

# GEORGIA

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ASSOCIATION OF  
**LITERACY**  
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# GEORGIA



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# Integrating Conventional and Innovative Practices: Enhancing Literacy Education in Diverse Contexts

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## ABSTRACT

The Spring 2024 issue of the *Georgia Journal of Literacy* highlights how traditional teaching methods and innovative practices can be merged to effectively address the needs of today's diverse student population. Articles within this issue advocate for a dynamic approach to literacy instruction, combining decades of research with contemporary classroom realities. The contributors to this issue explore topics from the complexities of reading aloud to leveraging community-based literacy projects, each underscoring strategies to create more inclusive and engaging learning environments. The issue also examines the importance of empirical data in developing effective literacy practices and offers practical strategies that apply research findings to enhance teaching and learning. The nine articles in this issue deepen understanding and encourage educators to innovate and adapt in ways that improve student engagement and literacy outcomes.

## KEYWORDS

innovative literacy practices; evidence-based literacy strategies; culturally responsive literacy; inclusive literacy

In this spring issue of the *Georgia Journal of Literacy*, we explore how blending conventional methods with innovative practices enhances literacy education in diverse contexts. As literacy educators, we find ourselves at a critical juncture in our field, one that calls on us to blend established methods with innovative approaches to effectively address the diverse needs of our students (Neuman & Gambrell, 2015). This integration goes beyond merely responding to changes in classroom demographics; it actively seeks diverse strategies to make learning environments more inclusive, engaging, and effective.

The authors of the nine articles showcased in this issue advocate for a dynamic approach to literacy instruction that synthesizes conventional pedagogies with contemporary research and practices. From exploring the complexities of reading aloud to engaging with culturally rich writing instruction—a trending topic in literacy research (Ho et al., 2024)—and the rigorous evaluation of state-approved assessment tools, each piece demonstrates the advantages of this integrative approach. As you read through this issue, consider how decades of empirical research and educational theory can be enhanced with innovative methods specifically tailored to meet the needs of today's learners (Neuman & Gambrell, 2015; Stewart et al., 2024).

Our goal for this issue is to spark conversations that lead to action and encourage practices grounded in rigorous research yet adapted to the realities of today's classrooms. By linking the

science of literacy with the art of teaching, we strive to inform professional conversations that reflect our current times and anticipate future educational challenges while ensuring literacy education continues to advance and become more inclusive and effective.

### **Evidence-Based Practices and Interventions**

The issue opens with two rigorous research studies. Emphasizing the essential role of empirical data in shaping literacy education strategies, Dr. Lindee Morgan, Joseph Wenke, and Dr. Kristina Dandy analyze the effectiveness of state-approved literacy screeners in “A Psychometric Review of Universal Reading Screeners Approved by the State Board of Education” and offer insights into their reliability for educators. Likewise, Drs. Susan Green and Maryann Mraz examine the impact of Question-Answer-Relationship (QAR) strategies on improving third graders’ reading comprehension in “The Effects of Question-Answer-Relationship (QAR) Instruction on Standardized Reading Comprehension Test Scores of Third-Grade Students,” with a focus on underserved populations. Both research articles highlight the importance of using solid, evidence-based research to develop literacy practices that are effective and inclusive.

### **Cultivating Empowerment Through Inclusive Literacy Practices**

Four practitioner-oriented articles follow the empirical pieces, the first two of which center on inclusive and empowering literacy practices. Seeking to deepen our understanding of how inclusivity and cultural relevance can fundamentally enhance literacy education, Dr. Leah Panther and Caitlin Hochuli’s “Looking for It: Language, Literacy, and History in Place” shows how community-based literacy projects in Georgia empower youth by connecting them with their local languages and histories. Dr. Bethany L. Scullin, Nickie B. Smith, and Holly N. Proby address the rise in book bans in “Teaching Between the Bans: Exploring Book Banning, Censorship, and Book Access in the Middle Grades,” promoting literature as a tool for intellectual freedom and engagement with diverse narratives. These practitioner articles emphasize the critical role of diverse perspectives and histories in enriching literacy education and empowering students to connect meaningfully with their learning environments.

### **Complexity and Depth in Literacy Practices**

The remaining practitioner-oriented articles call on readers to examine the complexity and depth of conventional literacy practices. Emphasizing the intricacies of effective literacy practices, Dr. William P. Bintz’s article “Reading-Aloud as Complex Art, not Simple Activity: A Cautionary Tale, Part II” reexamines the practice of reading aloud, showcasing its ability to engage a broad range of students, including those with special needs. This discussion is further developed by Bintz and Dr. Lisa Parker in “Using Companion Texts to Widen Student Perspective Across the Curriculum,” which introduces companion texts as innovative tools for improving literary comprehension and intertextual analysis across disciplines. These two articles promote a deeper understanding of text engagement and stress the need for careful text selection and teaching strategies that meet diverse intellectual needs.

### **Practical Strategies for Inclusive Literacy Education**

Three Teaching Tips articles provide readers with direct, actionable methods to meet diverse learning needs and create more engaging, inclusive classrooms. In “Igniting the Fire Within: Culturally Relevant Expository Writing,” Dr. Adam C. Whitaker illustrates the impact of culturally

relevant pedagogies and encourages educators to draw on students' cultural backgrounds to boost writing engagement and learning. Next, Drs. Sharon Swift and Kim Barker, in "Ten Quick and Easy Ways to Enhance Early Literacy Instruction: Tips from a School OT," discuss how multisensory learning, facilitated by occupational therapy techniques, can advance literacy in young learners. In "Tips for Organizing a Dyslexia Simulation Workshop for Pre-Service Teachers," Drs. Kimberly A. Davidson, Sarah Williams, Emily Lin, Annmarie Jackson, and Paula Tench offer a detailed guide on using simulation exercises to help educators better understand and support students with dyslexia. Together, these articles provide valuable insights into creating supportive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of all students.

### Final Thoughts

We want to express our gratitude to the contributors whose work has been pivotal in shaping this issue of the *Georgia Journal of Literacy*. Each article plays a crucial role in illustrating how blending traditional literacy approaches with innovative practices can meet the complex needs of today's diverse student populations. This issue and each article therein enrich our understanding and provide actionable strategies that bridge research and practice to make our classrooms more inclusive and effective. We also extend our thanks to you, our readers, for your continued engagement and dedication to literacy education. Your active participation is essential as we strive to learn, grow, and respond to the educational challenges of our time.

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# A Psychometric Review of Universal Reading Screeners Approved by the State Board of Education

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## ABSTRACT

In 2023, the Georgia Legislature passed the Georgia Early Literacy Act (HB 538), representing a sweeping reform effort to improve the quality of early reading instruction in the state. HB 538 requires schools to screen children in kindergarten through third grade three times yearly. Related to this requirement, HB 538 requires that the State Board of Education (SBOE) approve a list of universal reading screeners that can: 1) provide relevant information to target instruction, 2) measure foundational literacy skills, 3) identify students who are struggling to acquire reading skills, and 4) be used to monitor progress. The purpose of this review is to provide a supplement to the SBOE's approved list so that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) can assess the relative psychometric strength of each screener as they select the most appropriate screener for the students they serve. We compiled information regarding each screener's reliability, validity, sensitivity, and specificity to create an exposition of their strengths and weaknesses. We found that GaDOE's approved list contains numerous tools with acceptable psychometric properties; however, large variability in the amount of psychometric data available for each screener is problematic. LEAs are recommended to consider psychometric strength as a critical factor when selecting an early literacy screener.

## KEYWORDS

psychometric review; universal reading screeners

In 2023, the Georgia Legislature passed the Georgia Early Literacy Act (HB 538), representing a sweeping reform effort to improve the quality of early reading instruction in the state. Among other aspects of the law, HB 538 requires schools to screen children in kindergarten through third grade three times yearly. Related to this requirement, HB 538 requires that the State Board of Education (SBOE) approve a list of universal reading screeners that can: 1) provide relevant information to target instruction, 2) measure foundational literacy skills, 3) identify students who are struggling to acquire reading skills, and 4) be used to monitor progress.

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The Georgia Department of Education's (GaDOE) policy division coordinated a Request for Information (RFI) process beginning in May 2023. The RFI application required vendors to include evidence in several areas, including how their screener addresses the requirements listed in HB 538 as indicated above. Following this, publishers of screeners prepared and submitted information about their screener to the SBOE. The SBOE approved a list of 16 screeners on July 19, 2023, and shortened this list on February 22, 2024. The current approved list can be found [here](#).

The purpose of this psychometric review is to provide a supplement to the SBOE's approved list so that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) can assess the relative psychometric strength of each screener as they select the most appropriate screener for the students they serve. This independent review is meant to clarify several psychometric properties of each approved screener and provide LEAs with additional context regarding the tools included in this list.

## Literature Review

Understanding the psychometric composition of a screener is critical when determining what populations a screener will effectively target. Psychometrics enables us to analyze the instruments we use to measure behaviors and traits; it also provides us with objective rules for scoring the results of tests (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2011). It is important to note that screeners differ from childhood assessments. Universal reading screeners identify students in need of additional evaluation, while assessments give insight into specific abilities and competencies (Moodie et al., 2014).

## Psychometric Constructs

**Reliability.** Reliability is an index of whether students' scores on the screener will be stable despite extraneous factors, including when, who administers it, and where it is administered (Moodie et al., 2014). Reliability is impacted by variables such as test length, homogeneity of items, test-retest interval, variability of scores, student guessing, testing situation variance, and sample size (Sattler, 2020). For a psychometric test to be supported by evidence of reliability, the measure must be consistent across raters, time, and items (White et al., 2022).

While many reliability indices are available, the most common types used in our review were interrater reliability, test-retest, and internal consistency. Interrater reliability indicates whether the test's scores will vary when assessed by different raters (Cook & Beckman, 2006). Interrater reliability can demonstrate the objectivity of an assessment's scores (Sattler, 2020). Test-retest reliability demonstrates that an assessment yields stable results when administered to an individual at two or more time points (Sattler, 2020). Internal consistency demonstrates that the items in a test measure the same construct or concept or that the items in the test are homogenous (Cronbach, 1951; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

**Validity.** Validity is a measurement of "the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretations of test scores entailed by the proposed uses of tests" (American Educational Research Association [AERA], 1999, p. 9). That is, validity must be inferred from multiple sources of evidence and stated within the context of a specific purpose (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). A screener may have strong evidence of validity for identifying dyslexia but weak validity in screening for difficulty in acquiring reading skills or vice-versa. At the same time, a screener may obtain perfect sensitivity by flagging every student it assesses as at-risk for reading difficulty. However, its specificity would become incredibly weak for the number of false positives. Thus,

multiple sources for evidence of validity are required to state that a tool has evidence of validity (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). Criterion validity demonstrates that a screener is accurate and precise by measuring it against an already accepted assessment. Using accepted assessments as our criterion measure allows us to advance the field by expediting the review of new tools. Concurrent validity indicates the accuracy of an assessment by comparing its results to another well-tested assessment administered at about the same time. Predictive validity demonstrates a screener's ability to predict a child's scores on another well-tested assessment at a later date.

**Sensitivity and Specificity.** Sensitivity and specificity are additional forms of validity that indicate a measure's capacity to correctly identify which students are at risk and which are not (Council on Children, 2006; Swift et al., 2020). The sensitivity indicates a tool's accuracy in identifying students with or at risk for a condition (i.e., true positives), in this case, reading difficulty or dyslexia (Parikh et al., 2008). Specificity demonstrates the tool's capacity to accurately rule out students who are not at risk for a specific condition (i.e., true negatives). It is essential to acknowledge that sensitivity and specificity only apply to the tested group. Sensitivity and specificity do not provide the probability of an individual student's test result being correct; that probability is more appropriately assessed by positive predictive values and negative predictive values (Trevethan, 2017). Sensitivity focuses entirely on the percentage of the population with the condition caught by the screener; it is not impacted by false positives. Positive predictive values, on the other hand, show the percentage of true positives out of all positive test results (Trevethan, 2017). False positives are less concerning than false negatives when evaluating reading screeners because a false positive will only result in a student receiving extra assistance, while a false negative results in a student who needs assistance not receiving it (Classification Accuracy, n.d.). Adequate sensitivity and specificity are crucial to show that a screener appropriately identifies the students who need extra assistance without overburdening the screening and response system by flagging children who are not indeed at risk for reading difficulties.

### **Psychometric Review Process**

The authors reviewed all 16 screeners approved by the SBOE to provide LEAs with an answer to the question: What are the relative psychometric strengths of the universal reading screeners approved by the Georgia SBOE? The review used data published by independent experts when available and information provided by the screeners' publishers. The publishers of each screener submitted a report to GaDOE in response to a call for universal reading screening tools for students K–3. These reports contained information about how each screener works, the domains it assesses, and evidence of its efficacy. The National Center for Intensive Intervention's (NCII) Academic Screening Technical Review Committee (TRC) reviewed eleven of the sixteen screeners. The TRC comprises individuals with expertise in measurement and research methodology in academic screening. In addition, the TRC included committee members with expertise in culturally and linguistically diverse groups. Members of the TRC evaluated screeners for classification accuracy, reliability, and validity. Screeners not evaluated by NCII's TRC included *Amira*, *Battelle Early Academic Survey*, *aimswebPlus*, *Predictive Assessment of Reading*, *MindPlay Universal Screener*, and *Exact Path Diagnostic Assessment*. For each screener, we utilized reports submitted to GaDOE by the publishers of each screener as part of the RFI process and searched for additional studies on the screeners. Although several screeners on our list were developed for use beyond the third grade (e.g., as high as grade 8 or 12), we restricted our review to grades K–3 to align with the requirements of HB 538.

## Method

When evaluating each screener's psychometric strength, we focused specifically on metrics of reliability, validity, sensitivity, and specificity. These metrics provide robust indicators of a tool's value in educational settings, enabling the communication of meaningful information through precise psychological measurements (Sattler, 2020). We identified statistical tests performed in evaluating each screener and reported the strength of evidence each statistical test provided. Together, these metrics provide insight into whether an early literacy screener can accurately and consistently indicate a child's reading status.

