plausible solutions. This made Ms. Jones feel accountable for making changes to her schedule to increase instructional time for vocabulary teaching. She explained:

> Having colleagues from the same school that know the situation that you're in and knowing what ad-

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ministration expects from you and then all of us sitting down and saying, 'This is something we're committing to, we're going to find time in our schedule, we're going to hold each other accountable for it.'

Climates in which teachers feel safe to take risks and feel emotionally supported are more likely to lead to positive learning outcomes for students (Hollingworth et al., 2018; Louis et al., 2016). Further, when administrators participate in professional development alongside teachers, teachers become more engaged and more willing to implement new practices (Blasé & Blasé, 1999). By engaging as a co-learner and modeling her own vulnerability, Ms. Bennet established an egalitarian learning culture in which participants were secure to ask questions, make mistakes, share challenges, and take risks to adopt new practices.

## Coaching Teachers

As a former instructional coach, Ms. Bennet understood the importance of coaching in supporting professional growth, so she actively assumed a coaching role. The coaching model encourages teachers to be self-directed learners who explore problems of practice that relate to their own teaching contexts (Joyce & Showers, 1982). During the year, teachers selected dates and times for either Ms. Vlanton or Ms. Bennet to observe vocabulary instruction. For each of these observations, teachers selected an area of focus about which they would like feedback. Ms. Bennet and Ms. Vlanton focused observations on these teacher-identified problems of practice, such as on-topic student conversations during lessons, timing of in-lesson transitions, and clarity of teacher language. Assuming an inquiry stance, Ms. Bennet and Ms. Vlanton gathered data on problems of practice as identified by individual teachers. They shared this data during individual post-observation conversations and, upon request, offered constructive feedback to support teachers with planning next instructional steps.

*Administrative involvement in three areas emerged as particularly supportive of teachers' learning and growth: 1) initiation of the professional development cohort ; 2) participation in cohort sessions; and 3) coaching teachers.*

Hollingworth et al. (2018) point out that successful leaders provide teachers with opportunities to try new approaches and risk failure. They build trust when they work alongside teachers to address instructional challenges in ways that are neither punitive nor evaluative. By assuming the role of a coach, Ms. Bennet broke from a hierarchical leadership model in which administrators evaluate and critique teacher performance. Using a non-evaluative coaching stance, Ms. Bennet provided teachers constructive and timely feedback within the context of reflective conversations. Instructional challenges were viewed as learning opportunities, areas which the teachers themselves decided to improve upon, rather than mistakes for which they were penalized. Through this process Ms. Bennet supported teachers' professional growth.

Ms. Martin's journey with adopting student-centered instructional approaches illustrate the power of this coaching. Prior to participating in the professional development, Ms. Martin, a fourth-grade teacher, described her vocabulary instruction as "sporadic" and "teacher-centered." She expressed reticence about using more student-centered approaches citing concerns about classroom management. After completing the professional development, Ms. Martin identified increased use of student talk as her most profound instructional shift. She credited the ongoing support of the cohort and Ms. Bennet, along with opportunities to practice new instructional methods over time, with her ability to make instructional changes. She explained that she felt safe taking risks in her instruction, stating, "It's ok that it wasn't perfect because I had that support system, that group that was learning it together. I could slowly take baby steps and try some, you know, different activities over time." Ultimately Ms. Martin's baby steps led to long-term change. Observation of her vocabulary instruction over a three-year period revealed a shift in Ms. Martin's understanding about the importance of student talk, problem-solving and engagement in vocabulary learning. When asked about this change in an interview three years after the initial professional development, she reflected, "After practicing it so many times it became part of my practice, it's just a natural thing I do now."

Researchers have established that coaching is more likely to lead to gains in student achievement than more traditional administrative observational methods such as walkthroughs (Grissom et al., 2013). In the role of a coach, rather than evaluator, Ms. Bennet fostered a culture of learning focused on continuous instructional improvement. In doing so she made it possible for teachers to internalize changes to practice so that they eventually became "just a natural thing" to do.

## Conclusions

Results of this study clearly underscore the vital role that administrators can play in enhancing teachers' professional development experiences and thus facilitating the instructional growth process. All three participants credited their ability to make and sustain changes in their practice to the administrative support they received at PWES. Initially, participants felt investment in the professional development cohort because it was an administrative initiative at PWES. Teachers' engagement was further heightened and sustained by the assistant principal's enthusiasm for and active involvement in the professional development cohort. These conclusions are both supported by and contribute to existing research about the critical role of administrative leadership in facilitating teachers' efforts to make and sustain improvement to teaching (Grissom et al., 2021; Marzano, 2004; Robinson et al., 2008; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). The impact of administrative involvement in professional learning is best summarized, however, by the teachers themselves. In the words of Ms. Harris, "Thank goodness for Ms. Bennet and this study group of colleagues!"

## Six Tips for Administrators and Content Coaches

Given the many demands of administrative responsibilities, it can be challenging for building leaders to assume and maintain a learner-stance in professional development (Grissom et al., 2021). The following tips, based on insights generated by this study, are for administrators and content coaches seeking to increase administrative involvement with professional learning.

1. **Start small.** Given the competing demands for teachers' time and the variance in teachers' attitudes towards professional development, Ms. Bennet understood that a school-wide initiative mandated from administration would not gain traction with faculty to produce lasting results. She focused on building a small community of learners whose enthusiasm for the experience and notable shifts in practice would gradually draw the interest of other faculty, paving the way for opening the professional development experience to other teachers in the coming years.

2. **Make strategic decisions about cohort development.** Ms. Bennet made strategic decisions about who to invite to the cohort. None of the teachers selected had reputations for being outstanding literacy teachers. She intentionally selected teachers who had reputations for being enthusiastic learners and collegial colleagues, those teachers who enjoyed positive social relationships with other faculty and tended to be early adopters of instructional initiatives.

3. **Actively participate.** Ms. Bennet was an active, engaged participant in each cohort session. She ensured she was both physically and mentally present. She sat at the table with teachers, silenced her cell phone, and shut off her laptop. She engaged in the learning by asking her own questions, encouraging others to adopt a learning stance grounded in inquiry and curiosity, and by being a mindful listener to others.

4. **Reflect on your own teaching experiences**. It was evident throughout the year that Ms. Bennett never forgot her past experiences as a classroom teacher. She talked openly about her own teaching experiences with cohort members, sharing her own self-perceived instructional shortcomings. Teachers felt they could share their apprehensions and confusions, be heard and understood, and for many this was critical to their implementation.

5. **Understand adult learners.** Ms. Bennet knew that adult learners need time to reflect, process individually and with others, and opportunities to determine next steps in an effort to move forward (Knowles, 1984). In each monthly session, time was dedicated for teachers to reflect, process and plan. Consequently, teachers left each learning session with insights gained from reflection on practice, deepened understandings about new content, and actionable steps for classroom implementation.

6. **Foster a culture of coaching.** As assistant principal, Ms. Bennet could have taken the role of consultant, evaluator, or coach in the professional development. Consultants provide suggestions that teachers apply to improve practice. Evaluators monitor instructional practices to ensure adherence to school and district standards for

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teaching. Coaches position teachers as reflective decision makers. Ms. Bennet opted to position herself as a coach. The coaching role enabled Ms. Bennet to foster a cohort climate characterized by a communal sense of safety, collective responsibility and shared efficacy. As a result, teachers had time, space, and support to develop instructional skills and cultivate reflective habits of mind to sustain instructional growth over time.

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# Through the Pages of a Book:
## Teaching for Anti-Racism and Global Competence with Children's and Adolescent Literature

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The Commonwealth of Virginia is home to a sizable immigrant population. According to the American Immigration Council (2020), immigrants make up approximately 13 percent of the total population, including over 78,000 children. Additionally, between 2019 and 2021, Virginia annually welcomed between 3 and 5% of refugees granted asylum in the United States (Refugees and asylees, 2022). Of concern, immigrant students enter our schools in a time of xenophobia and anti-immigrant fervor among many in our nation, which can lead to increased scrutiny and racialization of immigrant children in schools (Jaffe-Walter, 2018). Given this reality, there is an imperative need for educators in Virginia to understand the lived experiences of diverse refugee and immigrant populations in order to create welcoming, safe schools through culturally and linguistically responsive learning experiences.

Research suggests (e.g., Aldana & Martinez, 2018) and our own teaching affirms that many practicing and future teachers might not have an in-depth awareness of the diverse backgrounds and experiences of refugee and immigrant children and families. In our experience as teacher educators, knowledge is power. One method for increasing knowledge in a viable way is through the use of children's literature. Using children's literature to introduce the experiences of others is a promising approach to gaining a glimpse into others' worlds and is a practice that can be replicated by educators in their current or future classrooms (Craft Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008; Harper & Brand, 2010; Mattix & Crawford, 2011).

Our goal in this manuscript is to support developing understandings of the lived experiences of families from refugee and immigrant backgrounds through the use of exemplary children's literature and research-based strategies for teaching for global competence and anti-racism education. Recent scholarship suggests that teachers can employ flexible approaches to anti-racist action work (Arneback & Jämte, 2021; Mosley, 2010), and that anti-racist work can be approached by fostering children's global competencies (Jackson, 2021). The use of children's literature to enter others' worlds can contribute to anti-racism education and build learners' global competence.

To do this, we demonstrate how we invite pre and in-service teachers to respond to children's literature through the use of global thinking routines, micro-teaching tools that can foster inquiry about the world beyond one's immediate environment. Through this process, we can engage learners in perspective-taking of others' viewpoints, invite respectful dialog with diverse others, and spark thinking around acting and advocating for a more just and sustainable world. This approach is useful for engaging educators with a research-based framework for education for global competence and for building domains of global competence (Boix Mansilla et al., 2017; Kerkoff & Cloud, 2020; OECD/Asia Society, 2018).

In the following sections, we provide an overview of how and why children's literature can be such a powerful platform for increasing awareness of the lived experiences of refugee and immigrant children and developing global competency skills. We also examine one literature example to demonstrate how we can use children's literature and global thinking routines to build understanding and teach for anti-racism and global competence. We conclude by offering some insights and suggestions for choosing children's literature to use in the classroom.

## Setting the Stage: The Power of Children's Literature

*Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. But if the light is right, the window becomes*

*a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. (Sims Bishop, 1990)*

Children's literature is an ideal tool for teaching complicated topics in the classroom. Children's literature serves as a purveyor of cultural capital (Zipes, 1989, 2008) that encompasses the socio-historical and sociocultural perspectives of the society in which it was written. Cowhey (2006) shares that children's literature can create a safe space for engaging children in dialog about sensitive topics, inviting problem-posing, building critical literacy skills, and considering actions that can improve unjust outcomes. Moreover, children's literature has been shown to be a powerful way in which children can develop their understanding of not just themselves, but also the world around them (Craft Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008; Harper & Brand, 2010; Mattix & Crawford, 2011). Children's books are used as fundamental artifacts in classrooms to build background knowledge, develop vocabulary, and increase reading skills. Equally important, children's literature exposes students to new concepts and cultures and assists students in developing their ideas about the world around them (Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1999).

A growing body of literature suggests that teacher educators can use children's and adolescent literature to foster educators' critical consciousness and social justice praxis (Hambacher et al., 2020). Mosley (2010) found that engaging educators in discussions of children's literature can contribute to developing an understanding of what it means to be actively anti-racist as a literacy teacher. This finding aligns with recent research suggesting that educators can apply a wide array of anti-racist actions in school settings (Arneback & Jämte, 2021). With growing numbers of children from refugee backgrounds in the U.S. and around the world, children's literature can be self-af-

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firming for children from this population as well as a window into new worlds for children from other backgrounds.

## Theory into Action: A Sample Story

In this section, we share an example of the way that PK-12 teachers can open a space to invite learners to consider what it must feel like to be a refugee; to suddenly need to leave everything behind to seek safety and begin a new life in an unfamiliar place and culture. We share this activity in a teacher education course so that current and future teachers have hands-on practice using children's literature to foster critical thinking and critical consciousness in age-appropriate ways with PK-12 learners.

To begin, we invite our teacher education students to view, listen to, and read *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna (2016). This children's book can be shared with PK-12 learners through reading a hard copy or viewing/listening to the story on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_CZhAOmAQGc). We selected this book for its topic, but also as it is endorsed by Amnesty International UK and was the recipient of a 2017 Ezra Jack Keats Book Award Honor. The power of this children's story is that it does not represent the specific experiences of one group of refugees, but instead invites readers to think about what it would feel like to become a refugee in a wartorn country. The text on each page is short but poignant, taking away some of the linguistic demands while conveying a captivating story. The book is also beautifully illustrated by the author in a way that affords opportunities to consider how images and colors can be used to create meaning in stories.



*The Journey* conveys the experiences of a family with an ordinary life who used to enjoy summer vacations at the beach until war in their country abruptly changed their lives forever. As the war progresses, the father is lost and the

mother must seek a safe place to live for her two children in a country far away. The mother comforts her children with the promise of safety, and they embark on their journey. The journey is long, tiring, and sometimes scary. The mother remains brave even when they are chased away from a border by guards and when they must eventually journey across a big sea with other refugees. After many days at sea, the family must continue the journey by train across many borders. On the train, one of the children notices the many birds who seem to have been following them throughout their journey. The story ends with the child's hope and wish that, like birds who migrate over many lands, their family, too, will find a safe home where they can begin their story again.