Each screener is a norm-referenced tool (i.e., these tools compare each student to a sample population) using grade-level norms (Ornstein, 1993). NCII was the first source of information used for our evaluation. For screeners not evaluated by NCII, the primary source of information was publisher reports submitted to GaDOE. Additional information from publishers' websites, journal articles, and technical manuals was also used. In their reports to GaDOE, each screener's publisher determined acceptable cutoff scores for the psychometric tests they used. The cutoffs used in our review are applied to all screeners based on relevant literature and standard research guidelines. Thus, they may vary from what was used by the publisher and generally provide a more conservative assessment of each tool's performance.

## Reliability

For reliability, this review focused on interrater reliability, test-retest reliability, and internal consistency metrics. NCII gave ratings of convincing evidence of reliability to each screener that demonstrated the following: a model-based approach to reliability, at least two types of reliability that are appropriate to the tool, and for each type of reliability, the median lower bound of the confidence interval around the estimate had to meet or exceed 0.70 (Academic Screening Tools, n.d.). NCII's ratings were applied separately for each grade level targeted by the tools evaluated.

**Interrater Reliability.** Interrater agreement was only reported on screeners evaluated by NCII. Therefore, our determination of acceptable levels of interrater agreement corresponds with that deemed by NCII. Interrater reliability can be demonstrated by percentage agreement, kappa, intraclass correlation coefficient, or product-moment correlation coefficient (Sattler, 2020).

**Test-Retest.** Correlation coefficients calculated from the test-retest reliability depend on the type of data used and can include Pearson's  $r$  or Spearman's  $\rho$  correlation coefficients. A test-retest coefficient below 0.5 is considered weak, 0.5 to 0.7 is moderate, while above 0.7 is strong, and above 0.9 is very strong (McDaniel & Ziniel, 2023).

**Internal Consistency.** Internal consistency can be shown using Cronbach's alpha, Omega, or split-half reliability; scores of 0.7 are considered good, and scores of 0.8 are considered excellent, but 0.9 or higher may suggest redundancy more than consistency (McDaniel & Ziniel, 2023). A score between 0.6 and 0.7 could be considered adequate in limited situations, but anything below 0.6 is considered poor reliability.

Other reliability tests used in reviewing the screeners but not included in our results include IRT-Score-based reliability and EFA/CFA Model-based coefficient Omega. While both tests are acceptable ways to measure reliability, too few screeners used these tests to justify including them in our results table.

### Validity

For the current review, we include metrics of criterion validity: concurrent and predictive. A correlation between the two measures evaluates both. For predictive and concurrent validity, a median coefficient of 0.49 or less is considered weak, 0.5 to 0.69 is considered moderate, and anything over 0.7 is considered strong (McDaniel & Ziniel, 2023).

**Sensitivity and Specificity.** Acceptable sensitivity and specificity depend on what is being assessed and the population in which it is being assessed. Sensitivity and specificity are expected to vary with changes in the prevalence of the condition being screened for (Parikh et al., 2008). For example, the sensitivity of a screener meant to detect reading difficulty should be higher than a screener meant to detect dyslexia because reading difficulty is more prevalent than dyslexia (Catts et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2022). Scoring systems must attempt to minimize under-referring or over-referring, which is why sensitivity and specificity scores of 0.7–0.8 are generally acceptable (Council on Children, 2006). Sensitivity and specificity are reported with a range from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating perfect measurement (Swift et al., 2020). Given that NCII gives high ratings to sensitivities of 0.7 or greater and to specificities of 0.8 or greater (Classification Accuracy, n.d.), we modified the rating scale for the current review, citing sensitivity and specificity ratings of 0.8 and above as acceptable; this modification was made to highlight the importance of accurately identifying reading difficulties in K–3 children. Given the interdependence of these measures within the context in which they are assessed, interpretation of specific scores should be made with consideration for the purpose of the assessments.

### Screener Ranking

Based on the information available to us and in examination of screener features and psychometric indices, we derived an informal coding system to generate relative rankings of the approved screeners. In this coding system, we ascribed weighted points for each area to derive a total score so that these tools could be considered relative to one another. Seven aspects were included in the coding system, including: (1) screener scope, (2) psychometric breadth, (3) reliability, (4) criterion validity, (5) sensitivity, (6) specificity, and (7) sensitivity and specificity composite.

The screener scope, determined by the domains that each screener assessed, was rated as a 0 or 1. The domains assessed by each screener were indicated by publishers in their reports to GaDOE; details can be found in Table 2. Screeners that assessed at least 12 domains received a score of 1. Psychometric breadth also rated a 0 or 1, was based on the range of grades psychometric data were provided for each screener. Screeners that provided data for at least three grades between K–3 received a score of 1. Reliability was also rated a 0 or 1, based on the abundance of assessments supported by evidence of reliability. Screeners that tested at least two types of reliability received a score of 1. Due to the nature of the data and its intended use in correctly identifying children with reading delays accurately, criterion validity was weighted more heavily than reliability at a maximum of 3 points. Points given for criterion validity were based on the cutoffs described above. Sensitivity weighting was calculated as a factor of the screener's reported sensitivity across K–3. We multiplied each screener's mean sensitivity by 6 to give it heavier weighting due to the relative importance of sensitivity as a psychometric feature for screeners in early education. Specificity was rated from 0–3, with 3 points for a specificity of 0.9 or more, 2 points for a specificity between 0.8 and 0.9, 1 point for a specificity between 0.7 and 0.8, and 0 points for a specificity of less than 0.7. A score of 0 was also given if specificity data were not provided. Finally, we calculated a mean sensitivity score and a mean specificity score and created

a composite score by adding them together for each screener. The exact composite score was added to the ranking score of each screener, for a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 2.

Using each of the aspects described above, we summed scores to rank each screener relative to one another and organized them into three categories: strong, moderate, and weak. The maximum possible score was 17 points. Scores above the median were categorized as strong. Scores below the median were categorized as moderate or weak. Screeners that received less than 60% of the maximum score were categorized as weak.

## Results

The results of our review are presented in Tables 1–4. Table 1 provides an alphabetical listing of each screener, its publisher, and the grades for which the tool is intended. Table 1 also indicates whether the tool shows convincing evidence of reliability and validity for each grade analyzed. An acceptable reliability rating was required for a tool to be determined to have convincing evidence of reliability in each grade, and a moderate validity coefficient was required for a tool to be determined to have convincing evidence for validity. When possible, NCII’s judgment on evidence was used. For screeners not evaluated by NCII, cutoff points for reliability and validity were used, as indicated in the section above.

Two screeners (*iSTEEP* and *MindPlay Universal Screener*) did not provide grade-specific metrics of reliability and validity. One notable finding is that nine of the sixteen tools do not have convincing evidence for either reliability or validity at kindergarten. Four of these tools do not have strong evidence for both reliability and validity at kindergarten. Additional information on each screener’s supporting evidence can be found in Table 3. It is also worth noting that for reliability and validity to have real meaning, the intended population must be the same as the group tested in the tool’s development (Moodie et al., 2014); however, an assessment of the test population was beyond this review’s scope. Generally, this information can be found on publisher’s websites or in screener technical manuals. Table 1 also states whether a screener requires administrator/teacher training or technology to administer, with most tools requiring both.

**Table 1: Overview of Literacy Screeners Approved by the SBOE**

Measure Name	Vendor	Grades Developed For	Convincing Evidence of Reliability by Grade	Convincing Evidence of Validity by Grade	Administrator Training Required	Technology Required for Administration
<i>Acadience Reading K–6</i>	Acadience Learning, Inc.	K–6	K–6	1, 2, 4, 5, 6	Yes	No
<i>aimswebPlus</i>	Pearson	K–8	K–8	K–8	Yes	Yes
<i>Amira</i>	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt	K–3	K–3	K–3	No	Yes
<i>Battelle Early Academic Survey</i>	Riverside Assessments	K–2	K–2	K–2	Yes	Yes
<i>Classworks Reading Universal Screener</i>	Classworks	K–10	2–8	2–8	Yes	Yes

<i>EasyCBM for Reading</i>	Riverside Assessments	K–8	K–5	2, 3, 4, 5	Yes	Yes
<i>Exact Path Diagnostic Assessment</i>	Edmentum	K–3	K–3	K–3	Yes	Yes
<i>FastBridge aReading</i>	Renaissance Learning	K–8	K–8	2–8	Yes	Yes
<i>i-Ready Assessment for Reading</i>	Curriculum Associates	K–8	K–8	K–8	Yes	Yes
<i>ISIP Reading with RAN and ORF</i>	Istation	K–8	K–8	K–8	Yes	Yes
<i>iSTEEP</i>	iSTEEP, LLC	K–12	N/A*	N/A*	No	Yes
<i>MAP Reading Fluency</i>	NWEA	K–3	K–3	1, 2, 3	Yes	Yes
<i>mCLASS</i>	Amplify Education, Inc.	K–8	K–8	K–5	Yes	No
<i>MindPlay Universal Screener</i>	MindPlay	K–12	N/A*	N/A*	No	Yes
<i>Predictive Assessment of Reading</i>	Red E Set Grow	K–3	K–3	1–3	Yes	Yes
<i>Star Assessments</i>	Renaissance Learning	K–3	1–3	K–3	Yes	Yes

Note. \*Not specified by grade.

Table 2 (a & b) lists the domains assessed by each screener. Table 2 is split into two parts for readability, with each part including eight screeners. Screener domains are sets of related skills or information classified together for assessment purposes. GaDOE provided two categories of screener domains: foundational literacy skills and characteristics of dyslexia. GaDOE provided these for publishers to indicate what screeners purportedly assess. The grades at which each domain is assessed are also indicated. Although GaDOE has listed each of these domains separately, the domains are not necessarily mutually exclusive. With very few exceptions, this group of screeners assesses each of the domains listed at K–3. It is worth noting that the Predictive Assessment of Reading evaluates only one out of the seven domains of dyslexia.

**Table 2(a): Domains Assessed**

	<i>Predictive</i>	<i>Acadience</i>	<i>Aimsweb Plus</i>	<i>Amira</i>	<i>Battelle</i>	<i>Class works</i>	<i>Easy CBM</i>	<i>Exact Path</i>
<b>Foundational Literacy Skills</b>								
Phonological Awareness	K-3	K-1	K-1	K-3	K-2	K-2	K-1	K-1
Phonemic Awareness	K-3	K-1	K-1	K-3	K-2	K-2	K-1	K-1
Phonics	K-3	K-3	K-1	K-3	K-2	K-3	K-1	K-3
Fluency	K-3	1-3	K-3	K-3	K-2	Not assessed	K-3	K-3
Vocabulary	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	Not assessed	2-3	2-3	K-3
Reading Comprehension	K-3	1-3	2-3	K-3	Not assessed	1-3	2-3	K-3
Spelling	K-3	K-1	K-3	K-3	Not assessed	3	Not assessed	K-3
Oral Language	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-2	K-3	K-3	K-3
Intersection of Reading and Writing	K-3	K-1	1-3	Not assessed	K-2	1-3	3	K-3
<b>Characteristics of Dyslexia</b>								
Sound Symbol Recognition	Not assessed	K-2	K-1	K-3	K-2	K-2	K-1	K
Alphabet Knowledge	Not assessed	1,2	K-3	K-3	K-2	K-3	K	K-3
Decoding Skills	Not assessed	K-3	K-1	K-3	K-2	K-3	K-1	K-3
Encoding Skills	Not assessed	K-1	K-3	K-3	Not assessed	K-3	K-1	K-3
RAN	K-3	K-1	K-3	K-3	K-2	Not assessed	K-1	K-3
Accuracy of Word Reading	Not assessed	1-3	K-3	K-3	K-2	K-3	1-3	K-3
Sight Word Reading Efficiency Skills	Not assessed	1-3	K-3	K-3	K-2	K-2	K-1	K-1

**Table 2(b): Domains Assessed**

	<i>FastBridge aReading</i>	<i>i-Ready Assessment for Reading</i>	<i>ISIP Reading with RAN and ORF</i>	<i>iSTEEP</i>	<i>MAP Reading Fluency</i>	<i>mCLASS</i>	<i>MindPlay Universal  Screener</i>	<i>Star Assess- ments</i>
<b>Foundational Literacy Skills</b>								
Phonological Awareness	K-1	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3
Phonemic Awareness	K-1	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3
Phonics	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3
Fluency	K-1	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3
Vocabulary	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3
Reading Comprehension	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3
Spelling	K-3	1-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3
Oral Language	K-1	1-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3
Intersection of Reading and Writing	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3
<b>Characteristics of Dyslexia</b>								
Sound Symbol Recognition	K-1	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3
Alphabet Knowledge	K	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3
Decoding Skills	K-1	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	Not assessed	K-3
Encoding Skills	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3
RAN	K	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3
Accuracy of Word Reading	1-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3
Sight Word Reading Efficiency Skills	K-1	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3	K-3

Table 3 summarizes the strength of each psychometric index evaluated as well as the source of information for these metrics. Specifically, Table 3 identifies the reliability, criterion validity, sensitivity, and specificity of each screener, specifically in grades K-3. While publishers may have reported these results for specific grade levels, the metrics in Table 3 are based on an average of

scores provided from K–3. These metrics provide insight as to whether a screener can accurately and consistently indicate children’s performance in the domains listed in Table 2. The metrics in Table 3 were analyzed against specific cut points to represent varying levels of reliability, criterion validity, sensitivity, and specificity. Our classifications represent the inferred strength of available evidence for each of the aforementioned psychometric indices. These are not absolute judgements; thus, exact values are not included in Table 3. A key is provided in the table that indicates these cut points, from low to acceptable, weak to strong, and weak to acceptable.

**Table 3: Reliability, Criterion Validity, Sensitivity, and Specificity of Screeners at Grades K–3**

Screener Name	Source	Reliability			Validity		
		<i>Interrater</i>	<i>Test-Retest</i>	<i>Internal Consistency</i>	<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Sensitivity</i>	<i>Specificity</i>
<i>Acadience Reading K–6</i>	<a href="#">Intensive intervention</a>	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Strong	Weak	Acceptable
<i>aimswebPlus</i>	Pearson	Not assessed	Acceptable*	Acceptable	Moderate	Acceptable	Acceptable
<i>Amira</i>	HMHCO Amira Learning: Research Evidence Base	Not assessed	Acceptable	Acceptable	Strong	Acceptable	Acceptable
<i>Battelle Early Academic Survey</i>	Riverside	Not assessed	Acceptable	Acceptable	Strong	**	**
<i>Classworks Reading Universal Screener</i>	<a href="#">Intensive intervention</a>	Not assessed	Acceptable	Acceptable	Strong	Weak	Acceptable
<i>Easy CBM for Reading</i>	<a href="#">Intensive intervention</a>	Not assessed	Acceptable	Not assessed	Moderate	Weak	Acceptable
<i>Exact Path Diagnostic Assessment</i>	Edmentum Research	Not assessed	Not assessed	Acceptable*	Strong	Acceptable	Acceptable
<i>FastBridge aReading</i>	<a href="#">Intensive intervention</a>	Not assessed	Acceptable	Not assessed	Strong	Acceptable	Acceptable
<i>i-Ready Assessment for Reading</i>	<a href="#">Intensive intervention</a>	Not assessed	Acceptable	Acceptable*	Strong	Acceptable	Acceptable
<i>ISIP Reading with RAN and ORF</i>	<a href="#">Padlet</a>	Not assessed	Acceptable	Acceptable*	Strong	Acceptable	Weak
<i>iSTEEP</i>	<a href="#">Intensive intervention</a>	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not assessed	Moderate	Weak	Acceptable
<i>MAP Reading Fluency</i>	<a href="#">Intensive intervention</a>	Not assessed	Acceptable	Acceptable*	Moderate	Weak	Weak
<i>mCLASS</i>	<a href="#">Intensive intervention</a>	Not assessed	Acceptable*	Not assessed	Strong	Weak	Acceptable

<i>MindPlay Universal Screener</i>	MindPlay Education	Not assessed	Acceptable	Not assessed	Moderate	**	**
<i>Predictive Assessment of Reading</i>	<u>PAR Technical Manual</u>	Not assessed	Acceptable	Acceptable	Strong	Acceptable	Acceptable
<i>STAR Assessments</i>	<u>Star Assessment</u>	Not assessed	Acceptable	Acceptable	Moderate	Acceptable	Acceptable

*Note.* Numerical ratings below represent median coefficient/alpha ratings. Cells showing the highest rating in each category are highlighted. \*Marginal reliability was used as a metric of internal consistency, or alternate form or delayed alternate form reliability was used as a metric of retest reliability. Acceptable level of Interrater, Test-Retest, and Internal Consistency was identified as Acceptable (> 0.7); Low (< 0.7). Ratings of Criterion Validity: Strong (> 0.7), Moderate (> 0.5, < 0.7), Weak (< 0.5). Ratings of Sensitivity and Specificity: Acceptable (> 0.8), Weak (< 0.8). \*\*Sensitivity and specificity were not tested for this screener.

It is important to note that several screeners did not assess two or more of the metrics examined in our review (see *Battelle Early Academic Survey*, *Exact Path*, *FastBridge*, *mCLASS*, and *MindPlay Universal Screener*). Of all of these, *MindPlay Universal Screener* provided the least evidence with information for only two out of six psychometric indices. Two of the sixteen tools (*Battelle Early Academic Survey* and *MindPlay Universal Screener*) did not publish information on sensitivity or specificity.

All screeners reporting indices of reliability performed within acceptable levels, and all screeners reporting criterion validity had either moderate or strong ratings. Regarding criterion validity, it is worth noting that multiple screeners used *MAP Growth* and *MAP* as their measure of comparison, which have been shown to be valid tools and as a result are acceptable criterion measures. *MAP Growth* and *MAP* are not the same tool as *MAP Reading Fluency* included in our review. Of the fourteen screeners reporting sensitivity, six received a determination of weak (*Acadience*, *Classworks*, *Easy CBM*, *iSTEOP*, *MAP Reading Fluency*, and *mCLASS*). Only two screeners were determined to have weak specificity (*ISIP Reading* and *MAP Reading Fluency*).

Inconsistencies in reporting were apparent for two screeners. Two screeners appear to have been developed and normed at a narrower grade range than their report to GaDOE suggests. According to the NCII report, *Classworks* was normed on 2nd-8th grade. However, their reporting to GaDOE indicated that their screener is appropriate for K–10th grade. Similarly, *EasyCBM* was reportedly normed on 3rd-5th grade, but their reporting to GaDOE indicated that their screener is appropriate for K–8th grade. Caution is suggested in using tools where publishers may have used reduced rigor in evaluating and reporting.

Relative screener rankings are provided in Table 4. It is important to note that these rankings only compare the screeners approved by the SBOE. For example, a ‘weak’ designation indicates a tool’s relative psychometric standing to the other screeners on the approved list. It does not provide a comparison to all literacy screeners available on the market, including those submitted to GaDOE that were not approved for use.

**Table 4: Relative Screener Rankings**

Ranking	Screener
Strong (8)	<i>aimswebPlus</i>
	<i>Amira</i>
	<i>Classworks Reading Universal Screener</i>
	<i>Exact Path Diagnostic Assessment</i>
	<i>i-Ready Assessment for Reading</i>
	<i>ISIP Reading with RAN and ORF</i>
	<i>Predictive Assessment of Reading</i>
	<i>Star Assessments</i>
Moderate (5)	<i>Acadience Reading K–6</i>
	<i>FastBridge aReading</i>
	<i>iSTEEP</i>
	<i>MAP Reading Fluency</i>
	<i>mCLASS</i>
Weak (3)	<i>EasyCBM</i>
	<i>Battelle Early Academic Survey</i>
	<i>MindPlay Universal Screener</i>

The maximum possible score for any screener in our ranking was 17; the highest score achieved was 15.87 (*Exact Path Diagnostic Assessment*), and the lowest score received was 3 (*MindPlay Universal Screener*). Screeners in the strong category had at least 14 points in our ranking. The moderate category belongs to screeners that received between 10 and 14 points. Only three screeners received a 0 for psychometric breadth. Four screeners received 0 points for reliability due to only having tested one type of reliability. No screener received less than 2 points for criterion validity. The lowest specificity, averaged across K–3, for any screener that tested it and provided data was 0.71. Cutoffs for rankings of criterion validity and specificity can be found in the notes under Table 3.

## Discussion

The authors conducted an independent review of universal literacy screeners approved by the SBOE to meet the screener requirements in HB 538. The review included a detailed summary of each tool’s primary features, domains assessed, and evidence of psychometric strength as indicated by metrics of reliability, criterion validity, sensitivity, and specificity. The purpose of this review was to provide a supplement to the SBOE’s approved list of screeners to aid LEAs in making an informed choice as to the most appropriate screener for the students they serve. Overall, our findings indicate that for K–3, most of the screeners assess all relevant early literacy domains as specified by GaDOE with acceptable levels of reliability and criterion validity where reported. The available evidence supporting each screener, along with the absence of psychometric evidence for some tools, allows us to discern which tools are supported by the strongest evidence of reliability and validity when identifying students at risk for reading difficulties. Given the information available, the eight tools with the strongest psychometric properties on the SBOE list of approved screeners are *aimswebPlus*, *Amira*, *Classworks Reading Universal Screener*, *Exact Path Diagnostic Assessment*, *i-Ready Assessment for Reading*, *ISIP Reading with RAN and ORF*, *Predictive Assessment of Reading*, and *Star Assessments*. Five tools, *Acadience Reading K–6*,

*FastBridge aReading*, *iSTEEP*, *MAP Reading Fluency*, and *mCLASS* were ranked as having moderate psychometric strength. In contrast, three tools cluster as having weaker psychometric profiles. These include *EasyCBM*, *Battelle Early Academic Survey*, and *MindPlay Universal Screener*. In consideration of these global groupings, a few issues should be taken into account. These are discussed in detail below.

Given that sensitivity and specificity should be interpreted together when determining the overall usefulness of a diagnostic test (Shreffler & Huecker, 2023), we identified the strongest screeners as those that demonstrate both acceptable sensitivity and specificity with an emphasis on sensitivity. Sensitivity is prioritized because it ensures accurate identification of children who need access to early reading interventions. Six screeners in our review demonstrated weak sensitivity. Tools with low sensitivity will fail to identify a higher percentage of children that are in need of additional instructional support. For the purposes of our review, we reported the average sensitivity of the tool across all grades assessed. The consequence is that the average can mask variability in sensitivity at different grade levels. While a screener might have strong sensitivity at specific grades, the weak sensitivity of a tool at any grade level should be considered a key factor in decision-making when selecting screeners.

One of the primary challenges of evaluating these screeners is inconsistency in available information. This inconsistency is found in both lack of information and discrepancies in reporting. Two screeners (*iSTEEP* and *MindPlay Universal Screener*) for example, did not provide grade-specific metrics of reliability and validity. Relatedly, two screeners (*Battelle Early Academic Survey* and *MindPlay Universal Screener*) did not provide evidence of sensitivity or specificity. There is an inherent problem with comparing tools lacking information to those that provided information that is less than compelling. Similarly, some inconsistency was noted with regard to NCII reporting on the grade levels the test was developed for versus what grades the publisher indicated the tool could be used. In both cases, it is important to consider that some publishers of tools are less rigorous in the evaluation of their screeners. For the purpose of this review, tools that presented thorough and consistent data were viewed more favorably than those that did not.

Another consideration is the matter of tools having variable performance at different grade levels. Nine out of the sixteen tools do not have convincing evidence for either reliability or validity for kindergarten. While this should be a concern of school districts, it is not surprising for screening tools to perform differently when administered across a multi-year age span. As children develop, their skills change at a rapid pace and certain screener items, or domains are likely to be more or less relevant given a child's developmental level. In literacy development, children in kindergarten present with a highly variable set of skills even within normal expectations. Additionally, kindergarten students undergo rapid acquisition of new skills within the school year. Thus, psychometric strength is more likely to be unstable at the early grades than the upper grades. Our review gave greater weight to tools demonstrating the greatest breadth of strong performance across grades.

The limited nature of this review is important to note, as it was conducted to provide a broad-based synopsis of the psychometric quality of early literacy screeners approved by the SBOE. This review was completed by the authors at the request of the Georgia Council on Literacy to respond to a specific need. Thus, it was conducted as robustly and thoroughly as was feasible within a relatively brief timeline (i.e., about two months). While the review includes ample detail, it was not conducted with the specificity and rigor that would be expected of a full-scale psychometric evaluation. As a result, some nuance and detail were beyond the scope of this project. For example, the review did not conduct an analysis of standardization populations, nor did it

include examination of the full scale of psychometric indices. Relatedly, we utilized two major sources (GaDOE RFI and NCII) to compile this review. Outside these two sources, there were a handful of additional publications used to gather information. Thus, there may be sources regarding these screeners that were not consulted for this review.

Finally, our review was conducted following a review by the GaDOE of a broader set of screeners submitted for consideration of approval. Thus, it is important for LEAs to consider that these tools represent a select set that are likely to be superior to other tools on the market. Thus, our rankings should be considered within this context as **relative only to one another** and not an absolute ranking of overall superiority or weakness.

## Conclusion

This review was conducted to enable LEAs to determine which screeners are best suited for the students they serve. Our review demonstrates that GaDOE has selected a number of tools with acceptable psychometric properties enabling statewide implementation of meaningful screening of K–3 students as required by HB538. With proper utilization of these screeners, schools can accurately and consistently identify students in need of additional support. It is recommended that LEAs consider psychometric strength as delineated herein a critical factor when selecting an early literacy screener.

## Key Takeaways for LEAs

- This review identified eight screeners (see Table 4) from the SBOE’s approved list that present with superior psychometric features relative to the remaining eight screeners.
- This review was completed following a review by the GaDOE of a broader set of screeners submitted for consideration. Our rankings of strong, moderate, or weak should be considered within this context and as relative only to one another and not an absolute ranking of screener acceptability.
- The relative rankings provided for the sixteen screeners included in this review were derived from an examination of all screener characteristics and psychometric features available to us. We ranked screeners based on a weighted combination of factors (e.g., completeness of psychometric testing, robustness across grades, adequate sensitivity).
- This review was conducted to provide a broad-based synopsis of the psychometric quality of early literacy screeners approved by the SBOE and was prepared within a very limited time frame. While this review includes ample detail, it was not conducted with the specificity and rigor that would be expected of a full-scale psychometric evaluation.

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# The Effects of Question-Answer-Relationship (QAR) Instruction on Standardized Reading Comprehension Test Scores of Third-Grade Students

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## ABSTRACT

Despite many school reform initiatives designed to ensure reading proficiency for all students, recent reports from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveal that only 37 percent of fourth-grade students and only 34 percent of eighth-grade students performed at or above the proficiency levels measured in reading (NAEP, 2017). This quantitative study used a non-equivalent control group design to examine the impact of direct instruction of the Question-Answer-Relationship (QAR) strategy on standardized reading test scores of third-grade students. It also specifically examined the impact of direct instruction of the QAR strategy on traditionally underserved students' standardized test scores. A two-way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted. Adjusted marginal mean post-test scores in the group receiving treatment of the QAR strategy (64.580) were higher than the mean post-test scores of students who did not receive QAR instruction (56.382). Adjusted marginal mean post-test scores of students who did not receive QAR instruction (56.382). Adjusted marginal mean post-test scores of historically underserved students showed no significant differences (60.05 and 60.90, respectively). In addition, adjusted marginal mean post-test scores of historically underserved and non-historically underserved students who received QAR instruction showed no significant differences (54.48 and 58.29).