Depending on the age/grade level of the learners, teachers can decide when, how, and why to integrate *The Journey* into their instruction. For example, this story may fit into an interdisciplinary unit in social studies and English language arts (see Table 1). It is an excellent story for fostering the global citizenship goals that many school districts embrace. Building PK-12 learners' dispositions and knowledge to become globally competent individuals aligns with these goals (https://asiasociety.org/education/what-global-competence; Boix-Mansilla, 2017). In turn, developing global competence is a way to foster anti-racism education by guiding children to develop the capacity to think and act as global citizens who desire to contribute to creating a more just, sustainable world for all people (Jackson, 2021). In addition, inviting learners' responses to a story like *The Journey* affords opportunities to build standards-aligned critical literacy skills in age-appropriate ways. Teachers can draw on their knowledge of their learners' backgrounds and experiences, as well as their curriculum, to decide when and how to set the stage for reading *The Journey* and inviting responses to this powerful story.

## Theory into Action Activity: Global Thinking Routines

Global Thinking Routines (GTRs) are a set of micro-teaching tools that can be used to cultivate learners' critical consciousness and nurture global competence dispositions to actively inquire about the world beyond one's immediate environment, seek multiple perspectives about issues of local-global significance, engage in respectful dialog with diverse others, and take responsible action for a socially just world (Boix-Mansilla, 2017; Boix-Mansilla, et al. 2013). Produced as part of Project Zero in the Harvard Graduate School of Education, GTRs are meant to be used often across content areas and grade levels to create a classroom culture of global competence (*Global Thinking*, n.d.).

In our work with *The Journey*, we invite teacher education students to engage in The 3Ys GTR after viewing, listening to, and reading the story. The 3Ys is a GTR that is designed to invite learners to consider whether something matters and why. This GTR encourages learners to uncover the significance of a topic by making local-global connections and situating themselves in local-global spheres. It can also be applied to spark interest in investigating a topic further to consider how it may have far-ranging impacts and consequences at local and global levels (http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/global-thinking).

Our teacher education students reflect on and answer The 3Ys after reading *The Journey*. In classrooms, teachers could create a graphic organizer of The 3Ys for use with learners:

1. Why might **the right to a safe place to live** matter to me?
2. Why might **the right to a safe place to live** matter to people around me [family, friends, city, nation]?
3. Why might **the right to a safe place to live** matter to the world?

Through engaging in The 3Ys in connection to *The Journey*, teacher education students discovered a meaningful pedagogical strategy for use in their current or future classrooms to engage PK-12 learners in perspective sharing around an issue of local-global significance. Literacy teachers could extend this learning activity in many directions. For example, PK-12 learners could be invited to create a multimodal visual representation of their responses to the questions to share and explain in pairs, small groups, and/or with the class.

## Continuing the Exploration: A Video Analysis of *The Journey*

Following The 3Ys, we invite teacher education students to view/listen to a video analysis of *The Journey* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iD1zFWBI5LY). The purpose of this activity is to engage current and future teachers in thinking about how to delve deeper into exploring the themes, characters, and symbolism in the story. We also want to provide educators with another avenue to consider the ways that children's literature can be a tool for anti-racism and global competence education.

After viewing a video analysis of *The Journey*, several key points were raised by the preservice and in-service teachers in our courses. One of the biggest takeaways was the power that stories like this have to teach empathy, perspective, and awareness, even with very young students. Discussions around war and migration can be explored with older stu-

**Table 1**

*Connections to Virginia Standards of Learning*

| Virginia Standards of Learning | |
|---|---|
| **History & Social Science** | **English Language Arts** |
| **Elementary: KG, Grade 3**<br><br>**K Skills** (K.1) The student will demonstrate skills for historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship by:<br><br>**KG History (**K.2) The student will recognize that history describes events and people from other times and places by<br>**Gr 3 Civics (**3.13) The student will recognize that Americans are a people of diverse ethnic origins, customs, and traditions and are united by the basic principles of a republican form of government and respect for individual rights and freedoms | **Elementary Reading (taken from Gr. 2, 4, 6)**<br><br>The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of fictional texts.<br><br>Connect previous experiences to new texts.<br>Ask and answer questions using the text for support.<br>Describe characters, setting, and plot events in fiction and poetry.<br>Compare/contrast details in literary and informational nonfiction texts.<br>Use information in the text to draw conclusions and make inferences.<br>Identify the conflict and resolution..<br>Identify the theme(s).<br>Identify cause and effect relationships. |
| **United States History: 1865 to the Present**<br>**Skills** (USII.1)<br>e) comparing and contrasting historical, cultural, and political perspectives in United States history;<br>f) determining relationships with multiple causes or effects in United States history;<br>(USII.9) d)  evaluating and explaining American foreign policy, immigration, the global environment, and other emerging issues. | **Grade 10: Reading**<br><br>10.4 The student will read, comprehend, and analyze literary texts of different cultures and eras.<br><br>c) Explain similarities and differences of techniques and literary forms represented in the literature of different cultures and eras.<br>d) Analyze the cultural or social function of literature.<br>e) Identify universal themes prevalent in the literature of different cultures.<br>f) Examine a literary selection from several critical perspectives.<br>g) Explain the influence of historical context on the form, style, and point of view of a literary text.<br>i) Compare and contrast literature from different cultures and eras |

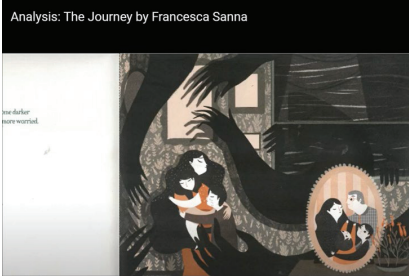| Portrait of a Graduate: Virginia PoG Goals for Global Citizenship |
|---|
| **Communicator:**<br>Applies effective reading skills to acquire knowledge and broaden perspectives.<br><br>**Collaborator:**<br>Respects divergent thinking to engage others in thoughtful discussion.<br>Analyzes and constructs arguments and positions to ensure examination of a full range of viewpoints.<br><br>**Ethical & Global Citizen:**<br>Acknowledges and understands diverse perspectives and cultures when considering local, national, and world issues.<br>Demonstrates empathy, compassion, and respect for others.<br>Acts responsibly and ethically to build trust and lead.<br><br>**Creative & Critical Thinker:**<br>Uses information in novel and creative ways to strengthen comprehension and deepen awareness. |

dents, but even very young students can understand and relate to the idea of moving and the feelings of fear and the unknown that often accompany it. Our students also shared ideas that relate not only to this particular text but to using children's literature in a range of grade levels to develop global competence:

- Building connections to specific topics introduced in the literature
- Encouraging students to share their personal stories
- Identifying cross-curricular topics and themes
- The importance of discussing books before, during, and after reading
- Reading the text more than once, especially when reading about topics that might challenge students' current beliefs
- The importance of choosing literature that represents a range of characters and topics
- How children's literature can be used at any grade level, including adolescent and adult learners

The video analysis can be useful to PK-12 teachers as an instructional tool as well. For example, the story and analysis could be built into a thematic mini-unit with adolescent learners in social studies or ELA classrooms. Reading and ESOL specialists could collaboratively plan with social studies and/or ELA teachers to introduce the topic of the migration of refugees in global contexts. The story and video analysis could be springboards to critical literacy lessons inviting adolescent learners to consider root causes of migration by refugee families, analyzing welcoming and/or rejecting refugee families in different contexts and reasons for these sentiments, exploring and creating solutions to integrating refugee families in local contexts, or any number of other themes. These lessons easily lend themselves to a multiliteracies approach as well when teachers plan opportunities for adolescent learners to share their thinking and understanding in multimodal ways.

Although the video analysis would not be shown to young learners, it can be a catalyst for sparking teacher thinking

**Table 2**
*General Questions*

| The Journey: Sample Student Questions |
| --- |
| General Questions |
| <ul><li>What colors do you see on this page?</li><li>Why do you think the author used these colors?</li><li>How do these colors make you feel?</li><li>Why do people move?</li><li>Have you ever moved?<ul><li>How did you feel when you left your home?</li><li>When you arrived at your new home?</li></ul></li></ul>  |

Questions that may spark deeper conversations and invite diverse perspectives can be used with middle to upper-elementary students:

**Table 3**
*Specific Questions*

| The Journey: Sample Student Questions |
| --- |
| Specific Questions |
| <ul><li>Why do you think the author made the ocean black at the beginning of the story?</li><li>Why do you think the author drew the birds following the family?</li><li>Where do you think the family lived at the beginning of the story?</li><li>Where do you think they were trying to go?</li><li>How do you think the main character(s) feels?</li><li>How would you feel if this was happening to you?</li><li>Have you ever moved somewhere new before? How did you feel?</li><li>Have you ever known anyone who moved from somewhere else?</li><li>If you could say something to the main character, what would it be?</li></ul>  |

**Table 4**
*Age-Based Questions*

| The Journey: Sample Student Questions | |
|---|---|
| Analysis: The Journey by Francesca Sanna<br><br>• What colors do you see on this page?<br>• Why do you think the author used these colors?<br>• How do these colors make you feel?<br>• Why do people move?<br>• Have you ever moved?<br>   ○ How did you feel when you left your home?<br>   ○ When you arrived at your new home? | <br>• Why do you think the author made the ocean black at the beginning of the story?<br>• Why do you think the author drew the birds following the family?<br>• Where do you think the family lived at the beginning of the story?<br>• Where do you think they were trying to go?<br>• How do you think the main character(s) feels?<br>• How would you feel if this was happening to you?<br>• Have you ever moved somewhere new before? How did you feel?<br>• Have you ever known anyone who moved from somewhere else?<br>• If you could say something to the main character, what would it be? |

about how to engage younger students to reflect and analyze in age-appropriate ways. For example, teachers can use the illustrations and symbolic use of color to engage students and cultivate conversations that develop empathy and awareness. Depending on the age of the learner, more general conversations around feelings and perspectives can be explored (see Tables 2, 3, and 4).

Regardless of the age of students, it's important that teachers allow sufficient time before, during, and after reading these texts for partner, small group, and whole class discussions to allow space for students to reflect and process their new understandings.

## Implications

Providing students with opportunities to experience lives that differ from their own allows for the development of empathy, tolerance, and respect for those with different life experiences. Children's literature is an excellent way to provide pathways for learners to do this, but importantly, combining thoughtful literature with reflective activities provides a space for students to develop their global competence. While there are many books to choose from when curating a reading list for students, it is important that educators are purposeful in text selection for children and adolescents. The publishing world is still an overwhelmingly and disproportionately white-dominated field, particularly in the United States. Choosing texts with second-hand representations of the immigrant and refugee experience can potentially be problematic, as "incomplete stereotypes invisibly uphold... the superiority and idealization of whiteness" (Anand & Hsu, 2022, p. 47). In addition to considering who the authors and illustrators are of texts, it is also important to diversify the narratives being told, as books not only provide an avenue for learning about hard topics and building empathy, but also provide a medium in which students might feel empowered and accurately represented in texts (Ambrosia et al., 2021). Appropriately chosen texts can not only build empathy for those unfamiliar with the immigrant and refugee experience, but they can also help build resilience in students who associate with the stories centered in the literature (see Appendix 1 for a sample list of texts).

In choosing texts for children and adolescents, it is important to be purposeful and intentional. It is advised to pick texts that are written and/or illustrated by persons who have direct experience with, or have been impacted by, the immigrant or refugee experience. Students who are immigrants or refugees themselves will benefit from hearing their stories echoed; students who are learning about the experience will have the opportunity to engage directly with a narrative provided by a person with experience, rather than second-hand retellings. We also recommend that a variety of texts are chosen that exemplify the multiple layers of the refugee story, to include both difficult content, as well as moments of joy and bravery. Additionally, we fully acknowledge the challenge of locating and selecting rich texts. To help navigate this challenge, we suggest a number of resources that contain curated lists for educators that have been vetted and are updated frequently: The Immigration Learning Center, UNHCR, World of Words, and Windows and Mirrors.

## Conclusions

Choosing and using rich literature has incredible potential in the classroom to help build empathy, tolerance, and understanding. Using powerful stories allows learners to engage in meaningful ways with the life experiences of others. It allows windows and mirrors to come into focus and open the pathway to teaching for anti-racism and global competence.

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# Appendix

Sample List of Books

| Early Readers & Elementary | | |
|---|---|---|
| *I Is for Immigrants* | Selina Alko | Early Reader |
| *What Is a Refugee?* | Elisa Gravel | Early Reader |
| *Two White Rabbits* | Jairo Buitrago and Rafael Yockteng | Early Reader |
| *The Name Jar* | Yangsook Choi | Elementary |
| *One Green Apple* | Eve Bunting | Elementary |
| *We Came to America* | Faith Ringgold | Elementary |
| *Wherever I Go* | Mary Wagley Copp | Elementary |
| *When Africa was Home* | Cooper Williams | Elementary |
| **Middle School** | | |
| *Refugee* | Alan Gratz | Middle School |
| *Boy Overboard* | Morris Gleitzman | Middle School |
| *While I was Away* | Waka T. Brown | Middle School |
| *B at Home: Emma Moves Again* | Valérie Besanceney | Middle School |
| *One Good Thing about America* | Ruth Freeman | Middle School |
| **High School** | | |
| *Crossing the Wire* | Will Hobbs | YA |
| *The Good Braider* | Terry Farrish | YA |
| *Illegal* | Bettina Restrepo | YA |
| *Red Umbrella* | Christina Diaz Gonzalez | YA |
| *Every Falling Star* | Sungju Lee & Susan McLelland | YA |
| *Never Fall Down* | Patrician McCormick | YA |
| *Finding Refuge* | Victoroya Rouse | YA |
| *Badawi* | Leila Abdelazaq | YA - graphic novel |
| *Unwanted* | Don Brown | YA - graphic novel |
| *The Arrival* | Shaun Tan | YA - graphic novel |

# 2023-2024 Call for Manuscripts: Reading in Virginia
## Theme: Expanding our Vision: Engaging Literacy Instruction for Every Learner

*Reading in Virginia* (RiV) is the peer-reviewed journal of the Virginia State Literacy Association. It publishes articles to support literacy instruction for and by researchers, specialists, and teachers. RiV offers a forum for the exchange of information on current theory, research, and classroom application, as well as to foster connections between literacy teachers, librarians, specialists, and researchers in Virginia and the United States. We broadly conceptualize literacy to include speaking, listening, reading, writing, and creating within and across grades and disciplines.

We seek original manuscripts that describe topics, issues, and events of interest to all levels of literacy educators. Possible examples include research reports, teacher action research, classroom applications of literacy research, teaching tips, digital literacy tool use and online engagement, parent involvement in literacy, school-based literacy leadership, as well as literature reviews. This journal is published in a digital format. Manuscripts of varying lengths are accepted. RiV is published annually.

Of continuing interest in 2023-24 are two special departments: *Teaching Texts and Coaching Connections*. Templates to assist manuscript development are included on the VSLA website. Given the recent shifts and additions to supporting students' broad literacy development, we believe that many voices and many experiences are needed to fully discuss and share what is happening in the field of literacy, and how we can best grow together. Please consider sharing your classroom and research expertise with colleagues in Virginia and beyond!

The fall submission window is now OPEN and manuscripts will be accepted until **November 30, 2023**. Manuscripts will be peer reviewed in the winter in anticipation of spring publication.

## Author Guidelines: Reading in Virginia
Manuscripts will be evaluated for the following elements:
1. Relevance to the audience (literacy teachers, specialists, librarians, and researchers).
2. Significance and importance of the topic and treatment.
3. Sufficient grounding in literacy theory and research
Additionally, manuscripts will be evaluated for clarity and organization of writing, appropriate tone for the audience, and overall writing quality, including mechanics. Papers should adhere to American Psychological Association (APA) formatting according to the 7th edition.

## Preparing Your Manuscript: Style and Format
All submissions must be electronic, and Word document format is highly preferred for text, tables, and figures (e.g., docx; .doc). Any submitted artwork may be saved in other appropriate formats (e.g., .pdf, .jpeg, .tiff). Please prepare a blinded manuscript using a 12-pt font (e.g., Times New Roman, Arial, or Calibri) and double-spaced text with one-inch margins. All elements should adhere to APA 7 format, and headings and subheadings are encouraged.

Submit your blinded manuscript to Dr. Joan Rhodes at joan.rhodes@vslatoday.org . In your email, please include your contact information, full names of all authors as they should appear in the journal, and affiliations. If you are a VSLA member, please indicate your local chapter as well.

*Note that membership is not a prerequisite for submission and will not affect the review process.*

# Professional Development to Bridge the Secondary/Postsecondary Writing Gap for All Students

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According to research (Benjamin & Wagner, 2021; Chowske, 2013; Giouroukakis et al., 2021; Kramer-Vida et al., 2021), there seems to be a disconnect between teaching and learning writing in K-12 and in college. For example, only 27% of employers surveyed in a report commissioned by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2015) felt recent graduates were well prepared in writing. In fact, on the secondary level, according to recent NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) assessments (2017), 72% of students coming out of high school are not ready for college-level writing.

Factors contributing to this disconnect include little or no alignment of student learning outcomes across high school and college and the overuse of formulaic writing as a means of teaching to the test. Research has documented that college students struggle with the literacy demands of college writing (Gorzycki, 2019; Holschuh, 2019; Wahleithner, 2020). For example, in her study that sought to understand college students' perceptions of their preparation for the literacy demands of college, Wahleithner (2020) found that students wished their high schools had better prepared them and offered opportunities for more complex reading assignments and engagement in original research as well as guidance in developing and supporting their ideas in writing. At the high school level, pressure to prepare students for standardized testing contributes to limited writing instruction (Hillocks, 2003; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Pella, 2015) that often includes scaffolds (e.g., writing frame, outline, sentence starters, guided writing instructions) and formulaic writing. "The goal for succeeding on the text-based response becomes the standard number of paragraphs for many questions which is often five: an introduction with a thesis, three supporting paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph" (Giouroukakis et al., 2021, p. 38). Fanetti et al. (2010) noted a stress on modal writing for the essays that are part of many standardized tests rather than a focus on process writing. Streibel (2014) argued that there is a lack of instruction on writing for authentic audiences and real context. This kind of instruction is antithetical to writing instruction that deeply enhances critical thinking, analysis, critiquing and synthesis. Even the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) program was criticized for teaching students to write to a test prompt rather than teaching students the skills taught in a college-level introductory writing course (Fleitz, 2007). College courses require disciplinary skills in reading, writing, and thinking that are not generally taught in high school (Wahleithner, 2020) through activities that engage students in rigorous research, analysis of complex texts, writing original arguments in disciplinary genres, evaluating multiple perspectives, citing sources in a scholarly, academic presentation style, etc.

Given the high school/college writing instruction disconnect, it is imperative that more professional development opportunities be created that include professors, instructors, and teachers in grades K-16 (elementary through post-secondary) communicating and working collectively to align writing standards and instruction that honor and promote each student's individuality and unique writing process. In doing so, educators will create a cohesive writing community that provides all students with access to rich, powerful instruction resulting in writing growth and both college and career readiness for all students.

> *At the high school level, pressure to prepare students for standardized testing contributes to limited writing instruction.*

To help eliminate the secondary and post-secondary writing gap and promote students' writing readiness, in 2018, a regional partnership in New York [the Superintendents' and College Presidents' Partnership (SCPP)/Long Island Regional Advisory Council on Higher Education (LIRACHE)] created a Writing Task Force consisting of a collaborative group of secondary and post-secondary Long Island ELA educators with one goal: to promote the college readiness of all students by fostering articulation between public school and higher education educators and developing fully aligned curriculum, assessments, and research-based practices.

The Task Force met regularly to share writing expectations, instructional strategies, and student writing performance. In addition to meetings, it also engaged in research that revealed that the understanding of what actually happens in public school classrooms and in college classrooms is perceived differently by each group. Our research (Giouroukakis et al., 2021; Kramer-Vida et al., 2021) has shown that high school and middle school practitioners see a need to use writing formulas to help students do well on standardized tests. On the other hand, professors and instructors in higher education see students coming to them with little ability to synthesize, critique, or evaluate source materials.

*Given the high school/college writing instruction disconnect, it is imperative that more professional development opportunities be created that include professors, instructors, and teachers in grades K-16 (elementary through post-secondary) communicating and working collectively to align writing standards and instruction that honor and promote each student's individuality and unique writing process. In doing so, educators will create a cohesive writing community that provides all students with access to rich, powerful instruction resulting in writing growth and both college and career readiness for all students.*

In addition, some college professors give little to no credence to state writing standards.

Based on the conversations and research that came out of the Writing Task Force work, we recommend that extensive professional development be instituted to accomplish shared P-16 experiences that promote continuity and consistency among secondary and post-secondary institutions. Below are a few of the key ideas on which we believe the professional development should focus:

## Develop a Shared Understanding of State Writing Standards and the Framework for Postsecondary Writing

Local pre-K through college-level educators must meet regularly to discuss writing expectations, and the conversation needs to begin with the participants' state standards and what writing instruction should be at all levels. For example, in New York, the Next Generation Learning Standards includes a section on the Lifelong Practices of Readers and Writers which aim to reflect the changing expectations for what it means to be literate today (New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2017). Those practices include expectations that students will utilize in order to be literate:

- Write often and widely in a variety of formats, using print and digital resources and tools.
- Persevere through challenging writing tasks.
- Experiment and play with language.
- Analyze mentor texts to enhance writing.
- Strengthen writing by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

Another notable document that provides guidance for writing teachers and researchers at all levels is the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing which was a collaborative effort in 2011 by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project (CWPA et al.). Like the CCSS and other State Standards, The Framework recommends that students have frequent opportunities to write flexibly and with rhetorical versatility for real-life audiences that extend beyond the classroom teacher and standardized test scores (CWPA et al., 2011). The Framework is designed to facilitate this for educators by describing "the rhetorical and 21st century skills as well as habits of mind and experiences that are critical for college success" (p. 1). The eight habits of mind include the following: a) curiosity, b) openness, c) engagement, d) creativity, e) persistence, f) responsibility, g) flexibility, and h) metacognition (p. 1). These traits support a desire and willingness to consider alternate ways

of thinking, an ability to reflect upon the work done, and commitment to going forward with one's process. Teachers are encouraged to foster these habits of mind through writing, reading, and critical analysis experiences that will develop critical thinking, a writing process that includes multiple strategies.

Because the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing is a document "based in current research in writing and writing pedagogy...and reviewed by two- and four-year college and high school writing faculty nationwide" (CWPA et al., 2011, p. 1), it has been widely accepted by college professors as the definition of "good college writing" (Chowske, 2013, p. 84). Therefore, all P-16 educators should develop a shared understanding of these research-based writing practices and habits of mind and incorporate them into their daily instruction.

### Develop a Shared Understanding of What Effective College and Career Writing Instruction Is Not

Students in most states take Common Core assessments as well as required assessments in order to graduate. Therefore, many teachers focus their instructional time teaching and reinforcing the writing prompts and formulas aligned with these exams. Overwhelmingly, when we ask teachers to share information about their writing instruction, their responses show that this practice is particularly prevalent in remedial and general classrooms, as opposed to honors and college-level classrooms (Giouroukakis et. al, 2021; Kramer-Vida et al., 2021). These motives, though well intentioned because the teachers feel they are providing clarity

*Our research (Giouroukakis et al., 2021; Kramer-Vida et al., 2021) has shown that high school and middle school practitioners see a need to use writing formulas to help students do well on standardized tests. On the other hand, professors and instructors in higher education see students coming to them with little ability to synthesize, critique, or evaluate source materials.*

and structure for students who are experiencing difficulty, may be establishing scaffolds that inhibit creativity and vision (Pella, 2015). In addition, this practice may discourage students from developing their own voice since they are asked to use a specific method that reduces a writing process into a checklist (Anderson, 2001). In all, this contributes to greater weaknesses in students' writing readiness since instruction involving formulaic writing inhibits students' writing growth and preparation for the demands of college and career.

Formulaic writing should not be the goal of sound writing instruction. Teachers compromise student writing growth when writing success is determined simply by the students' ability to adhere to a designated sequence of paragraphs required for a short writing task. The standard number of paragraphs is often five: an introduction with a thesis, three supporting paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. The formula is supposed to act as a scaffold which is a process "that enables a child or novice to solve a task or achieve a goal that would be beyond his unassisted efforts" (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90). Scaffolds serve as training wheels or a bridge used to build upon prior knowledge and need to be released gradually to develop autonomy and independence in students.

In general, students who enter classrooms in colleges and universities are expected to do much better than write the five-paragraph essay or a series of topic sentences attached to a thesis at the end of the first paragraph of an essay. They would write better if they came with a process that supports critical thinking skills and enables them to effectively express their interests, beliefs, and quite importantly, their own research. Yet, if their use of the five-paragraph essay formula yields an average grade in college, many students who find an average grade to be acceptable will likely continue to submit mediocre writing.

### Promote Writing Growth through an Individualized Writing Process

If we want to achieve writing growth through our instruction and best prepare students for postsecondary writing demands, secondary teachers need to resist the temptation to focus their efforts on simply training students to produce writing pieces that fulfill standardized testing requirements. Instead, teachers in all subject areas must understand why writing is important and dedicate most of their instructional time to developing their students' individual writing processes and the habits of mind that are linked to post-secondary writing success, such as persistence and metacognition (CWAP et al., 2011).

The authors of the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing (CWAP et al., 2011) suggest:

> Writing activities and assignments should be designed with genuine purposes and audiences in mind (from teachers and other students to community groups, local or national officials, commercial interests, students' friends and relatives, and other potential readers) in order to foster flexibility and rhetorical versatility....Writers learn to move back and forth through different stages of writing, adapting those stages to the situation. This ability to employ flexible writing processes is important as students encounter different types of writing tasks that require them to work through the various stages independently to produce final, polished texts. Teachers can help writers develop flexible processes by having students practice all aspects of writing processes. (p. 3)

Educators need to be aware that if they are to promote their students' individual voices and writing growth, the writing process should not be presented as a simple, stratified list of steps: planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. But how to do this? Professional development workshops including strategies, model programs, and articulation among higher level educators and K-12 educators would be a significant step in the right direction.