## KEYWORDS

reading comprehension; reading proficiency; metacognition; QAR (Question-Answer-Relationship); historically underserved students; standardized reading tests; high-stakes standardized testing

Despite many school reform initiatives designed to ensure reading proficiency for all students, recent reports from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveal that only 32 percent of fourth grade students and only 31 percent of eighth grade students performed at or above the proficiency levels measured in reading (NAEP, 2022). Poor performance on standardized reading tests can result in negative consequences for students, including limiting student learning, tracking, creating negative self-perceptions, and contributing to increased drop-out rates (National Council of Teachers of English, 2014). Although the negative impacts of standardized testing are felt by all students, the impact is especially severe for historically underserved students and students of low socio-economic status (SES). Differences between the scores of students with different backgrounds, including ethnic, racial, gender, disability, and income, are marked on standardized tests. The National Center for Education

Statistics reported that by the end of fourth grade, African American, Latino, and poor students of all races are two years behind their wealthier, predominantly white peers in reading and math; by eighth grade, they have slipped three years behind, and by the twelfth grade they are four years behind (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Demonstration of reading proficiency on standardized reading tests involves answering questions. Classroom reading instruction, however, does not always provide direct instruction in questioning skills. Raphael and Pearson (1985) contend that direct instruction in strategies for answering specific types of questions can advance comprehension. The Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) taxonomy was developed as a way for students to learn where information may be found to answer comprehension questions (Ezell et al., 1996). QAR is a way for students to understand that the answer to a question is directly related to the type of question asked. QAR categorizes questions according to where the answers can be found. *In the Book* questions will be literal because the answer will be contained in the text. *In my Head* questions will be inferential because the answer will require information that is not contained in the text (Cummins et al., 2012). This method of categorizing questions according to their answer source is intended to support comprehension (Kinninburg & Prew, 2010).

QAR is a valuable, well-known strategy that can be used to transport students to think deeply and analytically about text and prepare them for standardized testing while still focusing on higher-level thinking (Raphael & Au, 2005). Educators work to guide students to become more tactical thinkers by helping them understand their metacognitive processes. In the QAR framework, students analyze the question-answer relationship while becoming more aware of their metacognitive strategies as a step toward better reading comprehension (Raphael & Pearson, 1985). Research has shown that by grade three, children scoring significantly below the norm on achievement tests will continue to experience failure throughout their academic years (Ezell et al., 1996). Today, standardized testing in literacy education is common. For test-takers, the ability to locate and recall information in the text is crucial for success on standardized tests. The primary deficiency of students' responses on high-stakes tests is the failure to support answers (Gunning, 2006). Students need to know how to return to a passage to locate details, verify information, and find text evidence to support their answers. Lower-level questioning involves students locating information directly stated in the passage. Higher-level questioning involves students drawing inferences and making conclusions from information in the passage. QAR can be adapted to test-taking in assisting students in locating sources of information and differentiating questions based upon question-answer classification (Gunning, 2006). Students can learn which questions are textually explicit and know they can go to the passage and find the information they need. Students can learn which questions are textually implicit and know they must make inferences based on information contained in the passage.

Research shows that one of the most effective ways to improve students' achievement and to reduce the literacy achievement gap is to promote metacognition and higher-level thinking skills; however, historically underserved students and students of low SES are more likely to be instructed in basic skills rather than higher-level thinking processes (Gunning, 2006). QAR can serve as a vehicle to teach higher-level thinking skills while preparing students for high-stakes tests without sacrificing high-quality instruction (Raphael & Au, 2005). Studies have shown that direct instruction in metacognitive strategies, like QAR, assists students in reaching high levels of literacy. In this era of high-stakes standardized testing, it is imperative that teachers not only focus on skills to promote a high level of literacy development but also provide support for minority students as they navigate standardized assessments. QAR instruction, when used effectively in the

context of high-quality literacy instruction, can increase metacognition and provide students with a high-level strategy to increase reading comprehension and reading proficiency. QAR instruction may also serve as a strategy to increase scores on standardized reading tests, which would promote increased educational opportunities for all.

### Purpose and Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of direct instruction of the Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy on standardized reading test scores of third-grade students. Findings were intended to provide analysis of standardized test scores and the impact of QAR as an intervention that will serve not only to increase standardized test scores but also increase educational opportunities for all students, including historically underserved students, whose educational opportunities have been greatly limited by poor performance on standardized tests. The following questions guided this study:

*Research Question 1:* Do students who received QAR instruction do better on standardized reading assessments than students who do not receive QAR instruction?

*Research Question 2:* Is the impact of the QAR treatment the same for historically underserved and non-historically underserved students?

Prior research has focused primarily on QAR as a strategy to improve reading comprehension. There is little research directly linking QAR to improved standardized test scores (Cummins et al., 2012; Kinniburg & Baxter, 2012; Raphael & Pearson, 1985). This study examined QAR as a strategy to improve standardized test scores, which is critical in this era of high-stakes testing. Furthermore, there is no research focusing specifically on the effect of QAR on standardized test scores of historically underserved students or students of low socio-economic status (SES).

This study used two theoretical frameworks to examine the impact of QAR as an intervention to increase standardized test scores and, in turn, educational opportunities. Piaget's Cognitive Constructivism provides a strong framework for QAR instruction as an intervention to increase student knowledge and comprehension skills. Constructivism is a theory of learning anchored in the belief that students learn by actively constructing their own knowledge. It is an active process where learners construct meaning through a process of involvement and interaction with their environment. Cognitive constructivism focuses on the importance of the mind in learning and the development of cognitive structures in learners (Scholnik et al., 2006). Piaget's terms accommodation and assimilation are used to describe the interaction between mind and environment in the learning process. Learners use their cognitive structures to interpret the environment and assimilate new information into their existing cognitive schemas. Assimilation is limited to the extent of the existing schemas until cognitive structures modify based on new knowledge. Learning is continuous, and cognitive structures are always in process as the mind interacts with the environment (Mohapatra et al., 2015).

Michel Foucault's Power as Knowledge Theory provides a powerful lens through which to examine the effects of QAR as a strategy not only to improve the standardized test scores of third-grade students but also as a method of empowering all students through increased educational opportunities. Michael Foucault, a postmodern theorist, explored the ways in which political power was subtly invested in the mechanisms of knowledge in the modern world (Lemert, 2016). For

Foucault, power and knowledge were not seen as separate entities but as irrevocably connected. Knowledge is always an exercise of power, and power is always a function of knowledge.

Foucault believed power was everywhere, dispersed throughout society, and able to shape individuals within society. He believed that power and knowledge were constructed by truths created within societies and that these truths became a standard set of rules accepted by societies, providing power to those who had the status to create these truths. Foucault believed that these truths were reinforced through societal institutions, like schools, but believed that these truths were not static but rather marked by a constant battle where individuals pushed the boundaries of power (Lemert, 2016).

Although he believed that the relationship between power and knowledge was constraining and often limited behaviors, he also recognized the potential it also held to open new ways of thinking and behaving. Foucault recognized the potential for power to be a productive force in society, believing that power produces a reality that shapes individuals within societies through the attainment of knowledge (Lemert, 2016). Foucault viewed power as a fully socialized phenomenon and contended that power and the norms it creates are so embedded within our society that they tend to be unthinkingly followed by individuals who fail to fully realize the control it has over their daily actions (Lemert, 2016). He focused not only on the power of institutions and their ability to discipline but also on how these norms often create advantages for some while placing many at a great disadvantage.

### Relevant Literature

Metacognition can be defined as the process of monitoring or regulating cognition or “thinking about thinking” (Wilson & Smetana, 2009, p. 20). It refers to the awareness of the cognitive process involved in thinking. Metacognition in reading is multifaceted. It involves constructing meaning from text, recognizing when comprehension fails, and choosing appropriate strategies to increase comprehension. Metacognition includes the readers’ knowledge of the reading process as well as command of the strategies related to reading (Raphael, 1982).

Research studies have been conducted to explore the relationship between metacognition and reading proficiency. Early studies concluded that younger students and emergent readers had metacognitive deficits in reading (Myers & Paris, 1978). Subsequent studies explored the effects of classroom interventions that provided explicit instruction in reading strategies and reading strategy use to improve metacognition and reading comprehension. Students who received metacognitive training showed an increased awareness of effective reading strategies and improved performance on reading tasks (Cross & Paris, 1988).

Reading is a metacognitive process. Within text comprehension, readers must not only derive meaning from text content but also integrate new knowledge with background information from the readers’ prior knowledge (Soodla et al., 2016) to engage in higher levels of thinking and understanding. The use of reading strategies plays an important role in reading and reading comprehension. Proficient readers can use a variety of strategies and can apply appropriate reading strategies in various contexts. Strong metacognitive knowledge allows readers to be successful on reading comprehension tasks because students engage in strategic reading. They know how and when to use good reading strategies that are most effective for the task (Soodla et al., 2016).

The QAR taxonomy, first described by Pearson and Johnson (1978) and further developed by Raphael and Pearson (1985), is a metacognitive strategy used to improve reading comprehension by identifying questions according to their relationship to two primary sources of information: the reading material and the reader’s background knowledge. It requires students to

think about the relationship between the text and the questions. Using the QAR strategy, students can understand the question type, which correlates with knowing how to find the information to answer the question.

Raphael (1986) categorized QAR questions according to where the answers can be found. *In the Book* questions are literal because the answer is contained in the text. *In My Head* questions are inferential because the answer requires information not contained in the text. There are four types of question–answer relationships:

- *Right There*: The answer can be found in one place in the text.
- *Think and Search*: The answer can be found in a few places in the text.
- *Author and You*: The answer cannot be found in the text. The reader must use information in the text and find the answer in their head.
- *On My Own*: The answer cannot be found in the text. The answer is developed from the reader’s background knowledge. (Raphael, 1986)

In the QAR framework, students analyze the question-answer relationship while becoming more aware of their metacognitive strategies as a step toward better reading comprehension (Raphael & Pearson, 1985). Research supports the use of QAR in elementary school classrooms to increase the answering abilities and the reading comprehension skills of students (Ezell, 1992; Ezell et al., 1996; Raphael & Au, 2005). The level of awareness that comes with the classification of questions leads to success in answering reading comprehension questions.

While many studies explored QAR as a strategy to increase students’ reading comprehension skills, there are few that focus on QAR as a strategy to improve performance on standardized reading tests. Standardized tests require students to answer questions that are both textually explicit and textually implicit in nature, which require students to perform both lower-level and higher-level thinking about text (Wang, 2006). Researchers are just beginning to examine QAR as a framework for comprehension instruction that would not only raise students’ reading comprehension skills but also improve students’ performance on standardized reading tests. In this era of high-stakes standardized testing, it is imperative that teachers not only focus on skills to promote a high level of literacy development but also provide support for all students as they navigate standardized assessments.

## Methodology

A non-equivalent control group design was used for this study. Established third-grade classrooms were assigned to treatment or control groups. Students in both groups were pre-tested with a standardized reading test. Students in the treatment classrooms received six weeks of direct instruction in QAR. At the end of the six-week period, students in both groups were post-tested with a comparable standardized reading test. The research questions guiding this study were:

*Research Question 1*: Do students who received QAR instruction do better on standardized reading assessments than students who did not receive QAR instruction?

*Research Question 2*: Is the impact of the treatment the same for historically underserved and non-historically underserved students?

The population of this study was comprised of third-grade students and teachers from eight third-grade classrooms in two elementary schools in a rural community in the south. The choice

of schools in this study was purposeful. The two schools share similar student achievement levels and demographics. Third-grade classrooms were chosen specifically for this study since third grade is the first year of standardized testing in the state. The first elementary school that participated in this study had a school population of 590 students, with an average of 19 students in each third-grade classroom. Overall achievement indicators showed that 68% of students had achieved proficiency on recent past standardized state reading assessments. Ethnicity data for School One reported that the school was comprised of approximately 76% white students and 24% historically underserved students (UCPS Enrollment and Ethnicity Data, 2018).

The second elementary school that participated in this study had a school population of 604 students, with an average of 17 students in each third-grade classroom. Overall achievement indicators showed that 70% of students had achieved proficiency on recent past standardized state reading assessments. Ethnicity data for School Two reported that the school is comprised of approximately 74% white students and 26% historically underserved students (UCPS Enrollment and Ethnicity Data, 2018).

Four third-grade classrooms from each school participated in this study. All four third-grade classrooms at School One were assigned as treatment classrooms, and all four third-grade classrooms at School Two were assigned as control classrooms. Teachers in treatment classrooms participated in professional development on the use of QAR in the classroom and adhered to a six-week QAR instructional plan created by the researcher. Teachers completed daily rubrics during the six-week instructional period to self-report on their QAR classroom instructional practices. Teachers in treatment classrooms met with the researcher for two hours prior to the beginning of each of the four phases of the six-week intervention period for professional development, which included directives, clarification, and support. Teachers in treatment and control classrooms were not permitted to use QAR as an instructional strategy prior to this intervention. Teachers in control classrooms had agreed not to use QAR during this instructional intervention period.

### Data Collection and Analysis

A non-equivalent control group design was used for this study, and instrumentation included pre- and post-assessments published by Triumph Learning, which included full-length assessments that mirror the format, question type, and rigor of the State End-of-Grade Standardized Reading Assessment. These provided students with grade-level appropriate text to answer standardized reading comprehension questions that require application of both lower and higher-order thinking skills. Test developers used the Common Core State Standards to determine text complexity when selecting reading passages and employed quantitative measures and guidelines for making qualitative decisions about passages and questions included in each standardized reading assessment (Triumph Learning, 2015). Both pre- and post-assessments contained six reading selections, which included fiction, non-fiction, folktale, and poetry passages with corresponding multiple-choice questions for each passage. The forty-four multiple choice questions included questions from three of the QAR question types: *Right There*, *Think and Search*, and *Author and You*. The final QAR question type, *On My Own*, is not included in pre- or post-assessments since the answer would be developed solely from the reader's background knowledge and is not included on standardized reading assessments. The pre-assessment contained 44 multiple-choice questions: 19 were text-based (*Right There* or *Think and Search*), and 25 were inferential (*Author and You*). The post-assessment contained 44 multiple-choice questions: 19 were text-based (*Right There* or *Think and Search*), and 25 were inferential (*Author and You*).

Principals at the two participating schools were provided with copies of both pre- and post-assessments prior to the implementation of this study. Classroom teachers were provided with these pre- and post-assessments immediately prior to both assessments being administered in treatment and control classrooms. The pre-test assessments were administered by all eight third-grade classroom teachers the week prior to the six-week instructional intervention period. The post-test assessments were administered by all eight third-grade classroom teachers the week after the six-week instructional intervention period. Students in all classrooms had to complete pre and post-assessments in one testing session, and no students, including Exceptional Children (EC) or English-Language Learners (ELL), were excluded. Pre- and post-tests were scored by the researcher. Students received credit for correct answers on both assessments, and scores were calculated. Quantitative data analysis involving descriptive and inferential statistics was used to examine student scores and draw comparisons between groups.