The goal of engaging students in the writing process is to encourage the production of multiple drafts and revisions to produce a final product that is thoroughly developed over time and ideal for the topic, purpose, and audience. Revision cannot be editing only. It must include a variety of shifts and changes, that is, improving diction choices, cutting, expanding, adding examples, etc. Benjamin and Wagner (2021)

*Based on the conversations and research that came out of the Writing Task Force work, we recommend that extensive professional development be instituted to accomplish shared P-16 experiences that promote continuity and consistency among secondary and post-secondary institutions.*

recommend allocating ample time for writing and instructor-guided and scaffolded non-linear cycles of drafting, reviewing feedback, and revising. Repetition of these cycles will ensure students receive sound instruction and practice in developing more polished and effective writing. Planning or prewriting activities, such as brainstorming, should vary depending on a writer's preferences at the time, and should allow students to fully express their ideas and develop a plan that facilitates drafting. Through multiple peer and teacher conferences, students repeatedly revise and edit to improve the meaning and form of their writing. The process, when authentic, is not linear and teacher-directed; instead, each student progresses in a manner that they find most effective. When done, students are encouraged to publish their writing for an authentic audience that extends beyond the classroom, which can be motivating and rewarding. Sharing can take place in the classroom where student work is posted on the walls and shared in a gallery walk or put into print venues, like newsletters, journals, or magazines, or published through multimodal formats, such as blogs, Wikispaces, and social networking sites (Giouroukakis & Connolly, 2015).

The following are some additional suggestions to include in professional development (PD) sessions that would help teachers effectively engage students in the writing process:

- Students should see writing as a recursive process rather than a linear one.
- As students prepare to write, they should be exposed to mentor texts from master classic and contemporary authors with whom they might establish a personal connection (ex. Amy Tan, Jason Reynolds, Sandra Cisneros, Sanjay Gupta, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Anthony Bourdain). Exposure to relatable authors will likely inspire students who might otherwise see writing success as unattainable.
- Students should experiment with writing multiple drafts of a piece in the styles of various master authors, crafting one piece in each style.
- Teachers in all content areas and at all grade levels should engage students in the analysis of an author's craft, as well as with a text's content. In doing so, students will eventually learn to read like writers and write like readers.
- When students plan their writing, they should be encouraged to choose from a variety of planning strategies and graphic organizers and utilize what they find best for the particular writing task.
- Students should self-select effective writing tools and strategies in all school subjects and throughout their academic career. Some students might benefit from writing an extra draft, reordering lists, or engaging in text-

based discussions, rather than planning in the manner that is best for the teacher.

- Students should receive ongoing individual and small group instruction as they engage in a self-selected, non-linear writing process.
- Students should receive targeted editing mini-lessons through their participation in small-group editing centers, and they should keep a teacher-guided "focus" correction list for the next paper.
- Students should understand that they should incorporate editing into the revision process as their ability to make particular corrections becomes more automatic.
- Educators in all content areas should provide students with updated lists of publishing options and encourage them to publish for real audiences several times throughout the school year.

## A Professional Development Workshop that Is Meant to Bridge the Secondary/Postsecondary Writing Gap for All Students

To follow through on our theoretical thoughts related to professional development that grew from our research project, one of our four authors in coordination with other educators across the state, and with the technical assistance of another of the group's authors, developed a professional development course. It was presented to educators in our state in a variety of iterations through our various Boards of Cooperative Education and our various school districts.

This example, titled "The Reading-Writing Connection," was an on-line, multi-day workshop loosely connected to Graham and colleagues' *Practices in Writing* (2018) text. The PD program provided an overview of the reading-writing connection in terms of building students' foundational, shared knowledge of reading and writing as reciprocal processes that students could use to learn across the disciplines. Although the workshop was geared toward a K-12 educator audience, the PD presenters hoped that the skills learned by these teachers and transferred to their students would help close the high school/college disarticulation gap that our research had noted.

The learning target for the educators who attended this PD was that by the end of the workshop, they would at least be able to identify the instructional implications of reading and writing across all content areas on all grade levels, including post-grade 12. Thus, for this program, the workshop consisted of the following sections: a) the reading-writing connection; b) writing as communication; c) anticipating readers' needs; d) lifelong reading and writing practices; and

e) meaningful prompts that can include graphic organizers to help scaffold students' thinking and develop their own voice.

## The Reading-Writing Connection

The presenters began by linking the early stages of reading and writing. They used Ehri's (1995) Phases of Word Recognition and stages of writing development (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000) to show the connection between reading and writing and that both processes are developmental. The presenters hoped to make the point that when students approach their college level writing assignments, the more that they had read and the more that they could model on mentor texts, the better they would be able to complete these assignments in the mode expected by their professors.

The presenters then moved into Scarborough's (2001) "reading rope" model and Joan Sedita's (2022) "writing rope" model (Figure 1), metaphors used to depict the many strands that contribute to fluent, skilled reading and writing respectively. These models show that both text and good communicative writing are similar and complicated thinking processes. They involve the intertwining of the skills and strategies that students may have learned in an isolated fashion but that combined would create strong products that meet the needs of the audience, the context, and the purpose of a collegiate assignment.

## Writing as Communication

The next section involved writing as communication. The presenters began with a talk by Nonie Lesaux, from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where she spoke about building vocabulary by exposing students to more complex words through teacher talk that students could then use in their writing. Lesaux believes that helping students decipher academic language and explaining meaning is something all teachers need to do. "Even a high school math teacher can't just think about math. They have to think about the vocabulary words, and key into the fact that some of the kids may not understand the directives on the worksheet. We need to spend more time talking about language" (as cited in Prince, 2010, para. 4).

## Anticipating Readers' Needs

The PD leaders then used a handout about making connections to talk about writers anticipating readers' needs intrapersonally (i.e., text-to-self connections), interpersonally (i.e., text-to-text connections), and impersonally (i.e., text-to-world connections) to help prepare students for college

**Figure 1**
*The Writing Rope (Sedita, 2020)*

### The Strands That Are Woven Into Skilled Writing
(Sedita, 2019)

**Critical Thinking**
- Generating ideas, gathering information
- Writing process: organizing, drafting, writing, revising

**Syntax**
- Grammar and syntactic awareness
- Sentence elaboration
- Punctuation

**Text Structure**
- Narrative, informational, opinion structures
- Paragraph structure
- Patterns of organization (description, sequence, cause/effect, compare/contrast, problem/solution)
- Linking and transition words/phrases

**Writing Craft**
- Word choice
- Awareness of task, audience purpose
- Literary devices

**Transcription**
- Spelling
- Handwriting, keyboarding
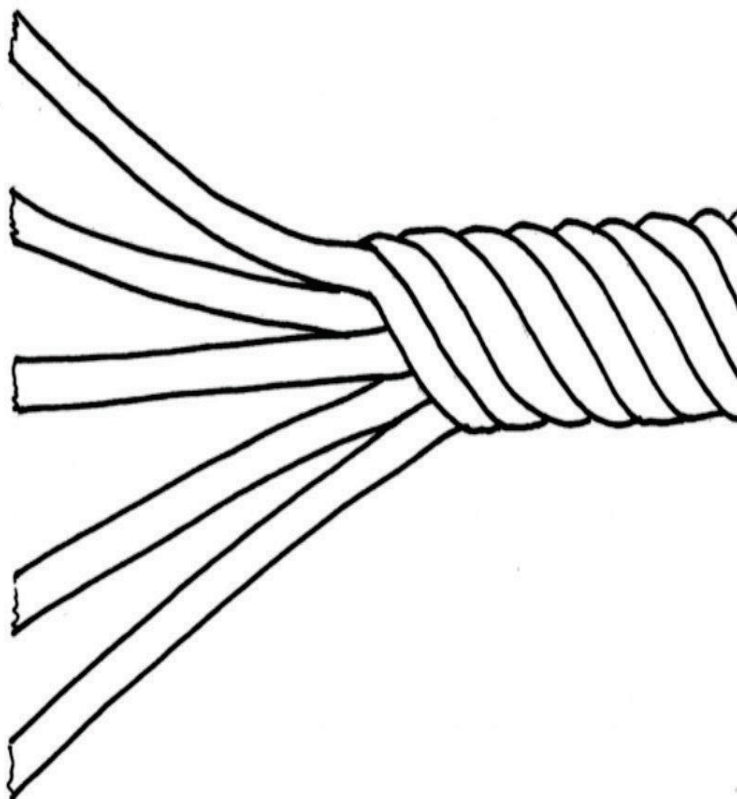
assignments where their product should resonate with the reader and include references to other textual materials and world events. This is similar to Chu's (2008) dissertation dealing with adult ESL readers who were using their own background knowledge, their worldly encounters, and their experiences with other texts to discuss and write about a canonical piece of literature.

### Lifelong Reading and Writing Practices

In New York State, the Learning Standards are broad statements about expectations for student achievement as they prepare for high school graduation. The PD leaders connected the discussion to one of our state's standards that deals with communicating (through writing, speaking, or presenting) about key ideas and details through inferencing. Related to the anchor standards are the life-long practices of readers and writers (NYSED, 2017) that can be used by college students to produce the type of writing required on the college level (see Figure 2).

The presenters discussed lifelong skills and strategies (e.g., summarizing, analyzing, critiquing, and synthesizing) that need to be taught and learned on the K-12 level in a

**Figure 2**
*Lifelong Practices of Readers ande Writers (NYSED, 2017, November 30)*

| Lifelong Practices of Readers | Lifelong Practices of Writers |
|---|---|
| Readers | Writers |
| • Think, write, speak, and listen to understand | • Think, read, speak, and listen to support writing |
| • Read often and widely from a range of global and diverse texts | • Write often and widely in a variety of formats, using print and digital resources and tools |
| • Read for multiple purposes, including for learning and for pleasure | • Write for multiple purposes, including for learning and for pleasure |
| • Self-select texts based on interest | • Persevere through challenging writing tasks |
| • Persevere through challenging, complex texts | • Enrich personal language, background knowledge, and vocabulary through writing and communicating with others |
| • Enrich personal language, background knowledge, and vocabulary through reading and communicating with others | • Experiment and play with language |
| • Monitor comprehension and apply reading strategies flexibly | • Analyze mentor texts to enhance writing |
| • Make connections (to self, other texts, ideas, cultures, eras, etc.) | • Strengthen writing by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach |

non-formulaic way but rather, in a way that emphasizes outside-of-the-box thinking. This type of thinking needs to be geared toward audience, purpose, and mode of presentation. Examples include how to write narratives, arguments, and explanatory texts. As an example, the presenters used graphic organizers (e.g., Multiple-Perspectives-Note-Catcher-Graphic-Organizer.pdf) and one in particular by Lapp et al. (2013) to help students synthesize evidence to present an argument (see Figure 3). As long as teachers avoid the formulaic component of some of these published graphics, they may be able to use these tools to help scaffold students' thinking and develop their own voice.

### Meaningful Prompts

An example of the type of guiding questions that could be developed into a graphic organizer is the assignment in figure 4 that uses questions to develop an argument. The questions deal with the concept of researching and writing from multiple perspectives. In addition to using guiding questions to develop an argument or putting these prompts into a graphic organizer for those who need more scaffolding, the presenters also emphasized:

- Teaching analysis and critique through guided discussion, classroom practice, research projects, etc.

- Utilizing such writing and discussion prompts as commenting on a character's point of view and how that influences plot and theme.
- Using Venn diagrams to compare and contrast two points of view from two different texts.
- Demonstrating how images support text and explaining how figurative language can enhance theme.

If teachers used the instructional prompts and techniques that were advocated throughout this workshop, students would be more prepared for the types of assignments they will encounter in college rather than the formulaic, test-driven prompts that are often seen in high school English classes.

### Professional Development Resources

One of the article's authors is an active member of the Write On, NY! Initiative (NYSED, n.d.) that is sponsored by our State Education Department as a state-wide writing PD program (www.nysed.gov/curriculum-instruction/write-ny). Per the website, the initiative promotes student writing and the lifelong practices of writing through the collaboration of teachers, school districts, educational organizations, the state's English Language Arts Advisory Panel, and state-wide ELA and literacy professional organizations.