Research has shown that QAR is a strategy that can be successfully implemented within existing instructional reading frameworks when teachers are provided with adequate professional development in QAR. Teachers in treatment classrooms participated in a two-hour professional development session prior to pre-test measures. During this professional development session, teachers were introduced to the QAR strategy, and each question type was explained and discussed. Teachers made materials to be used in their classrooms during the six-week instructional intervention phase, which included anchor charts and question cards to be categorized according to the QAR taxonomy as part of daily QAR classroom instruction. In addition, teachers were provided with a detailed four-phase plan and materials that they used to guide instruction during the six-week instructional intervention period and a copy of *Two for One: Using QAR to Increase Reading Comprehension and Improve Test Scores* (Green, 2016), which provided further clarification of each phase. Each phase (Table 1) of instruction took place within current classroom reading instructional frameworks and included a minimum of six days of instruction in the use of QAR. The four teachers in the treatment classrooms met at the beginning of each phase of the six-week instructional intervention period to discuss QAR classroom instructional strategies for each phase. Teachers were also provided with guidance and support from the researcher during these meetings to ensure classroom instruction would align with the instructional plan and at the end of each day of the six-week instructional classroom intervention of, QAR teachers completed a daily rubric where they self-reported on QAR classroom instruction. Teachers in treatment classrooms scored themselves on teaching behaviors for each phase of the instructional intervention.

**Table 1: Phases Within the Six-Week Instructional Period**

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Introduce and Model QAR	Model QAR with Subcategories	QAR with Just Right Text	QAR with Sample Test Questions
Teachers introduced the concept of QAR, explaining that answers to reading comprehension questions can be found in two places: in the text and in the reader's mind.	Teachers began instruction in all four categories of QAR; explaining the two categories of <i>In the Book: Right There</i> and <i>Think and Search</i> and the two categories of <i>In my Head: Author and You</i> and <i>On My Own</i> .	Teachers modeled, using a shared text, how to complete the QAR graphic organizer provided by the researcher.	Teachers modeled how to classify and answer standardized reading comprehension questions.

Teachers used the QAR anchor chart provided by the researcher to introduce only the two main categories of QAR: <i>In the Book</i> and <i>In my Head</i> .	Teachers used a shared text and periodically stopped and asked questions to model classifying questions according to QAR and QAR vocabulary.	Teachers had students complete the QAR graphic organizer with questions created around a reading passage provided by the researcher.	Teachers provided students with a reading selection and students classified (labeled) and answered questions using the QAR strategy.
Teachers used a shared text and periodically stopped and asked questions to model classifying questions according to QAR and QAR vocabulary.	Teachers encouraged students to use QAR vocabulary to classify and develop questions on their own for all four categories.	Teachers monitored student responses and provided clarification for students who had difficulty correctly using the QAR strategy.	Teachers monitored student classifications and answers and provided clarification for students who had difficulty using the QAR strategy to answer standardized reading comprehension questions.
Teachers encouraged students to use QAR vocabulary to classify and develop both categories of questions on their own.			

Quantitative data analysis involving descriptive and inferential statistics was used to examine student scores and draw comparisons between groups. To answer both research questions, a two-way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was performed. Treatment or control status served as one independent variable, and historically underserved or non-historically underserved status served as the second independent variable. The pre-test served as the covariate.

This study used a quasi-experimental control design to examine the impact of QAR on standardized reading test scores of third-grade students. It is important to delimit the boundaries of this investigation to interpret the results and potential future impacts most accurately. The use of a quasi-experimental design limits the generalizability of the findings. Participants included students from schools in the same cluster within a rural county in the southeast. The choice of schools and classrooms was purposeful and sought to strengthen the validity of this study since the two schools share similar student demographics and include a similar number of historically underserved students. However, schools and classrooms were also chosen for convenience. The researcher was employed as a third-grade teacher in the treatment school and served as both a researcher and a participant, implementing the six-week instructional intervention in her own third-grade classroom.

Since the researcher in this study was also a participant, the dual role of the researcher must be addressed. As a teacher in one of the treatment classrooms, the researcher provided QAR instruction to her students. One can assume that although the researcher did not use QAR as an instructional strategy prior to the six-week instructional intervention period, her knowledge of the strategy was extensive. While the use of a shared scripted instructional plan and a teaching rubric for self-reporting classroom instruction served to mitigate the inconsistencies resulting from the researchers' knowledge of the strategy, it is important to note this as a limitation of this study. This study also specifically examined the impact of direct instruction of the QAR strategy on historically underserved students. The findings of this study and implications for historically underserved students may not be generalizable since there was a small sample of historically underserved students included as participants in this study.

## Results

One hundred thirty-one students participated in this study between School One and School Two. Descriptive Statistics are included in Table 2.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Standardized Reading Assessment Scores of Historically Underserved and Non-Historically Underserved Students in Control and Treatment Groups**

	Pre-Standardized Reading Assessment				Post-Standardized Reading Assessment			
	No QAR		QAR		No QAR		QAR	
	Min	N-Min	Min	N-Min	Min	N-Min	Min	N-Min
<b>M</b>	52.85	61.53	53.14	61.78	49.70	60.37	61.09	65.80
<b>SD</b>	18.63	18.21	18.73	20.68	20.32	17.90	19.78	18.98
<b>N</b>	20	38	22	51	20	38	22	51

*Note.* Min = Historically underserved; N-Min = Non-Historically underserved

Measures were taken to ensure fidelity of implementation. It was established that prior to the study, QAR was not being used as an instructional strategy in any of the eight third-grade classrooms participating in this study. The teachers at School One, who were responsible for providing QAR instruction in their classrooms, participated in professional development prior to providing direct instruction of QAR in the classrooms.

All four teachers in the treatment classrooms followed a scripted plan for QAR instruction and used identical materials with their students. Teachers in treatment classrooms were also required to complete a daily teaching rubric to self-report on QAR classroom instruction. All four teachers reported high levels of alignment between the instructional plan and classroom implementation of QAR classroom instruction. Results of the Self-Reporting Teaching Rubric are outlined in Table 3. The numbers in each Likert Scale category show how many teachers self-reported the frequency in which they engaged in the tasks listed on the rubric in each classroom for each teaching segment.

**Table 3: Teaching Rubric Scores: Self-Reporting on Classroom Instruction for Treatment Classrooms for Each Teaching Segment**

	Never	Rarely	A Few Times	Frequently	Often
<b>Room 1</b>	0	0	2	3	194
<b>Room 2</b>	1	0	0	0	198
<b>Room 3</b>	4	0	3	6	186
<b>Room 4</b>	2	0	0	0	197

*Note.* Total number of teaching segments = 199

There was not a statistically significant two-way interaction between condition and ethnicity on post-test standardized reading comprehension scores while controlling for pre-test standardized reading comprehension scores,  $F(1,126) = 1.97, p = .163$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .015$ . According to Cohen (1988), this indicates a small effect size. Therefore, an analysis of the main effects for condition (no QAR and QAR) and ethnicity (historically underserved and non-historically underserved) was performed.

There was a statistically significant main effect for condition  $F(1,126) = 15.007, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .106$ . Adjusted marginal mean post-test scores in the group receiving treatment of the QAR strategy (64.58) were higher than the mean post-test scores of students who did not receive QAR instruction (56.38). According to Cohen (1988), this indicates a medium effect size. There was not a statistically significant effect for ethnicity,  $F(1,126) = .153, p = .697$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .001$ . According to Cohen (1988), this indicates a small effect size. Adjusted marginal mean post-test scores of historically underserved and non-historically underserved students showed no significant differences (60.05 and 60.90), respectively. In addition, adjusted marginal mean post-test scores of historically underserved and non-historically underserved students who received QAR instruction showed no significant differences (54.48 and 58.29), respectively.

## Discussion

This quantitative study examined the impact of direct instruction of the QAR strategy on standardized reading test scores of third-grade students. It also specifically examined the impact of direct instruction of the QAR strategy on historically underserved students' standardized test scores. The results will be discussed around the research questions and hypotheses guiding this study:

*Research Question 1:* Do students who received QAR instruction do better on standardized reading assessments than students who did not receive QAR instruction?

In seeking to answer research question one, the results of this study show a significant difference in students' mean scores on the post-test between third-grade students who received six weeks of QAR instruction and those who did not. Students who were in treatment classrooms had significantly higher mean scores (64.58) on the post-test compared to students in the control group (56.38). These results support the use of QAR to improve standardized reading test scores of third-grade students. Providing students with instruction in the metacognitive skill of classifying questions according to the location of the answer (text-based or inferential) assisted students in navigating standardized-type reading questions and increased student performance on a standardized reading comprehension test.

*Research Question 2:* Is the impact of the treatment the same for historically underserved and non-historically underserved students?

In seeking to answer research question two, the results of this study do not show a significant difference in students' mean scores on the post-test between historically underserved and non-historically underserved students. While results showed that historically underserved students benefitted from QAR instruction, students' ethnicity did not impact the results of this study. Students benefitted from QAR instruction regardless of their ethnicity status. However, since the findings of this study support the use of QAR to improve standardized test scores of third-grade students, this would include third-grade historically underserved students. QAR can be

viewed as a viable strategy to increase standardized reading comprehension test scores of both historically underserved and non-historically underserved students.

Of utmost importance to the paradigm of best practices in literacy education, this study presented evidence to substantiate the benefits of QAR in improving standardized reading comprehension test scores of third-grade students. Students in the treatment classrooms had substantially higher mean scores on the post-assessment measure after six weeks of direct instruction in the QAR strategy than students in the control classrooms. The results have instructional and theoretical implications for practice.

Instructional implications include support for direct instruction in metacognitive skills to increase students' reading performance and proficiency. In this study, direct instruction in metacognition, involving the awareness of the relationship between reading comprehension questions and the sources of information to answer questions correctly, resulted in increased reading performance on a standardized assessment. Students who received direct instruction in metacognition showed an increase in awareness of effective reading strategies, which resulted in improved performance in reading tasks. As a result of increasing students' metacognitive knowledge, students employed strategic reading behaviors. The findings of this study align with previous studies concluding that direct instruction and use of metacognitive strategies facilitate students' understanding of critical cognitive processes and promote students' reading development.

In addition, instructional implications include support for the use of QAR to increase students' reading comprehension skills. Students in this study who used the QAR strategy were more successful in answering reading comprehension questions than students who did not receive QAR strategy instruction. QAR was easily implemented within established literacy classroom frameworks and a six-week instructional period provided students with the ability to correctly classify and answer text-based and inferential questions within a reading comprehension selection. The findings of this study align with others that have established QAR as a method to increase students' awareness of sources of information to improve reading comprehension question-answering skills and could be easily implemented within established classroom instructional frameworks to enhance students' performance on reading comprehension tests.

This study also highlights the importance of providing instruction in higher-level critical thinking skills. QAR instruction focuses on the relationship between questions and answers and provides students with procedural knowledge to practice both lower-level and higher-level reading and thinking skills. Students were instructed to employ both lower-level and higher-level reading and thinking skills as part of this instructional intervention. QAR requires students to engage in lower levels of thinking by recalling text when answering text-based questions. However, QAR also requires students to employ higher levels of thinking like application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation when categorizing and answering inferential questions. In addition to increasing students' abilities to answer questions, QAR was also used to provide students with an opportunity to generate their own questions. Question generating and discussion around cognitive techniques allowed students to maximize the benefits of QAR as a higher-level metacognitive strategy.

The instructional implications for educators working with historically underserved students are clear. While this study showed no statistically significant interaction effect between the QAR strategy and ethnicity, findings did support the use of QAR to improve standardized test scores of all students in this study. These findings support the use of QAR to increase non-historically underserved and historically underserved students' test scores. There is significant research that shows one of the most effective ways to improve student literacy achievement is through

instruction of metacognition and higher-level thinking skills; however, historically, underserved students are more likely to be instructed in basic skills rather than higher-level thinking processes (Gunning, 2006). QAR can be viewed as a viable strategy to promote higher levels of literacy development for historically underserved students as well as a strategy to increase standardized test scores.

Future research must adhere to a narrower focus where researchers examine different aspects of QAR and the effects on students' development of higher-level literacy skills. Therefore, the next steps should include an examination of QAR in relation to students' age, length of instructional intervention, longevity of skills, and the impact QAR has on different levels of readers. In addition, since standardized testing has become a seemingly permanent fixture in education, future research should examine the impact QAR instruction has on standardized test scores as well as the impact QAR has on historical groups of students. Future research should also explore the length of instruction required for the QAR strategy students to improve reading comprehension and promote higher levels of literacy development.

Throughout the history of education, groups of students have struggled to show proficiency on standardized reading assessments. Differences between the scores of students with different backgrounds, including ethnic, racial, gender, disability, and income, are marked on standardized tests. The consequences associated with low standardized test scores extend far beyond testing, limiting opportunities for higher education and future employment. Future research should also focus on uncovering strategies that would increase the performance of historically underserved groups of students, therefore mitigating the negative consequences associated with poor performance on standardized assessments. In this era of high-stakes standardized testing, it is imperative that researchers not only focus on skills to promote a high level of literacy development but also focus on support for students as they navigate standardized assessments, specifically on skills and strategies that target the learning needs of historically marginalized student groups.

This quantitative study examined the impact of direct instruction of the QAR strategy on standardized reading test scores of third-grade students. It also examined the impact of direct instruction of the QAR strategy on historically underserved students' standardized test scores. The findings support the use of QAR to increase standardized test scores of both historically underserved and non-historically underserved students. The research presented provides educators with an additional strategy to support students' reading comprehension and improve student scores on standardized reading assessments. This is essential since scores on standardized assessments can either open or close doors to educational opportunities that influence future success.

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# Looking for It: Language, Literacy, and History in Place

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## ABSTRACT

Within this article, we explore how teachers, researchers, and community members—including youth—worked in collaborative conversations and place-based projects to explore the languages, stories, and histories of their local Georgia communities. By examining the process of “looking for it,” as one youth researcher puts it, this article explores three inquiry practices Georgia youth use to identify and sustain community language and literacy practices: personal storytelling, walking histories, and breaking bread. These community literacies resulted in youth having a stronger sense of self and community and understanding the relationship between them. Additionally, the practices spurred critical thinking, historical inquiry, and socioemotional learning. Community exploration through community literacies created the foundation for place-based language, literacy, and history research to take root and flourish.

## KEYWORDS

place-based learning; community collaboration; community literacies

I want to see people understand that education is not something that’s boxed in, not something that you can all put in a book. You have to go out there and look for it.

–Naiser, 15

**N**aiser, a self-selected pseudonym, defines education as “not something that’s boxed in” or “you can all put in a book”, rather, at the heart of her advice is moving beyond the traditional four walls of a text, classroom, and school building. This advice comes from two years as a youth co-researcher in the Linguistic Justice Collaboration (LJC); a collaborative whose mission is to identify, design, and sustain the languages, literacy practices, and histories of Georgia’s diverse geographical and cultural communities. This work means putting teachers, researchers, and community members—including youth—into collaborative conversations and place-based projects to explore the languages, stories, and histories of their communities. Within this article, we explore how eight different LJC projects have gone “looking for it”, as Naiser puts it, and what youth have taught us about identifying and sustaining community language and literacy practices in our middle and high school English classrooms.

## Where We’re Rooted

We (Leah and Caitlin) are current and former classroom and community educators, researchers, and active community members within Georgia. We, like the LJC collaborators, are committed to

schooling that centers local communities and remains accountable to community goals above (and sometimes in opposition to) standardized goals for learning. In other words, we view schooling as spaces that prepare youth for college, career, and community. Preparing learners to be active, current citizens in their own communities includes an active exploration of community languages, literacy practices, and understanding the histories that both create, erase, and sustain these communities. These beliefs are summarized in the guiding framework: Georgia languages, Georgia races, Georgia histories, and Georgia places (Figure 1).

*Figure 1: Linguistic Justice Collaborative's Framework*



### *Language and Linguistic Justice*

What is currently the state of Georgia is a snapshot of the language and linguistic diversity across the United States of America, with 10% of residents born outside of the country and 13% of households speaking a language other than English at home (American Immigration Council, 2023). In addition, Georgians who speak English represent a range of linguistic varieties from Geechee Gullah along the Atlantic coastline (Turner, 1969) to Appalachian “mountain talk” in the north (Clark & Hayward, 2013, p. 106) to Black Language throughout the state (Dillard, 1973; Smitherman, 1999; also called Ebonics, African American English, African American Vernacular English, and Black English), particularly in the Atlanta metro area where over 50% of residents identify as Black or part of the African diaspora. Though, this is not to suggest that all Black Georgians speak Black Language nor that all Black Language speakers are Black, particularly given the intersectionalities between race and English language learners (Cooper, 2020). Furthermore, Georgia represents a long history of languages outside of voiced traditions, as well, including one of the first schools for Deaf Education in the country (Gallaudet, 1886).

The classrooms throughout Georgia reflect the language and linguistic diversity in its communities: learners are their language (Anzaldúa, 1981) and bring their full repertoire into learning spaces regardless of how schooling systems do—or often do not—acknowledge, celebrate and sustain these languages and literacy practices (García et al., 2021). Language and linguistic justice (Baker-Bell, 2020; Hudley et al., 2020) collectively refer to creating systems, structures,

and pedagogies that value languages and linguistic varieties outside of voiced Mainstream White English as the dominant language.

Throughout history, what is considered effective communication has been shaped by the languages and literacy practices enacted by cultural groups with power, from the erasure of Indigenous languages within boarding schools to anti-literacy laws and literacy tests to block civic participation for Black Americans to English-only policies (Spolsky, 2022). Each geographic and cultural community develops, adapts, and sustains language and literacy practices that reflect these unique histories and purposes for communicating that are at threat of erasure when they deviate from the myth of a standard English that is associated with proximity to White, middle class, Midwestern ways of speaking (Baker-Bell, 2020; Lippi-Green, 2016; Maracz, 2018). Language and linguistic justice honors each community's languages, language varieties, and literacy practices as ways to sustain individual identities and community identities and prepare learners for more than college and career but for active civic participation in their own communities (Mirra & Garcia, 2017). This is not to suggest learners would not have full access to learning and growing in English and its various varieties, but rather an expansion of how power is understood within communication practices (Cushing, 2021) to identify and abolish racist, ableist, and classist listening practices (Baker-Bell, 2020; Rosa & Flores, 2017). This necessarily demands challenges to the way we conceptualize, study, and teach language and literacy if our goals move past college and career readiness and into sustaining selves and communities (Maracz, 2018).

### *Language and Literacy in Places*

Broadly, place-based education uses local phenomena and students' lived experiences to make education meaningful for learners (Gruenewald, 2008; Smith, 2002). According to Sloan (2013), this approach is "conditioning the mind to inquire about the placement, patterns, and origins of our surroundings [in order for] learners to acquire a deeper understanding of culture and place" (p. 28). Youth are conditioning their own minds to see how the geographic space of their communities came to be a meaning-filled place over time. Furthermore, educators who leverage place-based education facilitate opportunities for learners to inquire about interdisciplinary patterns: the ecological, social, cultural, and historical aspects of society, and connect these meaningful places and their embedded knowledges to themselves (Gruenewald, 2008). Ideally, as students connect their personal experiences to problem-solving in their communities, they are using community-developed languages, literacy practices, and stories to share their ideas and suggest solutions (Smith, 2002). As a result, place-based education has emerged over the past several decades as a transdisciplinary approach to learning that draws from language, literacy, social studies, and science in order to solve problems in youths' communities.

Within our Georgian communities, as youth engage in local place-based work, language is the basis of that communication: how Georgians tell the stories of self and others, and how community members connect to share and develop those stories. This means intentionally working in multiracial, multiethnic, and multilingual teams to ensure the community stories, histories, and problem solving represent the full range of community members' perspectives, experiences, and valued actions. Thus, we draw from place-based learning practices within our work, which can lead to deeper community connections and personal growth through the development of shared language and literacy practices for civic empowerment (Silbernagel et al., 2015). Exploring language and linguistic justice through a place-based lens ensures youth explore and interpret the historical and cultural contexts of their community more thoroughly than a textbook or curricular resource alone could provide (Sedawi et al., 2021). As learners interact with their communities

through hands-on, problem-based exploration, there are more opportunities to connect for youth who previously felt disconnected, better understand their individual identity, and find their place within their community (Donovan, 2016; 2013; Sedawi et al., 2021).

### Unboxing Education: Language and Linguistic Justice in Place Based Education

The Linguistic Justice Collaborative (LJC) is a research-practice partnership where teachers, teacher educators, community members, and youth collaboratively identify, design, and sustain the language and literacy practices. The work of identification and design of community language and literacy practices is through sustained, participatory action research within communities that is led by community educators and/or youth. Within this manuscript, we draw from two participatory research projects to illustrate these findings (Table 1).

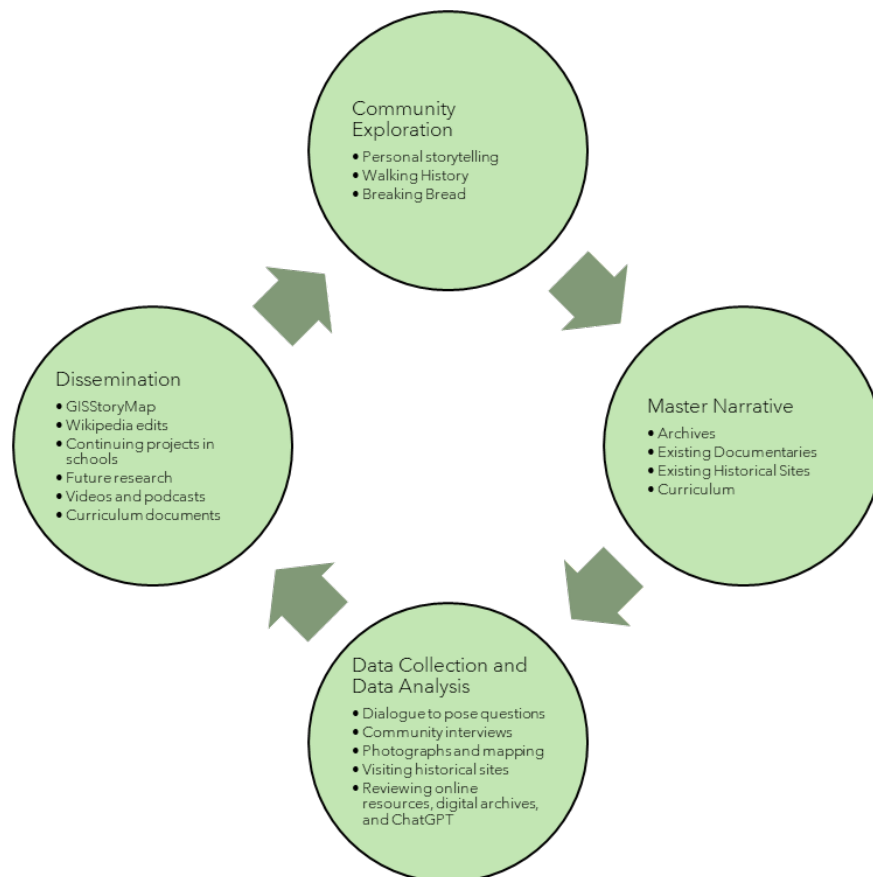
**Table 1: Place-Based Projects**

Project Name	Original Program Advertisement	Additional Context
<b>Storying Tucker:</b> <i>Who is Tucker?</i>	This free summer literacy program is available for youth aged 13-17 in the Tucker area. Tucker became a city in 2016, but it was a community long before that. What is the history of Tucker? Who is Tucker today? And what could the future of Tucker be? A small group of Tucker youth will be co-researchers to record and capture Tucker's stories, voices, and community histories. The end results will be guided by youth co-researchers, but may include creating podcasts, open access digital archives, adding to Tucker's existing GIS Map, drafting a white paper for the Tucker city council, or book.	This project was in its second summer, and in 2023, ten multiracial, multiethnic, and multilingual youth explored the history of Peter's Park, a historic Black community within Tucker, Georgia, the history of school desegregation within the city, and a broader look at the transnational entrepreneurs who make up the economic life of Tucker, Georgia.
<b>In the Shadow of Stone Mountain:</b> <i>Historicizing Shermantown</i>	This free summer literacy program is available for youth aged 12-18 in the Stone Mountain, Tucker, Smoke Rise, Mountain Park, Lilburn, and Clarkston area. Youth will record and capture the stories, voices, and community histories of Shermantown, an African American community within Stone Mountain Village. This will be guided by youth co-researchers, but may include creating podcasts, open access digital archives, a white paper for the Stone Mountain city government, or book.	This project was in its second year, but 2023 was the first year with youth co-researchers. The five youth represented multiracial and multilingual youth who explored Shermantown, Stone Mountain, Stone Mountain Park, and the Atlanta History Center.

Collaborators regularly translate the findings of our place-based research projects into traditional schooling settings to sustain community languages, literacy practices, stories, and histories. Holistically considering the results of LJC projects from the past three years, we (Leah and Caitlin) offer the ways we have translated place-based into curriculum and instruction that sustains individual and community identities within our roles as a literacy teacher educator and community language researcher (Leah) and community-based educator and place-based researcher (Caitlin; see Figure 2). These practices consider how to (a) engage youth in exploring their local communities, (b) analyze the historical and media narratives surrounding their communities, (c)

develop their own inquiry processes, and (d) share their work to support change. Within this article, we narrowly explore three community exploration practices using examples from three of our most recent projects (Table 1) to consider how community becomes the central curriculum within Georgia literacy education.

**Figure 2: Participatory Process for Curricularizing Language and Linguistic Justice in Georgia**



### **Community Exploration**

Curriculum describes what knowledge, what language, and which literacy practices are most valued: it is what is explicitly taught, assessed, and ultimately sustained (Giroux & Penna, 1979). Intentionally placing communities at the center of a curriculum is an intentional move to sustain the language, literacies, and valued knowledges of local communities (Paris, 2021). Youth are not future citizens in training but current community members, capable of posing questions, observing, and interacting with their communities. This asset-based understanding of youth results in co-construction of a community-based curriculum with youth through practices such as personal storytelling, history walks, and opportunities to authentically “break bread” with community members and elders.

**Personal Storytelling.** Through personal storytelling, learners use their experiences from the community to share their existing knowledge, explore areas of curiosity, and understand multiple perspectives, ultimately setting up an environment for youth to tell stories of themselves and their communities. During a program exploring the history of Shermantown, an African

American community within the city of Stone Mountain, youth began by telling stories about their experiences living in Stone Mountain, visiting Stone Mountain Park, and the histories their family members and neighbors had already passed down. Completing a similar project in Tucker, Georgia, the youth walked down the city's main street, stopping in front of each building or greenspace to recall memories of visiting each place, the people who worked there, and the history of the space. The storytelling centered youth languages and language practices as their his collective storytelling sparked additional memories and stories from others where they would take up generational language practices (e.g., Leah learned what it meant to be streets ahead figuratively vs. literally) and translanguaging. Additionally, youth made connections to history, examples of valued languages, patterns of valued literacy practices, and raised questions to guide further inquiry.

Starting with youth storytelling in and through community exploration creates space for youth to understand themselves, the history of their community, and the relationship between the two. For example, after participating in LJC projects across two summers, Nasier reflected, "I think if you're coming into a community, you're bringing something with you, like you're bringing another identity or like another piece to the community with you, making the community bigger and stronger." Each individual identity has something to add to the overall community, and these identities build a stronger community.

These individual identities work together to build unique communities. According to Bud, a self-identified Lakotan, communities "have their own way of operating, by, um, knowing everybody. The people, the places, the language, the religion. Just, like, things that connect them as a community that other communities wouldn't have. Something that like, um, makes them different." These differences both connect and draw in others while also creating points of difference that lead to unique community language and literacy practices.

Considering how personal storytelling leads to connections between individuals and communities, Fantasma describes the importance of racial identities and intersections of language as part of understanding communities and self. He explained, "I feel like race and language plays a big part of it . . . if you share the same ethnicity with your community, I feel like you'll bond easier than the other community that's a different race or this a different ethnicity." As a multilingual Hispanic high school student, he explained how he saw himself in signs written in multiple languages, hearing his youth co-researchers move between Spanish and English in their personal storytelling, and his desire to find Hispanic community members to conduct interviews for his project in Spanish. Shared racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities within the stories of co-researchers and within the community strengthened Fantasma's sense of self and self of membership within the community.