**Figure 3**
*Simple Argumentation as a Graphic Organizer (Lapp, Wolsey, & Moss, 2013).*
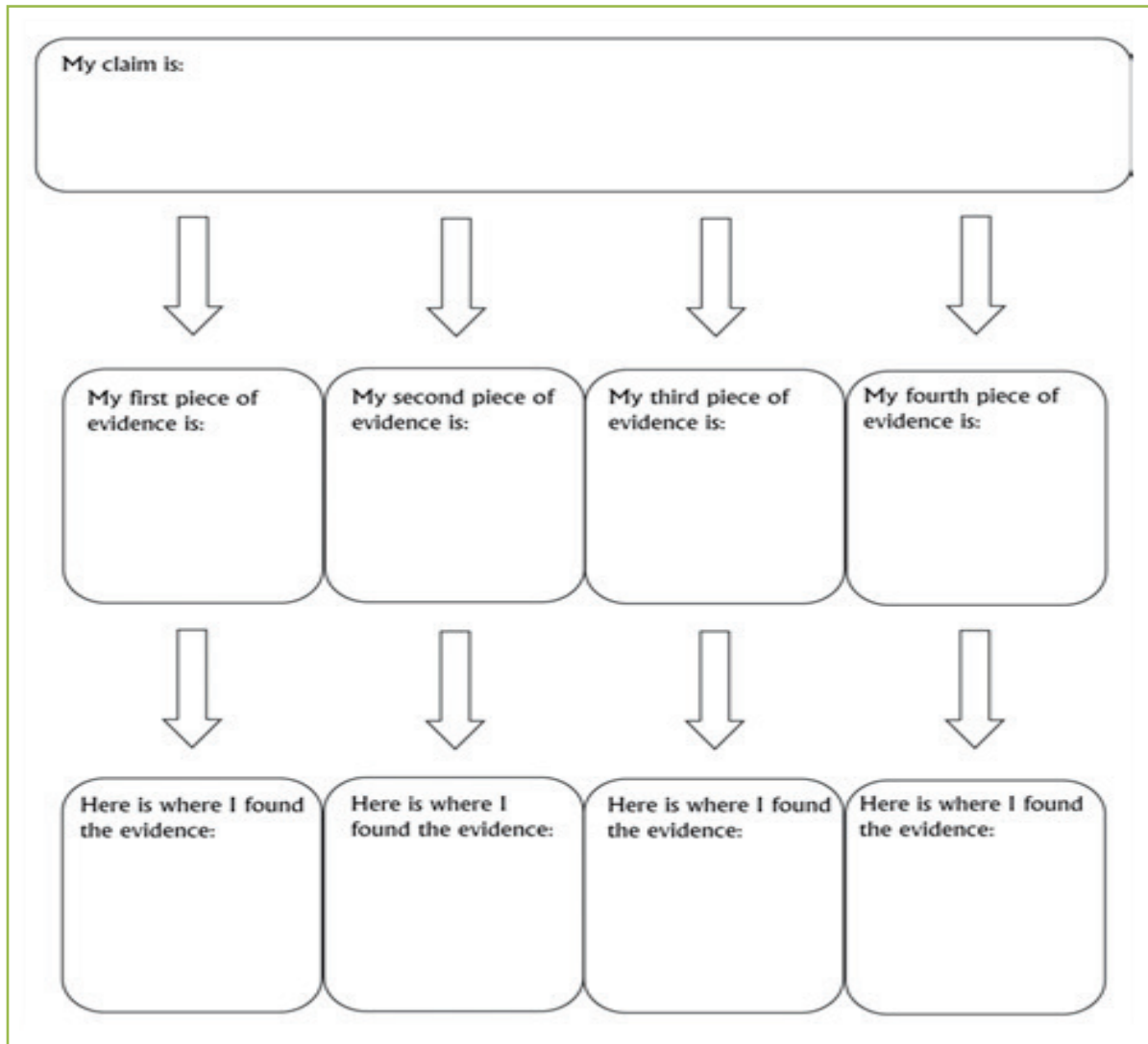


**Figure 4**
*Argument Writing Assignment*
Adapted from Multiple-Perspectives-Note-Catcher-Graphic-Organizer.pdf (edutopia.org)

Assignment: You will read articles related to an issue and complete a graphic organizer before writing your argumentative piece. This will help you consider real world issues and multiple perspectives on those issues. You will create your own in formed opinion!

Prompts: What are the sources' main arguments? What is their best evidence? However, argue the other side as well! What counter arguments could be made for this source? What evidence does this source have that does not hold true ALL the time? What claims do the sources make that should be further questioned, examined, or defined? What question will your argument and research respond to?

Before you did your research, what was your claim in response to your question? Now that you have read multiple views and articles on this issue, revise your claim to reflect your more informed view. Consider sections of your claim that some-one could disagree with. What would they say to counter your claim? What would opposers say or question? What in the countering voice has merit and calls you to seriously consider your points and/or evidence? What could you respectfully argue against the countering voice? And after considering the countering voice, can you write a revised claim?

This website recommends practices and supplies resources to prioritize writing across the grades and the subject areas, especially to close the gap that students with disabilities and English language learners may encounter when they leave the K-12 environment and become first year college students.

## Conclusion

In order to bridge the secondary/postsecondary writing gap and provide effective writing instruction for all students, we must increase communication across academic levels and offer specific recommendations for different components of the recursive writing process. We must encourage all students to find their own processes and stop giving every learner in the room a specific formula for specific kinds of writing and, instead, encourage students to find their own processes. We must incorporate an individualized approach to process writing in all content areas that will develop students' lifelong writing skills—skills that will help them succeed not only on standardized tests, but also in career and life (Connolly & Giouroukakis, 2016).

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# Parental Involvement is Paramount for African American Males:
## Yesterday, Today, and Forever More

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During the last decade, there has been a renewed focus on improving the instruction of children at risk for not learning to read well and ways to effectively involve their parents to enhance their children's reading achievement. This study examined the extent to which the reading achievement of African American male learners improves with school, family, and community partnerships. The sample consisted of fourth-grade African American males from the Coastal region of Virginia who were enrolled in Title 1 schools that participate in the National Network of School Partnerships. The study identified which type of parental involvement significantly influenced the reading achievement of African American males. Teachers and administrators were surveyed using an instrument adapted from Epstein's School, Family, and Community Partnership Survey, The Virginia Standards of Learning reading and language arts assessments provided data for reading achievement of fourth grade African American males.

## Case Scenario: Marvin's Mother Pleads for Help

> During a recent parent-teacher conference, Marvin's mother was informed that he is still reading below grade level. In her frustration, she hastily turns to his teacher and says, "You are the teacher. Tell me what I need to do." Marvin's mother is not unlike any other parent who is seeking knowledge to help her son. What can schools do to begin to bridge the gap between parents and teachers?

During third grade many African American male students experience a decline in their academic progress (Baker, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2002-2022; Wilson, 2003). Most third-grade African American males in Title 1 schools require some form of intervention to succeed in the reading classroom (Meier, 2015; Webb & Thomas, 2015; Williams & Portman, 2014). Despite the African American male's potential for success in reading, historically, this population has not been achieving as well as their Caucasian male peers on standardized tests such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2022). It is important to note that the fourth-grade reading scores for 2019 yielded the largest decline since 1998 (NAEP, 2019). Unfortunately, African American fourth grade students' reading scores in Virginia continue to fare worse compared to their Caucasian and Hispanic peers (NAEP, 2022). These declines signal the need to evaluate current practices that involve all aspects of students' academic success.

Epstein's decades of research on school, family, and community partnerships have provided some insight into improving students' academic success. When educators view students as children, they are more prone to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development (Epstein et al., 2009). Partners care about children and share the responsibilities to work together to create better programs and opportunities for students (Epstein et al., 2009). A caring community is formed when parents, teachers, students, administrators, and people in the community perceive each other as partners in education. Caring partners help students succeed in school.

> *When educators view students as children, they are more prone to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development (Epstein et al., 2009).*

Henderson and Mapp (2002) recommended that educators of male students from diverse backgrounds who are experiencing reading achievement difficulties explore the influence of parental involvement. They suggested that families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and life. Children from all cultural and economic backgrounds achievement increased directly with the extent of parental involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

When parents talk to their children about school, expect them to do well, help them plan for college, and make sure that out-of-school activities are constructive; their children do better in school. When schools engage families in ways that are linked to improving learning, students make greater gains. When schools build partnerships with families that respond to their concerns and honor their contributions, they are successful in sustaining connections that are aimed at improving student achievement. When families and communities organize to hold poorly performing schools accountable, studies suggest that school districts make positive changes in policy, practice, and resources. (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p 8).

## Parental Influence and Involvement

Students who like reading generally have parents who like to read (Morrow, 1983). Morrow's seminal study of kindergarten students' high or low interest in literacy suggests that the home exerts a tremendous influence upon the students. The findings of her investigation indicated home practices that could be successful in school settings and information concerning the crucial role a family plays in the development of their children's literacy. When at-risk students do not have reading role models, and when they continue to experience reading failure, many avoid reading and reading related activities. Therefore, it is imperative that schools and parents unite to bring about improved achievement.

Parental involvement has become a critical component of school reform. As educators seek to better understand, provide a rationale, and remediate the inequalities of student achievement outcomes in the United States, parental involvement has been the focus of educational policy

*A caring community is formed when parents, teachers, students, administrators, and people in the community perceive each other as partners in education.*

(Desimone, 1999; Sheldon, 2019; Wood & Bauman, 2017). Educational policy at the district, state, and national levels has provided strategies for improving parental involvement. There are provisions to strengthen relationships between parents and schools in several major pieces of federal legislation (Desimone, 1999; Epstein et al., 2019; Wood & Bauman, 2017).

## Conceptual Framework

In today's society, schools are required to educate a more diverse student population. School leaders must give their undivided attention to improving student achievement and social outcomes of disadvantaged minority students. Therefore, it is imperative that educators increase their understanding of how to utilize parental involvement in ways that are best for all children, especially for those at risk of educational failure (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2019). Epstein's research has provided researchers with a widely cited conceptual framework of parental involvement. I utilized Epstein's conceptual framework to examine the impact of parental involvement on the reading achievement of the fourth-grade African American male.

Recognizing how social organizations of school, family, and community connect, Epstein refers to them as spheres of overlapping influences. These spheres of influence directly affect student learning and development. The more these spheres interact, the more students are likely to receive common messages that emphasize the importance of school, working hard, creative thinking creatively, assisting one another, and remaining in school (Epstein et al., 2009). Epstein's external model of overlapping spheres of influence recognizes the three major contexts of school, family, and community in which students learn and grow. These spheres of influence may be drawn together or pushed apart (Epstein et al., 2009). Within this model, there are practices that schools, families, and communities complete separately, and some that are jointly conducted to influence children's learning and development (Epstein et al., 2009). Epstein's conceptual framework shown in Table 1 consists of six parental involvement categories:

The six types of parental involvement as stated in Figure 1 serve as a template to help educators develop programs of school and family partnerships and include many different practices to involve and meet the needs of all families and students. The six types of parental involvement redefine the old notion of parental involvement as measured by the number of parents in the school for an activity.

**Table 1**

*Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Parental Involvement*

| Type of Involvement | Sample Practices |
|---|---|
| *1. Parenting*: Help all families establish home environments to support children as students. | • Parent education and other courses or training for parents (e.g., GED, college credit, family literacy).<br>• Family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services.<br>• Home visits at transition points to pre-school, elementary, middle, and high school. |
| *2. Communicating*: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress. | • Conferences with every parent at least once a year.<br>• Language translators to assist families as needed.<br>• Regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications. |
| *3. Volunteering*: Recruit and organize parent help and support. | • School and classroom volunteer program to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents.<br>• Parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings, and resources for families.<br>• Annual postcard survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers. |
| *4. Learning at Home*: Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. | • Information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade.<br>• Information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home.<br>• Family participation in setting student goals each year and in planning for college or work. |
| *5. Decision Making*: Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives. | • Active PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees for parent leadership and participation.<br>• Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements.<br>• Networks to link all families with parent representatives. |
| *6. Collaborating with Community*: Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. | • Information for students and families on community, health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs/services.<br>• Information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students. |

Epstein, J., Sanders, M., Simon, B., Salinas, K., Jansorn, N., & Van Voorhis, F. (2009). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (3rd ed.). Corwin Press.

## Methods

Parental involvement in schools has evolved from being about parents to student success (Epstein, 2001; Epstein, et al., 2019). This research was conducted to provide school administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders with data that indicate which types of parental involvement, and which parental involvement activities influenced the academic improvement in the reading achievement of fourth-grade, African American males. As a former teacher, reading specialist, and administrator, and now a professor exploring family involvement and the reading achievement of African American males, my research interests align with the present study.

The research was conducted in a high-performing urban school division that served a large population of fourth-grade African American males. Forty-six administrators and teachers at 13 Title 1 schools responded to the survey. Eleven respondents were principals. Thirty-five respondents were teachers. A survey adapted from Joyce Epstein's School, Family, and Community Partnerships Survey (2009) was used. The survey addressed the six types of parental involvement and teachers' perceptions of the importance of each type. The summary of scales for the School, Family, and Community Partnerships were analyzed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA tests, and Pearson correlations.

## Findings and Discussion

The findings from the research are helpful to most school leaders by providing them with professional development topics that their teachers can utilize to improve the literacy instruction of African American male students. The data from the research help school leaders effectively enrich the African American males' reading achievement. This research enables school leaders to help the African American male navigate a learning environment that has been viewed in the past as hostile and unpredictable for many of these students (Meier, 2015; Tatum, 2005; Tatum et al., 2021).

Parental Involvement Type 3: Volunteering was shown to have a significant impact on the reading achievement of the African American male. Pearson correlations were explored to determine if there was a relationship between the scales of the School, Family, and Community Partnership, School Mean, and African American Males' Mean Score on the English SOL. A significant correlation ($r=.417$, $p=.005$) between teacher reports of school program Type 3 volunteering and the school mean for fourth grade English SOL scores was found. Similarly, a significant correlation ($r=.457$, $p=.002$) between teacher reports of school program Type 3 volunteering and the mean SOL score for African American male fourth grade students was found.

The academic reading success of the fourth grade African American male was correlated with the volunteering (Type 3) activities in school. Although many schools have volunteers on a daily basis, they are often monitoring the hallways, working in the parent resource room, the library, or assisting on a field trip or with a class party. Based on the findings of this research, schools need to find more opportunities to involve parents and community partners directly in the learning environment. This finding is in keeping with Wilson's (2003) research that when African American male students had an adult in their educational lives, they performed better. They made better grades, did their homework regularly, and listened more attentively in class. Wilson's (2003) participants were proud to have their parents come to school and work with their teachers. The participants whose parents came to school for lunch or visited regularly had fewer behavioral referrals, better test scores and better grades than those who did not have parental support.

In addition, it is important to note that Desimone's (1999) earlier research supports these findings. Volunteering at the school level for Caucasian and African American students affected student achievement. Desimone's findings indicate that participating in the PTO was a significant predictor for increased mathematical and reading scores for both African American and Caucasian students. Involvement in the PTO was a stronger predictor of grades for African American students than for any other racial-ethnic minorities or low-income students (Desimone, 1999, p. 20). Based on Desimone (1999) and the current study, it is known that for African American parents participating in the PTO, volunteering at school in various capacities, and participating in the learning environment to assist the teachers and their children may empower them to eliminate some cultural barriers traditionally held by the administrators, teachers, and parents. Additionally, the correlation between parental involvement and the increase in reading achievement is well documented, and aligns with current research (e.g., Epstein et al., 2019, Whaley et al., 2019).

Significant differences were found between principals and teachers in their ratings of Teacher Reports of School Program Type 4 (Learning at Home). The mean rating for teachers ($M=3.1$, $SD=0.63$) was significantly higher than the mean rating of principals ($M=2.5$, $SD=0.42$) in their ratings of Teacher Reports of School Program Type 4 (Learning at Home) ($F=7.456$, ($df=1$), $p=.009$).

*These spheres of influence directly affect student learning and development. The more these spheres interact, the more students are likely to receive common messages that emphasize the importance of school, working hard, creative thinking creatively, assisting one another, and remaining in school (Epstein et al., 2009).*

Teachers may value the Type 4: Learning at Home activities more than principals because they are directly involved in the daily instruction of the students. Teachers may be more cognizant of the fact that volunteering at school fosters a relationship among the teachers and parents. This positive relationship between the teachers and parents promotes learning at home activities. According to Desimone (1999), the relationship positively affects teacher perceptions of students' homework completion and attendance. In addition, Morrow (1983) established that homes where parents like to read and share reading with their children in literature rich environments produce children who perform higher in reading than those children who do not share this experience.

Learning at Home activities also give the teacher many opportunities to provide "interactive homework" (Epstein et al., 2019; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005) with the student and parent. Interactive homework allows the student to demonstrate, discuss, and celebrate reading skills with the parent or family member. Monitoring, participating, and sharing in the student's homework gives parents a direct link to the classroom curriculum.

Students' learning, reading achievement, and other literacy skills are influenced by their experiences inside and outside the classroom (Jennerjohn, 2020; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Wilson, 2003). The Type 4 Learning at Home parental involvement became extremely pertinent during the COVID-19 pandemic because the physical school buildings were closed. Parents were thrust into a major role of their child's (or children's) learning because classes were held virtually. The pandemic also exposed the digital divide. Many low to moderate socio-economic families did not have access to the internet in their homes (Guernsey, 2017). The inability to connect to the virtual classroom was an obstacle to learning at home (Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021). Although this research did not examine barriers to parental involvement, the aforementioned information was a hindering factor in the students' reading achievement as evidenced by the NAEP (2022) data.

## Limitations

Limitations to this research include data that can only be generalized to urban, at-risk African American male children. It cannot be generalized to other African American students who do not have the adverse effects associated with being at risk of school failure or to African American students who may have behavioral or cognitive learning difficulties. Students who were given the Virginia Standards of Learning Alternate Assessment were not included in this research.

This research examines one single academic subject, gender, and race/ethnicity. The participants in this study were African American males who attend Title 1 schools in an urban school division within the Coastal region of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The sample population was from the fourth grade, because the literature indicates that the African American males' reading achievement begins to decline at this grade level. In addition, the scope of the curriculum increases from third to fourth grade, and the achievement levels between students become more evident.

Additionally, this research does not examine the potential barriers that may influence African American males' parents' opportunities to participate in parental involvement activities at their sons' respective schools. Further research is needed to examine the barriers to parents volunteering in schools (Type 3) and supporting student learning at home (Type 4).

## Implications

Data analysis revealed differences of ratings between the principal and teachers in the scale of Teacher Reports of School Program Type 4, (Learning at Home). The differences in the ratings suggest that there is a disconnection among the principals' and teachers' value of learning at home activities and the implementation of parents volunteering in the learning environment. Principals' perceptions may be different because they are not immersed in the daily instruction of the students like the teachers. For the sake of the children, the school, family, and community must work together to support and sustain the African American males' reading achievement. Based on the evidence from this research, there is a need for schools and school divisions to continue to improve their family involvement programs.

The research provided evidence for the need to educate African American parents about reading development and instruction. This support will help them to have a better understanding of their children's progress and to actively participate in the school system. Parental knowledge about reading is crucial because it supports, encourages, and guides reading development in their children, thus positive-

*Based on the findings of this research, schools need to find more opportunities to involve parents and community partners directly in the learning environment.*

ly influencing reading achievement of their children. School administrators are charged to conduct numerous workshops on the reading curriculum for parents and community partners. Some of these workshops should take place during the early evening hours so that working parents can participate. It is also recommended that the workshops are held in the living environments of the students. Schools should collaborate with local colleges and universities to provide in-service training to parents about the literacy curriculum.

## Conclusions

Parental involvement is a catalyst to improve school experiences and achievement for the African American fourth grade male learner. Schools should strategically utilize the untapped resources of the African American parent and community stakeholders by providing many meaningful opportunities for the parent and stakeholder to volunteer at school within the learning environment. This will promote positive relationships between the teacher and parent and a better understanding of some cultural differences. Volunteering at school will also extend the school's learning environment to the home. Therefore, school leaders should focus on collaborating with community agencies to volunteer to help the African American male. Ultimately, this focus will help the learner co-exist in his social environment and successfully navigate a learning environment that has been viewed in the past as hostile and unpredictable for many of these students.

In addition, the findings from this research suggest that colleges and universities can educate aspiring teachers concerning the literary needs of the African American male. The literacy instruction must be presented as having value in the daily lives of African American males. Excellent training will help the teachers use the students' diverse cultural and experiences to engage them in rich literary readings and discussions.

*In addition, Morrow (1983) established that homes where parents like to read and share reading with their children in literature rich environments produce children who perform higher in reading than those children who do not share this experience.*

## Future Research

This study should be replicated using Title 1 and non-Title 1 schools in urban, suburban, and rural communities. Researchers and educators need to know if the results will be the same or different. It is also important to know the teachers' and principals' perceptions of school, family, and community partnerships in other demographic areas.

An investigation of minority parents' perceptions of school, family, and community partnerships is important research. It is important to give these parents a voice and to allow them to indicate their needs. The investigation will provide evidence to the school as to how the school could improve their parental involvement activities. It is paramount that the schools identify and eradicate the barriers that hinder African American males' parents from volunteering in the learning environment and engaging in learning at home activities.

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# Virginia Readers' Choice Winners
## 2022-2023
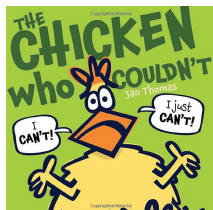
### Primary Winner!

*The Chicken Who Couldn't*
Jan Thomas, 2020

It has not been a good day for Chicken. He went to the fair with Farmer, but didn't win even one ribbon. And on the way home, the road is so bumpy that Farmer's truck knocks Chicken right out! He's been left behind! It's the end for Chicken. Surely, he can't walk all the way home. Or avoid the hungry fox along the way. Or maybe...he can?

Thomas, J. (2020).
*The Chicken Who Couldn't*
Beach Lane Books
ISBN: 978-1416996996

### Elementary Winner!

*Allergic*
Megan Wagner Lloyd (Author)
Michelle Mee Nutter (Illustrator) 2021

At home, Maggie is the odd one out. Her parents are preoccupied with getting ready for a new baby, and her younger brothers are twins and always in their own world. Maggie loves animals and thinks a new puppy is the answer, but when she goes to select one on her birthday, she breaks out in hives and rashes. She's severely allergic to anything with fur! Can Maggie outsmart her allergies and find the perfect pet? With illustrations by Michelle Mee Nutter, Megan Wagner Lloyd draws on her own experiences with allergies to tell a heartfelt story of family, friendship, and finding a place to belong.

Wagner Lloyd, M., Mee Nutter M. (2021)
*Allergic*
Graphix; Illustrated edition
ISBN: 978-1338568905
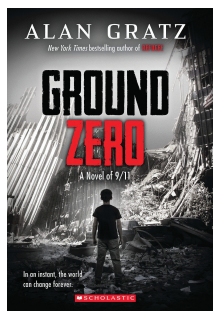
### Middle School Winner!
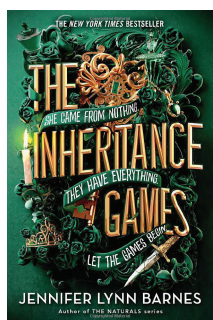
*Ground Zero*
Alan Gratz, 2021

In time for the twentieth anniversary of 9/11, master storyteller Alan Gratz (Refugee) delivers a pulse-pounding and unforgettable take on history and hope, revenge and fear -- and the stunning links between the past and present.

Gratz, A. (2021)
*Ground Zero*
Scholastic Press
ISBN: 978-1338245752

### High School Winner!

*The Inheritance Games*
Jennifer Lynn Barnes, 2021

Avery Grambs has a plan for a better future: survive high school, win a scholarship, and get out. But her fortunes change in an instant when billionaire Tobias Hawthorne dies and leaves Avery virtually his entire fortune. The catch? Avery has no idea why -- or even who Tobias Hawthorne is.  To receive her inheritance, Avery must move into sprawling, secret passage-filled Hawthorne House, where every room bears the old man's touch -- and his love of puzzles, riddles, and codes. Unfortunately for Avery, Hawthorne House is also occupied by the family that Tobias Hawthorne just dispossessed. This includes the four Hawthorne grandsons: dangerous, magnetic, brilliant boys who grew up with every expectation that one day, they would inherit billions. Heir apparent Grayson Hawthorne is convinced that Avery must be a conwoman, and he's determined to take her down. His brother, Jameson, views her as their grandfather's last hurrah: a twisted riddle, a puzzle to be solved. Caught in a world of wealth and privilege with danger around every turn, Avery will have to play the game herself just to survive.

Lynn Barnes, J. (2021)
*The Inheritance Games*
Little, Brown Books for Young Readers; Reprint edition
ISBN: 978-0759555402

# Morphology Matters:
## Supporting Writing Across Content Areas

*Anna Moriah Myers, University of Portland,*
*Lauren Elizabeth Hauser, University of Virginia,*
*Victoria J. VanUitert, Bowling Green State University*

Mr. Shiley is a sixth-grade science teacher at Rolling Rock Middle School. He teaches five classes a day. His lessons are informed by Virginia's sixth grade Science Standards of Learning (SOL). He is preparing to give a unit test on VA Science SOL 6.6, a standard that encompasses water characteristics and properties. In an attempt to measure how much information the students have retained before giving the unit test, Mr. Shiley asked his students to draw and label a picture and write a brief summary about the properties of water during the last 10 minutes of a class period. As he looks over the responses later that day, he notices a pattern. Student responses are sparse and do not reflect the rich discussions they have been having in class. Based on the quality of the writing, Mr. Shiley questions whether his perception of what the students know is off. 'Are they ready for the unit test?' he wonders as he reviews his students' work.

Currently, the student paper Mr. Shiley is reviewing reads:

Water is a very special compound. It has things about it that support life on earth. One important thing is that it is a good solvent. That means almost anything can go into it. Water sticks together. This lets some insects "walk on water." Some animals can run on water too, but they have to be fast.

The student who authored this writing was Maggie, a bright and energetic sixth grader and frequent hand raiser during class discussions. Maggie is also diagnosed with dyslexia. The quality of her writing sample did not reflect the knowledge and understandings she demonstrated through her class discussion contributions and diorama project work, which showed the key characteristics of water.

As Mr. Shiley read more papers, he saw that Maggie was not alone. Several of her classmates' writings demonstrated only a small portion of what he thought they understood about water. Some students just wrote a list of vocabulary words, many of which were misspelled. Mr. Shiley was perplexed and reflected upon his instruction.

At the end of the semester, Mr. Shiley realized he was off target with the district's pacing guide. The unit on properties of water needed to be covered quickly. He prepared engaging lessons where the students watched videos and completed hands-on demonstrations of water molecules joining together to represent cohesion. Mr. Shiley had the students engage in partner-, small group-, and whole class- discussions after each activity to formatively assess their understanding of the content. He prepared his students to use the vocabulary they were learning and, as such, encouraged the use of academic language when the students participated in these post-activity discussions. He monitored these activities and discussions and heard great conversations. He wondered why what he observed in the student conversations was not reflected in the students' writing samples.

Mr. Shiley began his investigation by going straight to the source. He asked Maggie to stay after class and showed her her writing sample. "Maggie," he began, "I want to talk with you about how well you're using our unit vocabulary in our class discussions. You do such a great job of expressing your learning using our key terms! I noticed in your writing that you don't use those vocabulary words though, and I'm wondering why that might be."

Maggie thought for a moment before responding, "Hmm... I guess when I'm writing, I always feel like I'm going to run out of time. Sometimes, it's just easier to say things in a different way where the words are simpler and I know I can spell them quickly. Writing longer words is more difficult if I haven't memorized them so I just try to say what I can with the words I can write quickly."