Returning to Bud's explanation of communities having points of "difference" that construct the uniqueness of community, personal storytelling spurred initial community engagement that spurred conversation around points of difference. For Naiser, it was questioning why Black history was a part of her family's memories of the area but not a part of what her White co-researchers were taught around their dinner tables. Or why Bud had visceral memories of what Stone Mountain Park, the world's largest monument to the Confederacy, represented, and others had happy memories of school field trips and family reunions in the same geographic space. These points of difference revealed different valued knowledges that served as the central curriculum for each place-based program. Additionally, the differences in language usage to describe personal memories—what one person describes as a corner store another calls a bodega—and differences in literacy practices enacted in the storytelling—from narrative structures to rhetorical devices.

Recognizing language and linguistic differences in personal storytelling reinforces youth connections to their own racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural communities (Berry et al., 2014) and sustains pluralistic communities by centering youth language, literacy practices, and valued knowledge (Paris & Alim, 2017). By engaging in personal storytelling, youth also found connections between their stories and the stories of the community, further strengthening their relationship within their learning. Youth also had space to explore their personal narratives, building confidence and self-perspective on their role in the community (Berry et al., 2014). Through this exploration, youth found a greater sense of belonging and understanding of their community.

**Walking History.** Within our place-based programs, youth were learning in their communities by being in their communities: walking throughout neighborhoods, traveling to historic locations, and retracing the literal steps described during storytelling. Rather than prefacing these walks with a mini-lecture, PowerPoint, or reading on the history of the locations we were visiting or walking past. Instead, the walk itself became the setting for authentic dialogue and artifact-based historical learning, resisting traditional approaches to history education.

For example, stopping at street signs to pose a question about the meaning of the street's name before offering the story (Figure 1), pausing on a walk to observe changes in buildings' facades to make predictions about eras of economic growth in the area (Figure 2), or responding in the moment to question evoked during a personal storytelling session, such as providing context to who the United Daughters of the Confederacy were when youth did not have personal stories to tell about a location on a walk (Figure 3).

*Figure 3: Using Community Resources, Example 1*



*Note.* Here, a street sign is a curriculum for learning history and historical literacies.

*Figure 4: Using Community Resources, Example 2*



*Note.* Here, architecture is a curriculum for learning economics and financial literacies.

*Figure 5: Using Community Resources, Example 3*



*Note.* Here, a donated monument is a curriculum for learning history and critical literacies.

As youth walked through their communities—and therefore through community histories—they engaged in various language and literacy practices: speaking and listening with community members, photographing their experiences, writing down questions in their research notebooks, and tracing maps using GPS and GIS technologies. These moments

leveraged their existing language and literacy practices to explore historical contexts and connect them to the present-day community. Dr. Squiggles, a rising junior, described herself as “not much of a reader” but took great pleasure in interviewing community members about a range of topics, particularly when she was the one taking notes and relistening to the audio to catch details her youth co-researchers may have missed. Bruce enjoyed taking the lead in asking the questions, and Bando explained, “I silently collected data. I wasn’t asking questions like that. I was listening. I’m like, just, if you just sit and listen to that person instead of asking a lot of questions, it usually helps.” As a team, the youth drew from one another’s existing strengths: speaking, listening, and note-taking to create historical narratives that Lizzie scripted and Fantasma directed: he guided Lizzie and Bud to perform the scripts in the same locations described in the narratives and where initial interviews took place. The youth created YouTube shorts that functioned as a public digital archive of their research, which was collected, analyzed, and disseminated based on history walks: one that sustained the history of the town while expanding access to the stories through multiple languages. Ultimately, through their experiences with history walks, youth leveraged and challenged one another to develop critical literacies through their collective historical inquiry and challenged their language communities to be a part of the historical remembering.

Across programs, the pattern of history walks resulting in community engagement was sustained. Garnett, a rising senior who had recently moved into the community, explained the importance of attaching new memories and experiences to being within the geographic community, “. . . understanding the place that like I’m . . . walking around every day. I’m driving by every day. I’m living in, like, I feel so much better knowing now, like more history behind it and more of the people and the elders.” She especially appreciated Black community members in their 80s being willing to share their experiences with a White teenager:

And I also just like, love that they had somebody like to talk to, like, like they had, like they, all of them said that they like love that like young people are interested and like they have young people to talk to. . . I will sit there and listen to you talk for hours, like, which I just loved it. It just like made, in like a non-selfish way, it just made me like feel really good about myself and knowing that like I got to know more about the community, but me, too. I love it.

Garnett loved listening to community elders at prearranged church gatherings, stopping in the streets, and being called to join them on their porches as we walked through the neighborhood. As a result of these history walks, which turned into extended conversations, Garnett knew more about the community, “but me, too.”

As learners engaged in history walks, they combined experiences of historical sites, neighborhoods, and community members’ perspectives to explore the history and present day of a place captured in photographs, audio recordings, and videos that facilitated continued exploration and meaning-making of these experiences. Through these artifacts, students created a story of their place, which in turn made youth more likely to identify as members of their community while still bringing their full racial and linguistic identities into the space (Donovan, 2016). Place-based learning allows youth to engage in self-reflection and discovery while encouraging a reciprocal relationship with the community (Janson et al., 2013). Learning becomes transformational instead of transactional, and as youth reflect on their role within the community, they see how essential they are to sustaining the culture and history of their place (Pisters et al., 2023). Walking history was one such practice that created

literal and figurative space for these transformational moments for youth to find and intentionally place themselves in the community.

**Breaking Bread.** Youth co-researchers routinely described and defined community as more than a geographic area or a shared cultural history, but as a changing and dynamic place where people are “known,” “work together,” “help one another,” and—above all—action-oriented. Dr. Squiggles described the action as “choosing to be a part of it.” Naiser added, “to learn about it” and “be involved in something bigger. . . [being] willing to build a community.” In sum, that community is the active choice to build and sustain a place. Part of our place-based program prioritized spending time in the community with community members but also actively building and engaging with the community. For example, eating meals at locally owned restaurants when meeting with community members, economically supporting local businesses where interviews took place, and asking community members what they wanted to see the youth create or do as a result of their research. Literally and figuratively, community engaged research was centered on opportunities for “breaking bread.”

Breaking bread designs opportunity to talk and interact with community members and elders where the elders feel most comfortable in the community to break down potential barriers and build up meaningful relationships with community spaces. As youth participated in these experiences, they saw where they lived differently. Garnett shared how talking with elders left her wanting to learn more, sharing, “Give me all the conversations. The elder wisdom. I’ll take it all” referring to a porch conversation with a community elder that was in stark contrast to her usual experiences in history and English classes:

I feel a lot like, in a way, like better about myself now. . . I always knew that there was so much history here, but like so many books and stuff, well, one, I’m not, I am not a huge fan of like reading nonfiction. I’m very bad at reading nonfiction. I love to read, but nonfiction is not my thing. And, but I will sit there and listen to somebody talk for hours. So I did not wanna leave that woman. I loved her.

Through breaking bread as part of community exploration, Garnett developed a personal connection to a community member, and the community’s history was made relevant. Similarly, Naiser explained the identity of the community was “to me is the people, cuz without the people. Then you’re not gonna have the business, you’re not gonna have the libraries, you’re not gonna have all this because they bring it in, right?” Thus, spending time with the people in the places they had created—drinking a smoothie together at a coffee shop or walking on the trail at the neighborhood park—made her understanding of the people, the history, and the place that much deeper.

For both Garnett and Naiser, breaking bread led to more than knowledge; it also developed socioemotional literacies or practices for listening with empathy and communication compassion. Bud similarly found breaking bread with community members was essential to his socioemotional learning, stating when “you know about where you are and what people are there and what makes it a place. . . [that] knowledge of people allows you to be a more compassionate and kind person.” Elisa explained how difficult these moments could be, recalling a luncheon at a local church with a group of elders who had different perceptions of the community’s racialized history, particularly their interactions with the Ku Klux Klan in the 1950s:

On some of the particular interviews where people were just saying stuff that you don’t necessarily think is true or believe in, it’s just kind of like challenging to not like push their buttons by like asking more about it. . . Like she [a community elder]

was just very persistent, straightforward with her answers, and like, you asked her a follow-up question, she would kind of just say the same thing, but in like a stronger tone in a way. And it's like, okay, well like that's not really what I'm asking. Like if you ask her about anything, she's like, it's just the same answer that she's given the press a million times. Which, like, I get, like you do an interview or amount of times, you're going to kind of just, you know, feed the same information. But it's like, Okay. We're asking her in-depth questions. Like we've actually studied, like, it's not just like, oh, like a reporter. Like we've sat here all week and studied the town that you grew up in. We've interviewed multiple people that you grew up with and heard their stories. . . Like just trying not to be like, 'well, I heard different from somebody else' was just kind of difficult cuz it's like I don't wanna argue. At all. And I don't wanna make anybody angry. But it's also like, okay. I just don't think that that's true.

Having heard stories that contradicted the community member's recollection, Elisa struggled to know when to listen and when to ask follow up questions or press a particular point. Garnett contrasted the same community elder with another breaking bread experience, getting an early lunch with the first woman to desegregate a local elementary school. Referring to the former, "And she was like, she clearly had some strong emotions, and she felt like some, you know, some negative things. Anyway, that's what I expected most people to feel like, and I feel like that's very justified," and contrasted the experiences with the latter community elder:

But then when we were meeting with [a different community elder] and how she was able to take away. . . it shaped her and made her stronger. . . that was a really shocking takeaway because, like, I don't know everybody, they just have every right to be angry about the way that they were treated and about the way that they had to like, lead their lives, have every right to be angry and she wasn't. And she, I don't know. I just, I don't know how I make sense of all the different, um, the different react like reactions to the experiences and the takeaways that they had. Because like I seriously don't understand how [the one community elder] was able to like, walk away feeling like. . . her being treated horribly, like made her the person she is today. . . I don't have that kind of inner peace.

Where one community member denied the existence of hard things, and others chose to remain angry—justifiably so, according to Garnett—the ability to share a meal with a community member who forgave the racist actions of her classmates and framed these experiences as formative was difficult to make sense of. It revealed her own struggle to find "inner peace" while giving Garnett a model of mercy that appealed to her.

Finding community through shared language and literacy practices helps learners develop social awareness and empathy as they make connections and communicate with each other within and across their languages (Venegas, 2019). While the benefits of learning together are significant, learning histories with community members helped amplify the development of interpersonal literacies (Bone, 2005). Bringing in these moments for interpersonal and intergenerational connection across a kitchen table or smoothie from the local coffee shop invited cross-cultural conversations and deepened the bonds made in these connections: both to one another, the community, and geographic place (Haddix et al., 2016). The shared geographic places also began to remove cultural barriers and invited warm, inclusive conversations that, in turn, created a sense of belonging (Haddix et al., 2016). Through these inter-generational conversations, youth and

elders create a space to talk about the history and present day realities of societal challenges with kindness and compassion.

### From Community to Curriculum

Engaging youth in placed-based community exploration through personal storytelling, walking histories, and breaking bread resulted in youth having a stronger sense of self, community, and understanding the relationship between them. Additionally, it supported language and literacy practices that spurred critical thinking, historical inquiry, and socioemotional learning. These opportunities are not reserved for community education programs but can be translated into Georgia middle and high school classrooms, as well. At times, this means bringing the community into the traditional classroom due to the constraints of budgets, field trip procedures, and funding (Table 2).

**Table 2: Place Based Practices in the Georgia Curriculum**

Place Based Community Exploration Practices	Connections to Georgia Curriculum
<b>Create Opportunities for Personal Storytelling</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making narrative units multimodal, where learners can integrate video tours, photographs, or self-created maps of where the narrative takes place.</li> <li>• Bellringer or activator activities in class that use local photographs, maps, and landmarks as prompts</li> <li>• Using VoiceThread to make text-to-community connections that learners add to and branch from, creating a multivocality of personal stories related to required curricular texts.</li> </ul>
<b>Participate in Walking History Tours</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use GoogleMaps Street View to “walk through” a street in your city as a class to reinforce how to write directions in a “how to” speech while also making authentic connections to the local community.</li> <li>• Shift to a “living book report” and invite students to video record a conversation with a family member, neighbor, or friend as they walk through a place with significance.</li> </ul>
<b>Breaking Bread and Porch Talks with Community Elders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask students whom they would like to invite to class via Microsoft Teams or Zoom as primary sources while working on a research essay.</li> <li>• Invite local community members to your class publishing party to celebrate the youth writing—and perhaps the community members!</li> </ul>

However, given the potential for community exploration experiences to support language, literacy, and history learning and the success of youth participatory action research projects, we also offer examples of how Georgia educators can take up community exploration in both small and large-scale ways to ensure learners’ languages, literacy practices, and historical inquiries take root and flourish (Table 3).