Mr. Shiley replied, "That's a great insight! Thanks for sharing this with me." As Maggie left, Mr. Shiley knew it was time to investigate strategies he can use to help Maggie and her classmates to

*demonstrate their understanding of the vocabulary and science content.*

Why does Maggie struggle with writing? It makes sense that her spelling is limited as dyslexia impacts word level skills and her suggestion that time is an issue may be linked to this as well. Maggie wants to demonstrate her knowledge but to do this she cannot spend the finite time available to her trying to decipher the spelling. Therefore, Maggie's writing is not congruent with her oral explanations.

Let us contextualize Maggie's challenges within the Simple View of Writing. Because our readers are likely familiar with the Simple View of Reading, we will start there. The Simple View of Reading dictates that two factors, decoding and language comprehension, interact to determine reading comprehension (Gough & Tumner, 1986). Similarly, the Simple View of Writing (Berninger et al., 2002; Juel et al., 1986) considers the interaction of two factors, transcription and text generation (sometimes referred to as *ideation*), as determinants of a written product. The first factor, *transcription*, is the "nuts and bolts" aspect of the writing process, which encompasses spelling, physical writing, and typing. The second factor is *text generation*, which includes vocabulary, syntax, and other processes tied to oral language production (Berninger and Swanson, 1994). Together, transcription and text generation enable the ultimate translation of language into its written form (Flower & Hayes, 1980).

As McCutchen et al. (2022) explain, morphological knowledge is critical to a student's ability to engage in the writing process because it eases the process of *translation*, or representing language in its written form (Flower & Hayes, 1980). According to Berninger and Swanson (1994), *translation* consists of two elements. The first component is *transcription*, or the "nuts and bolts" aspect of the writing process, which encompasses spelling, physical writing, and typing. Researchers have found that morphological awareness has a positive impact on later spelling abilities (Deacon et al., 2009). The second component of translation is *text generation*, which includes vocabulary, syntax, and other processes tied to oral language production. Morphological awareness

has been shown to positively impact text generation and writing quality, likely because it improves students' diction. In other words, with morphological awareness students can access and deploy precise words to capture their intended meaning (Berninger et al., 2011; McCutchen & Stull, 2015; Northey et al., 2016). Since morphology relates closely to spelling and vocabulary, building students' knowledge of word parts and their meanings will support their ability to represent their ideas in writing, which, in turn, will deepen their understanding of the content.

Both transcription and ideation are necessary but not sufficient for skilled writing. Just as the Simple View of Reading demonstrates that a weakness in either decoding or language comprehension will compromise reading comprehension, so too does the Simple View of Writing demonstrate that a weakness in either transcription or text generation will compromise written expression. For students who experience difficulty in spelling, transcription is the bottleneck that limits written expression. "Words selected for composition are mentally generated and accurately transcribed onto the page through the application of spelling knowledge" (Sumner et al., 2016, p. 294).

Spelling has three layers, phonological, orthographic, and morphological. One reason for this disconnect that Mr. Shiley sees may be due to his students needing morphological awareness instruction that is direct and visual. Morphological awareness refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and use the smallest parts of words that convey meaning. Researchers have found that morphological awareness has a positive impact on later spelling abilities (Deacon et al., 2009). Maggie, a student with dyslexia (SWD), certainly needs the direct correlation of her verbal vocabulary to the written orthography (i.e., conventional spelling). In other words, she needs to see and write the vocabulary words before she is expected to use them in her writing. Her peers would benefit as well, as demonstrated by Bahr and colleagues' (2012) study, which found that linguistic spelling patterns in neurotypical students (i.e., typically developing students) in grades 1-9 supports the notion that older students exhibit morphological errors after grade 4. Repetition through distributed practice such as studying, visualizing spelling, or playing games aids in generalization as well (Harris et al., 2017). Generalization here refers to the ability to use targeted words beyond the lessons in which they are taught in oral and written communication. Practicing morphological spelling skills can be accomplished through direct and/or indirect instruction; however, it is necessary for new spelling patterns to generalize to written products, especially for those who struggle with writing such as Maggie (McCutcheon et al., 2013).

> *Morphological knowledge is critical to a student's ability to engage in the writing process because it eases the process of translation, or representing language in its written form.*

Morphological work begins to appear in Virginia's ELA SOLs at grade 3 with the use of roots and affixes. These morphological standards; however, reside in reading and not writing. Yet, we know from research that morphological awareness bolsters reading *and* spelling skills (Coker & Ritchey, 2015). Writing SOLs at grade 6 require the correct spelling of commonly used words, but the vague nature of this standard leaves room for what we might think of as "common" words.

The content areas are rich with content specific vocabulary. The science classroom is especially ripe for morphological work through roots and affixes. "Common" words in science will likely differ from those in English, Math, and History classes, therefore specific embedded morphological work is important.

For SWD, direct instruction with morphemes in content area classrooms can be especially important. SWD may hesitate when spelling (Sumner et al., 2016). Sumner and colleagues (2016) found that SWD did not show their verbal vocabulary ability in their written products. The researchers assessed 31 elementary aged students on written and verbal composition tasks. Students fell into two groups, students with dyslexia (i.e. those word level difficulties) and neurotypical students. The study also examined the amount (i.e. number of times) and duration of pausing while students write on a digital writing tablet. SWD were found to make more spelling errors, pause more while writing, and use a reduced number of multisyllabic words when compared to their verbal abilities. Same-age neurotypical peers did not show these deficits in written products. While the Sumner et al. (2016) study attends to students younger than Mr. Shiley's class, Bahr and colleagues (2012) demonstrate that neurotypical students also make morphological errors after grade 4.

As shown in Maggie's writing sample, SWD can exhibit written products that are inconsistent with their oral language vocabulary usage. "[I]n the literature it has been suggested that children with dyslexia avoid writing words they cannot spell (Berninger et al., 2008), implying that these children restrict their vocabulary when writing supposedly due to their spelling difficulties" (Sumner et al., 2016, p. 294). This can be shown in the use of fewer multisyllabic words

*Researchers have found that morphological awareness has a positive impact on later spelling abilities.*

when writing (McCutchen et al., 2013; Sumner et al., 2016), which indicates a need for morphological work to increase confidence in writing complex words using prefixes, root words, and suffixes. Morphological awareness may support students' general spelling skills that go beyond writing specific content vocabulary terms. Specifically, students can use their morphological awareness, such as affix knowledge, to correctly spell words outside of the lessons in which they are taught (Deacon et al., 2009; McCutchen et al., 2013).

No matter the content area, specialized vocabulary terms will show up that are not part of students' everyday word usage. Pre-teaching vocabulary may be a common practice in areas such as science and social studies, but in order to create deep word knowledge, vocabulary instruction should move beyond typical vocabulary work such as defining terms and using terms in oral communication to the service of reading and writing. In this light, teachers employ morphological awareness activities to not only advance meaning and understanding, but to explicitly show how to read and spell words based on the morphemes. When students are able to write about a topic using content specific language, they are internalizing its meaning and can communicate a deep understanding in written form (McCutchen et al., 2013).

*Mr. Shiley decided to reach out to the reading specialist, Mrs. Gelpin, to see how he could help Maggie, and his other students who struggle with writing, to be more successful in sharing their knowledge in their written products. Mrs. Gelpin chatted with Mr. Shiley about his concerns, and she agreed that writing clearly is an area of need for many students. In their conversation, Mrs. Gelpin emphasized to Mr. Shiley the importance of spelling instruction. Mr. Shiley asked why spelling might be something he would want to address in his science class. Mrs. Gelpin explained that science has specific content vocabulary that students are likely to not encounter in other subjects. Additionally, she pointed out that being exposed to new vocabulary through verbal instruction does not directly translate to the students being able to use those terms with confidence in their writing. Often, students need to be taught new vocabulary through receiving direct instruction, having repeated practice opportunities, and creating written expression products to be internalized (McCutchen et al., 2013).*

*"Hmmm," Mr. Shiley began, "My student, Maggie, seemed to have internalized the new vocabulary. She participated in class discussions using the terms we learned. It's her writing where I see a breakdown."*

*Mrs. Gelpin responded, "Maggie has command of the new vocabulary in speech, but for her, spelling is not automatic. When she must work so hard to figure out how to spell the words, it*

limits her cognitive capacity to think about the meaning of what she is writing (Sumner et al., 2016). Plus, she might choose simpler vocabulary in her writing, so she doesn't have to try and spell complex words (Sumner et al., 2016)."

"Right," replied Mr. Shiley quietly. "She said almost the exact same thing and mentioned that writing longer words she hasn't memorized slows her down, so she uses simpler words."

"That makes sense," replied Mrs. Gelpin," Maggie is a student that needs direct instruction on the components of words, especially content specific words, to feel confident using them in her writing (McCutchen et al., 2013: Sumner et al., 2016). But you'd be surprised how many students would also benefit from spelling work who don't have dyslexia."

She continued, "Morphological study means that we are going to help the students use morphemes, which are the smallest units of meaning within a word, to teach both word meaning and spelling. So, as you are teaching the new vocabulary, you will add an extra layer with specific morpheme work that is verbal and visual. This will help with spelling (McCutchen et al., 2013; 2022; Sumner et al., 2016). But, more importantly, it will help your students take ownership of this specialized vocabulary and support them in feeling empowered to use it in both speaking and writing."

## Planning Morphological Instruction

Mrs. Gelpin offered to meet with the sixth-grade team to provide multiple suggestions to align writing across the grade and content courses. First, Mrs. Gelpin recommended that Mr. Shiley choose target words that he wanted present in the student writing for his class. Based on Mrs. Gelpin's reading of Kucan (2012) and Beck et al. (2013), words should be deliberately chosen. For Mr. Shiley, the words stem from the VA Science SOL 6.6 on water properties. Using the SOL standard, we turn to Kucan (2012) who suggests that new vocabulary should

*Since morphology relates closely to spelling and vocabulary, building students' knowledge of word parts and their meanings will support their ability to represent their ideas in writing, which, in turn, will deepen their understanding of the content.*

a) **Not be present in students' everyday vocabulary**. This is easily accomplished in content areas like science. Mr. Shiley chose *tension, cohesion, solvent,* and *dissolve*.

b) **Students should have background knowledge to support understanding of the new word**. In order to aid student understanding of the words *tension, cohesion, solvent,* and *dissolve*, sixth-grade science teachers should draw upon student background knowledge of things such as liquids vs. solids, erosion, and dissolving powdered drink mixes in water.

c) **Words are used across content and can be used in varied ways.** This is where team meetings and class alignment are vital. Rich morphological vocabulary instruction should be alive in many, if not all, classes. For example, to support student learning of the terms *tension, cohesion, solvent,* and *dissolve*, the English Language Arts teacher can use a fiction story where *tension* plays a large role in the plot. Here, the multiple meanings of words could be explored. In math, the teacher could create word problems using graphs that use the term *coordinate* highlighting the prefix *co-*. The history teacher could discuss how societies use *adherence* to laws and cultural expectations to ease *tensions* and create order or *cohesion* when working with the prefix *ad-* and the suffix *-sion*. Not only would this type of programming enliven language comprehension, but students may begin to see school to world connections that they had not previously seen.

d) **The word is essential to content writing.** Having command of the word *cohesion* and its variations will aid in writing about surface tension of water.

Mr. Shiley and Mrs. Gelpin worked together to create activities in which students must grapple with the meaning of *cohesion*. Mrs. Gelpin relied on Beck et al. (2013) for guidance in creating these activities. While they are presented here in worksheet format, they could also be transformed into three-dimensional, real world/ object activities for hands-on work.
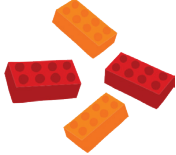
## Applied Practice for Generalization

Afterwards, students would write about a topic using the newly learned vocabulary words. Writing prompts can vary widely. Prompts can be factual, such as "What is special about water tension?" Prompts can be inventive and require imagination, such as "Tell a story about a baby fishing spider (i.e. the ones that walk on water) who is learning to walk on water? What does his mom or dad tell him? How does he
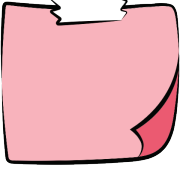
One trait that makes water special is the cohesion between its molecules. Remember that "cohesion" means "the act of sticking together," as shown by the prefix "co-," meaning "together."

Which of these pictures show an example of "cohesion"? Sort them into the correct category.

| | |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| **Examples** | **Non-Examples** |
| | |

**Word Associations and Generation**

| Word Element | Find or Draw an Example | Write a Word with the Same Word Element |
|---|---|---|
| co- means "together" | *Students insert pictures such as...* | cooperate |
| -he- comes from the Latin word "haerere," which means, "to stick" | | adhesive |
| -sion means "the state of" (in other words, this suffix makes a word into a noun) | | decision |

## Structured Word Inquiry

| co<br>"together" | he/her<br>"to stick" | sion<br>"the state of" | ly<br>"in a particular way" |
|---|---|---|---|
| ad<br>"toward" | | sive<br>"like or pertaining to" | |
| | | ent<br>"doing or performing" | |

Make words: *student generate words*
*Cohere*
*Cohesion*
*Cohesive*
*Coherent*
*Cohesively*
*Coherently*
*Adhere*
*Adhesion*
*Adhesive*

practice?" Prompts can include visuals that ask the student to describe the picture and name the important components. This applied practice in writing is an important step to help the students "own" the vocabulary words through usage and correct spelling.

### Revising Written Products

*After three days of morphological work using the worksheets above, and reviewing the water properties unit, Mr. Shiley gave*

> Morphological awareness may support students' general spelling skills that go beyond writing specific content vocabulary terms. Specifically, students can use their morphological awareness, such as affix knowledge, to correctly spell words outside of the lessons in which they are taught.

*the original writing prompt again, having the students draw and label a picture and write a summary about water properties. Students were handed back their original writing and asked to correct mistakes and expand upon the information they wrote. He also gave them 20 minutes to write rather than 10 minutes. The revision Maggie submitted is as follows:*

Water is a very special compound. It has characteristics that support life on earth. One important characteristic is that water is a universal solvent. This means it can dissolve almost any substance. Water molecules stick together which is called cohesion. This creates surface tension which allows some insects to "walk on water." The tension balances the weight of the insect when it "water walks." There is even a lizard that can't walk on water, but the water's surface tension can support it if it runs fast enough.

*Mr. Shiley could now see the importance of including verbal and visual word work in his science class. Maggie's writing was a great example of how his students' writing became more informative, represented what he thought they knew, and had fewer spelling errors. He understood now that he was not only re-*

*sponsible for teaching science content, but also embedding and integrating meaningful vocabulary work that is verbal AND visual. He realized it helps all students, not just those with dyslexia or those who struggle with writing. Morphological awareness is not reserved for English class but can be used in all classes. He recognized these activities were something he could incorporate more and more easily with the help of Mrs. Gelpin and thoughtful, self-aware students like Maggie.*

## Assessing Instruction

Lastly, an assessment should be conducted to determine the need for reteaching or identifying next instructional steps in extending students' newly acquired vocabulary comprehension and usage. Both informal and formal assessments can appropriately probe student understanding. Following the scenario above, Mr. Shiley noted informally that Maggie used her vocabulary in conversation but was less successful using the terms in her writing. After specific morphological instruction, Mr. Shiley administered an informal writing prompt and saw that Maggie's vocabulary usage was generalizing to writing. Mr. Shiley could next formally evaluate students' written products with structured projects or curriculum-based tests. No matter his choice, Mr. Shiley should assess students' use and understanding of new vocabulary in a variety of ways to ensure that language comprehension has increased.

## Closing Thoughts

You may notice that Maggie's writing contained more misspelled words than our activity examples attempted to aid. Using our examples above, how might you embed other words in morphological work in a science class, an English class, a math class, and a history class using these words? Could this work even be done in a gym class? We think so! Now it is your turn to get creative.

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# Teaching Virtually:
## Spelling Inventories, Verbal Output, and Student Practice

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Students throughout the commonwealth of Virginia are continuing to participate in virtual learning. Two statewide virtual learning programs saw enrollment numbers that were more than double what they were pre-pandemic in the 2022-2023 school year. These two programs alone accounted for 8,374 virtual learners and 400 teachers (Defusco, 2022). Regardless of opinions on virtual learning versus in-person learning, there *are* students in virtual classrooms requiring quality reading instruction. There is a need for best practices in virtual reading instruction to be examined, and shared amongst educators, so that we can support the literacy development of learners throughout the state. As a teacher of reading in the virtual classroom, I have worked to find "what-works" in virtual reading instruction and how research on best-practices in reading instruction can be applied in the virtual setting. There are strategies that can be used, and expectations that can be set to maximize student reading growth online. The use of spelling inventories, providing manageable opportunities for verbal output, and engaging students in synchronous practice can support growth.

## Spelling Inventories

Spelling inventories easily translate to the virtual setting. These inventories provide insight into the students' spelling stage which is crucial to both forming instructional groups, and planning for instruction (Bear et al., 2019; Ganske, 2014). Spelling inventories are word lists presented to students through dictation with spelling features (like short vowels, digraphs sh/ch/th, consonant blends, long vowel patterns, etc.) that increase in difficulty (Bear et al., 2019). The teacher can then analyze student responses to determine which spelling features students are using, confusing, or are not using at all. As Ehri (2020) writes, "teaching students to decode unfamiliar words and enabling students to store spellings of familiar words bonded to their other identities in memory should be central goals for beginning reading instruction" (p. 13). Spelling inventories help the teacher to identify the students' spelling stages to know which words are familiar, or unfamiliar, and where to begin instruction.

## Phases of Reading and Spelling Development

The development of reading and spelling follows a pattern including the phases listed in Figure 1, which is a brief consolidation of the phases as outlined by Moats (2020) and Ehri (2020). Bear and colleagues (2019), in addition to Ganske (2014), further divide these phases into five stages that follow a similar pattern, dividing the final phase to differentiate between students working on within word pattern spelling features, syllables, affixes, and derivational relations.

Analysis of a student's spelling can provide a window into their instructional needs. As Moats (2020) writes, "spelling and writing are a visible record of language processing. They may indicate exactly which aspects of print or speech are eluding the student...and where instruction should focus" (p. 264). Gentry and Oullette (2019) emphasize the importance of spelling as it relates to reading when they write, "reading and spelling develop as two sides of the same coin" (p. 10).

## Virtual Administration of Spelling Inventories

One of the challenges of presenting a spelling inventory online is the presence of well-meaning adults in a student's learning space who may provide cues to the student. For this reason, it is important to clearly establish that the inventory is not for a grade, but rather helps the teacher best plan for instruction. To create a relaxed atmosphere before presenting the inventory, share that this is not for a grade, and remind students that they should do their best to use what they know about letters and sounds to spell (Bear, 2019; Ganske, 2014).

Due to the number of potential distractions within students' environments that are outside of the teacher's control, the

**Figure 1**

*Reading and Spelling Phases as Outlined by Moats (2020) and Ehri (2020)*

| Pre-alphabetic | Early Alphabetic/ Partial Alphabetic | Later Alphabetic/ Full Alphabetic | Consolidated/ Consolidated Alphabetic |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Understand that written words stand for spoken words<br><br>• Have an idea of what print looks like<br><br>• No letter-sound cues to read and write words | • Make the connection between letters and sounds<br><br>• Write parts of words, may leave out vowels<br><br>• Use letter names/ sounds to help spell | • Connect each phoneme in a word to its grapheme | • Can recognize and spell many words<br><br>• Use spelling patterns within multisyllabic words<br><br>• Connect morphemes to spelling patterns |

teacher must ensure a steady pace to hold all students' attention. Administering the inventory in a small group, or one-on-one setting can help keep the pace appropriate. Ganske (2014) recommends to "allow sufficient time for students to respond, but move along quickly" (p. 30). When administering a spelling inventory one-on-one, the student should leave their microphone on. This helps the teacher to ensure that the student is working independently and that the environment remains distraction-free.

The use of the chat-box for spelling inventories makes for a faster pace of administration, promotes a non-threatening environment (it doesn't feel like a "test"), and makes it easy to collect student responses. When using the chat-box to collect student responses, the teacher can state the word aloud on the microphone, and students type the word into the designated space for chat messages in Zoom, or Google Meet (or any other platform is being used). Be sure to adjust chat settings so that student messages go directly to the host of the meeting (the teacher) and not all participants. This method of administration should not impact the integrity of the inventory. The inventory is not being used to assess students' handwriting, but their spelling. During in-person administration, a teacher might ask a student to tell them what the letters they wrote are if they are unable to be deciphered, while alphabet strips are a tool that might be used for letter formation reference (Bear et al., 2019). Thus, the use of the keyboard should not impact the integrity of the inventory.

When collecting student responses in the online setting, the use of a spreadsheet can be helpful for organization. The word list can be typed into the first column, with student names along the top row. As students send their responses

through the chat box, copy and paste those responses into the spreadsheet for easy analysis after the session. Figure 2 provides an example of what this may look like.

## Verbal Output

Once groups are formed using the data gathered from assessment and instruction begins, it must be done with intentionality to ensure that the virtual students have the greatest opportunity to learn. Verbal output, or saying words and sounds out loud, is a key component in developing reading (Kilpatrick, 2015). This presents a challenge for students learning online. Varying levels of internet connectivity among students can cause issues with activities that would be simple when in-person. For example, in-person a teacher can ask the class to say a word out loud and expect that they will hear the students say the word. This is not always the case online. One way to better facilitate this online is to first set the expectation that all students are in a quiet learning space (emphasize that all televisions are off, even if the student is not watching it). Then, ask the students to unmute their microphones. When asked to say something (ex., a word or sound) request that the students whisper. This is less chaotic to hear and prevents louder students from hurting the ears of others who may be sensitive. The teacher can also easily monitor students for participation in this manner by seeing who has their microphone unmuted.

Another way to increase opportunity for verbal output is to do quick check-ins with students in a breakout room during small group instruction. Students can be tasked with an independent activity that has been introduced (perhaps a sort, word hunt, or reading of a text). The teacher can rotate through breakout rooms with students to listen to

**Figure 2**

*ample Spelling Inventory Student Response Sheet*

Sample word list

Student names listed across the top of the spreadsheet.

Student responses

| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | ↓Word List | Harry | Ron | Hermione | Neville | Luna | Draco |
| 2 | **that** | that | that | that | that | that | that |
| 3 | **ship** | ship | ship | ship | ship | ship | ship |
| 4 | **much** | much | much | much | mush | much | much |
| 5 | **drip** | drip | drip | drip | dripp | drip | drip |
| 6 | **grab** | grab | grab | grab | grab | grab | grab |
| 7 | **crack** | crack | crack | crak | crack | crack | crak |
| 8 | **swift** | swift | swift | swift | swifed | swift | swift |
| 9 | **plump** | plump | plump | plum | plup | plump | plump |
| 10 | **spring** | spring | spring | spring | spring | spring | spring |
| 11 | **spend** | spend | spend | spint | spend | spend | spend |
| 12 | **stark** | stark | stark | stark | stark | stock | stark |
| 13 | **thorn** | thorn | thorn | thron | thorn | thorn | thorn |
| 14 | **grape** | grape | grape | grape | grape | grape | grape |
| 15 | **cloud** | cloud | cloud | cloud | clode | cloud | claud |
| 16 | **coated** | coated | coated | coated | coated | coated | cooted |
| 17 | **slightly** | slightly | slightly | slightly | slitely | slightly | lightly |
| 18 | **snowing** | snowing | snowing | snowing | snowing | snowing | sowing |
| 19 | **boiled** | boweild | boel | boiled | boweld | bowiled | bolled |
| 20 | **biking** | biking | bikeing | biking | bicking | biking | bickeing |
| 21 | **flies** | flys | fly | flys | flise | flies | fly's |
| 22 | **clapping** | claping | clapping | clapping | claping | clapping | claping |
| 23 | **spoonful** | spoon full | spoonful | spoonful | spoonful | spoonfull | boonful |
| 24 | | | | | | | |
| 25 | | | | | | | |

them read as they work. Resist the urge to call on students one at a time to turn on their microphones as this can very easily turn into a round-robin style lesson, which can lead to disengagement and embarrassment in students (Rasinski, 2010).

## Student Practice

Student practice during synchronous (live) instruction provides time for students to apply their learning under the guidance of their teacher who can provide feedback. Practice that is effective includes teacher feedback, which helps students to make corrections to their work (Gunning, 2017). Additionally, struggling learners require frequent feedback (Richardson, 2012). Relying solely on asynchronous work for student practice risks missing out on opportunities for immediate feedback. Sorting and word building are activities that allow students to analyze the spelling features or sounds present in words (Ganske, 2014) and are practice items that can be easily implemented in the virtual setting.

## Tools for Student Practice

Tools for engaging students in this work online include websites specifically designed for sorts or word building, digital whiteboards, and physical whiteboards and markers. Wordwall.net is one website that can be easily used to cre-

ate group sorts (including pictures and/or words), and anagrams. Student work is logged in a report allowing for ease in monitoring student responses. One drawback of Wordwall's group sort feature is that it is not open-ended and will show students "correct" or "incorrect" placements once they submit their work. This limits time for discussion surrounding the student's rationale for their sort. Student talk and reflection on their work supports their learning of the target spelling features (Bear et al., 2019).

A "draw-it" activity created on Nearpod.com, a Google Jamboard, or a whiteboard on Classkick.com can all serve as a digital whiteboard. Students can draw their own charts, and write the words for their sorts, or use their drawing or writing tool to record words found in a "word hunt." In a word hunt, a student finds words with a target spelling feature in their reading material, and records found words on their own list (Bear et al., 2019; Ganske, 2014). Digital whiteboards allow the teacher to see student work in real-time which can allow for the most immediate feedback. One should not discount the use of a whiteboard and marker. Student writing on a whiteboard can be relatively easy to see on a webcam, and markers are quick to write with and erase. This is a good option for students whose devices or internet connection do not easily support multiple applications running simultaneously.

## Conclusion

The use of spelling inventories, ensuring verbal output, and engaging students in synchronous practice can support literacy development in virtual learners. Teacher knowledge of students gained through the implementation of spelling inventories can help to best target instruction in order to grow both reading and spelling ability. Verbal output facilitates the connection between written words and oral language (Gentry & Ouellette, 2019). This can be done successfully in the virtual setting when students are in quiet workspaces, teachers encourage whispering on microphones, and teachers check in with students one-on-one. Both digital tools and physical materials can be leveraged for student practice in the virtual classroom.  As many students are continuing to participate in virtual school, we must continue to work to ensure that all learners, including those learning in the virtual setting, are learning through quality, evidence-based practices implemented in ways that work online.

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