**Table 3: Engage in Community Exploration**

Action	Ideas	Examples
<b>Create Opportunities for</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create prompts to aid in group discussion before visiting a site or discussing a topic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before a community resource walk in Stone Mountain, we asked everyone in the group: “What are your experiences with Stone Mountain Park?” and “What</li> </ul>

<p><b>Personal Storytelling</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While walking through a community site, stop in front of each building, monument, sign, or street to share stories about personal connections to the place or historical knowledge.</li> <li>• Ensure at least one historical or present-day community member is included on place-based community exploration trips to make sure personal stories and connections to place are included.</li> <li>• Use a physical or digital map to track your route and put “pins” in locations associated with community members’ and youth stories.</li> </ul>	<p>have you heard others share about Stone Mountain?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During a community resource walk in Tucker, we traced our route on a GoogleMaps printout and then added our photographs and audio recordings to a GISStoryMap.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Participate in Walking History Tours</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite community members with historical knowledge to lead walking history tours of specific areas, including local parks, historic neighborhoods, a business district, or meaningful geographic sites.</li> <li>• Record interviews with historical societies or community members to create audio walking tours.</li> <li>• Photograph and video record sites throughout the community to create YouTube Shorts, GISStoryMaps, and other digital tools that recreate place-based learning.</li> <li>• Use QR codes to let other visitors to community places experience the community members’ stories, local histories, and youth created guides.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We audio and video recorded the President of the Tucker Historical Society during a walking tour of Main Street.</li> <li>• Youth recorded personal histories of community members that could be posted next to historical artifacts in a local museum to add additional local context to displays.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Breaking Bread and Porch Talks with Community Elders</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with community organizations, including historical societies, local government, volunteer groups, and places of worship, to identify community leaders and elders.</li> <li>• Seek to join community elders in their preferred spaces, such as attending a meeting or event, having lunch, or sitting on their porch.</li> <li>• Attending community events (e.g., a tent at a festival) and being present in community spaces (e.g., a table at a coffee shop) to invite community members to share their stories with youth.</li> <li>• Bring technology to record stories (e.g., audio and video recorders) and historical artifacts (e.g., scanner app, portable 3D scanner).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth brought pie to community members and sat on their porches to hear the history of the local neighborhood.</li> <li>• Youth joined a group of community elders at a historic community church to talk about how present-day problems in the community were tied to histories.</li> <li>• We created a toll-free phone number that community members could call to record their stories.</li> </ul>

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# Teaching Between the Bans: Exploring Book Banning, Censorship, and Book Access in the Middle Grades

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, we invite middle-level educators to discover how literature can be a gateway to understanding and addressing book bans, censorship, and access to books. We delve into the recent rise in book challenges, particularly against diverse narratives, and trace the historical roots of censorship. Highlighting ten selected texts, we show how they can be practical tools in teaching the critical importance of intellectual freedom. Accompanied by discussion questions and engaging teaching ideas, these books aim to spark critical thought, embrace varied viewpoints, and motivate students to actively discuss censorship issues. This piece is a resource for educators to enrich their approach to complex topics and underscore the vital role of reading in shaping aware, inquisitive, and active citizens in today's increasingly complex world.

## KEYWORDS

banned books; educational censorship; book access; book challenges; middle school literacy; diverse narratives

Books themselves are freedom. Freedom to think, to believe, to dream.

Lucas; *Words on Fire* (Nielsen, 2019, p. 109)

In the first eight months of 2023 alone, the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom recorded an unprecedented spike in attempts to censor library materials, with challenges to 1,915 unique titles (SLJ, 2023). This marks a worrying twenty percent increase from 2022, which sets a record for the most challenges in over two decades. Most targeted were books reflecting the lives and rights of people of color and the LGBTQIA+ community, echoing a historical pattern of marginalizing already underrepresented voices.

As troubling as these statistics are, they are not without precedent. History is rife with censorship, from the destruction of millions of books in the National Library in Sarajevo during the Bosnian War in 1992 (Burgess, 2020) to the banning of classics by Shakespeare (Baldassarro, 2011). We have witnessed the burning of books by profound thinkers in Nazi Germany (Stern, 2022) and the suppression of scientific truth by the Catholic Church (Artigas, 2006). More

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recently, a Georgia teacher, Katie Rinderle, was terminated for reading a picturebook she purchased at the school's Scholastic Book Fair, *My Shadow is Purple* (Stuart, 2022), to her fifth-grade gifted class (Sonnenberg, 2023). These acts of censorship were not simply about removing books from shelves; they were about stifling ideas, silencing dissent, and erasing cultural and intellectual diversity.

The pattern is clear: society's progress stalls when books are banned. Amid a resurgence in banning books across the United States, the role of educators in fostering a culture of open inquiry and protecting intellectual freedom has never been more important. Recent headlines underscore this urgency, with books on topics from diverse historical narratives to those reflecting a range of identities being removed from classroom libraries, school media centers, and public library shelves. This alarming trend erases numerous perspectives of human experience and weakens the foundation of public education within the United States, which thrives on the exchange of ideas and the freedom to explore them. Historically, censorship and book banning have been instruments of oppression, stifling the voices of marginalized communities and reinforcing the barriers to access. As advocates of literacy and students' rights, we firmly believe that every student has the inherent right to read, explore, and think critically about diverse perspectives.

### ***Books About Banned Books . . . and Censorship and Book Access***

In an educational environment that is constantly evolving and facing new challenges, teachers find themselves at a crucial intersection, balancing the responsibility to address complex issues while managing varied external pressures. The question arises: What path should we take? We propose the answer lies in turning to literature itself to provide a solid foundation. By integrating stories that reflect on book banning, censorship, and book access, educators equip students with the tools to understand and question these issues. This approach allows students to connect with the core values of freedom and access, showcasing the real-life and historical impact of these principles.

In this article, we present ten books, including five picturebooks and five novels, which serve as both mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1990) into the complex world of censorship, book banning, and access to books. We specifically included picturebooks within our list of recommended texts, acknowledging their growing recognition in middle-grade classrooms for engaging adolescent students. These books are visually appealing and rich in mature themes, complex content, and multi-layered meanings. With their intricate illustrations and challenging texts, picturebooks cover controversial topics and support reading comprehension skills. This combination makes picturebooks valuable educational tools for middle school students, facilitating a more profound understanding and engagement with the material (Bintz & Ciercierski-Madara, 2022; Costello & Kolodziej, 2006).

Along with the carefully selected texts, we have included suggested discussion questions, teaching ideas, and activities with the goal of informing and inspiring students to become thoughtful, questioning, and engaged citizens. Our proposed texts range from historical contexts that gave rise to censorship to examining its present-day actualities. We explore how books about banned books, censorship, and book access can be powerful tools in the classroom. In addition, we provide a collection of resources (Figure 1) to aid educators in exploring perspectives of censorship, book banning, and access to books and education. By equipping our students with the ability to analyze the world around them, we are defending their right to read and empowering them to shape the future of their own intellectual freedoms.

**Figure 1: Summaries, Discussion Questions, Teaching Ideas, and Activities with Texts Featuring Censorship, Book Banning, and Access to Books and Education**

**Ashes** (2010) by Kathryn Lasky

Historical fiction, novel, 320 pp., ISBN 9780142411124

*I'll say whatever I want. I'm not a book. You can't burn me!* (p. 304)



Thirteen-year-old Gaby (Gabriella) lives the typical life of any thirteen-year-old girl in Berlin in 1932. She goes to the theater with her best friend and enjoys her favorite pastime of reading...even during the occasional class. She comes from a loving, educated family and great friends, including Albert Einstein. But slowly, that all starts to change as the political climate begins to change. Author Kathryn Lasky writes a gripping novel about a young girl living in the days when Hitler began to come into power. This historical fiction novel highlights how quickly censorship can take over and what is really at stake when that happens. Gaby watches how censorship affects her classmates, family, and close friends. Then she watches, in horror, how censorship affects her beloved books that she has come to cherish. In *Ashes*, the reader takes a historical journey while learning about the dangers of censorship.

**Discussion**

- Considering Gaby's experience, how do changes in political power, like the rise of Hitler, impact the freedom to access and enjoy literature? What can this tell us about the role of government and politics in shaping what we read?
- Gaby finds solace in books during turmoil. How do you think banning or censoring books would have affected her understanding of the world and her identity? What might be the consequences for young people when their access to diverse stories and perspectives is restricted?

**Teaching Ideas & Activities**

- **Personal Responses to Censorship:** Invite students to create a visual or written response expressing their feelings about censorship, inspired by Gaby's story. They could design posters, write poems, or create short stories that reflect what losing access to books might mean for them. This activity will allow students to connect personally with the impact of book bans and censorship, encouraging them to express their viewpoints creatively and consider the value of free access to literature in their own lives.
- **Compare/Contrast:** Using the [graphic organizer](#), have students compare and contrast the effects of censorship. For example, compare Gaby's classmates' behavior and attitudes at the beginning of the novel to their behavior and attitude at the end of the novel. How did censorship play a part in this? Alternatively, compare Gaby's life at the beginning of the novel to her life at the end of the novel. Again, ask how censorship plays a part in this. Other choices could be Gaby's father, Albert Einstein, and the overall social life of Berlin's citizens.

***The Book is BANNED*** (2023) by Raj Haldar  
 Fantasy, picturebook, 40 pp., ISBN 9781728276564

*Because we banned everything and there's no ending left to read.* (p. 35)



Giraffes! Hippos! And unicorns!?! These are some of the things that get BANNED in this silly and engaging book about book banning. Author Raj Haldar uses ordinary examples to demonstrate to his young readers how banning the simplest things can lead to eliminating everything. It all starts when the Hippos want to ban the giraffes because they are tall and get all the leaves off the trees. No more giraffes! But wait! What happens when someone thinks the hippos complain too much?? They get banned, too! No more giraffes and no more hippos! Thus begins this tale of banning things because of differences and dislikes...until there is nothing left to read and no ending to the story..

### Discussion

- In this story, various items are censored, leading to a series of bans. How does this reflect the potential consequences of censorship in real-world scenarios? What might be the broader impact on society if diverse ideas and topics are routinely banned?
- Considering the book's humorous approach to banning subjects like dinosaurs and avocados, what message does it convey about the reasons behind censorship? How can this perspective help us understand the importance of having access to a variety of books and ideas?

### Teaching Ideas & Activities

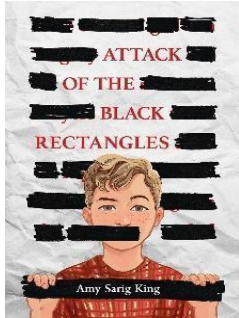
- **Create a Banned Book:** Challenge students to write and illustrate their own short story, picture book, or comic strip on a seemingly innocuous topic, then go through a mock 'banning' process. Discuss the reasons why certain books might be banned and the impact of these decisions, encouraging students to reflect on the importance of diverse perspectives in literature.
- **Banned Book Fair:** Have students create displays or presentations on books that have been historically banned or challenged (in the U.S. and globally). Students can research the reasons behind the ban and its cultural or historical context, then present their findings to the class.

***Attack of the Black Rectangles*** (2022) by Amy Sarig King  
Realistic fiction, novel, 272 pp., ISBN 9781338680522

*The first step is finding out who did it, I Say.*

*Then why they did it, Denis says.*

*Then we fight it, Marci says. (p. 72)*



His dad believes he is an alien, his mother is a hospice nurse, and his grandfather is a truth-teller, so what does that make Mac? Being encouraged to have integrity, sixth grader Mac Delaney, in a town that's 97% white from Pennsylvania, stumbles onto a book from the library. Not long into his reading, Mac finds out that someone is marking out words and phrases in the book he is reading. Who is the culprit? Did someone make a mistake in the book? When Mac goes to his teacher, Ms. Sett, for answers, he learns that she agrees with the censorship. With the support of friends Denis and Marci, Mac challenges the status quo and finds out they have gotten more than they bargained for. This book aligns with the politics happening in modern times. It opens the door to having those hard discussions of acceptance, friendship, growing pains, and the importance of letting people decide for themselves what is true. However, you have to know all the facts, right?

### Discussion

- Considering Mac's reaction to the blacked-out sections in *The Devil's Arithmetic* (Yolen, 1988), how does censorship in literature impact a reader's understanding of history, susceptible topics like the Holocaust?
- Mac's decision to challenge the censorship at his school raises important questions about student activism. What role should students play in addressing censorship issues in their schools or communities?

### Teaching Ideas & Activities

- **Create a Speech Suppression Poster:** Working in small groups or independently, have students design posters that illustrate the causes and effects of speech suppression. This project allows them to visually express how restricting speech can impact individuals and society while critically considering the consequences of limiting free expression.
- **Create a Public Service Announcement (PSA):** Have students use Adobe Spark (or similar software) to create a PSA on the importance of reading and the impact of book censorship. This activity encourages students to express their views on why reading is fundamental and to explore the arguments for and against censoring books. Here is a three-minute tutorial: [youtube.com/watch?v=iWrx0SxTaBw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWrx0SxTaBw)

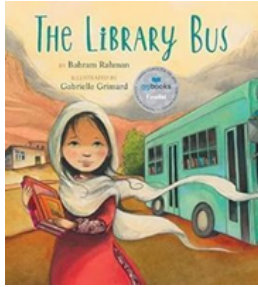
***The Library Bus*** (2020) by Bahram Rahman

Realistic fiction (based on true events), picturebook, 32 pp., ISBN 9781772781014

*There are no schools for girls in the village or the camp.*

*They only have the library bus once a week.*

*But I will help them the same way your grandpa helped me. (p. 30)*



Not being aware of the privileges of learning in a classroom, Pari's mother brings the learning experience to remote mountainous areas and teaches her daughter Pari the value of an education with a mobile classroom. With the library bus, children can escape what they consider the norm of war and rubble and trade it for a short while for an adventure a book will take them. Based on actual events, the author gives homage to Afghani women in his own family and their relentless pursuit of the freedom that literacy can give but is forbidden for the female gender. This book will provoke the thinking of middle school students learning about geography or cultures beyond their own.

### Discussion

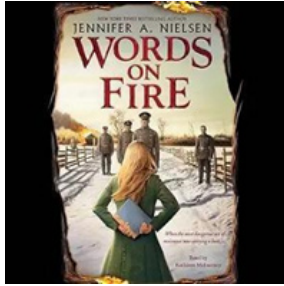
- Reflect on the role of the library bus in providing access to books in Pari's story. How does this mobile library challenge the traditional barriers to education, especially for girls in war-torn areas?
- Considering the restrictions on girls' education in Pari's community, discuss how access to books can empower individuals and change societal norms. What impact could this kind of access have in communities where certain groups are denied educational opportunities?

### Teaching Ideas & Activities

- **Comparative Analysis:** Have students create Venn diagrams to compare learning experiences in a library bus versus a traditional classroom setting and the educational opportunities for boys versus girls in Afghanistan. This activity encourages students to analyze the different educational environments and gender disparities in access to education, enhancing their understanding of global educational challenges.
- **Illustrated Storyboard Project:** Encourage students to create illustrated storyboards that depict key scenes from *The Library Bus*. Focus on how the library bus impacts the community and the differences in educational opportunities for boys and girls in Afghanistan.

**Words on Fire** (2019) by Jennifer A. Nielsen

Historical fiction, novel, 336 pp., ISBN 9781338275780



*How do you destroy a people? You take away their culture.*

*And how is that done?*

*You must take their language, their history, their very identity.*

*How would you do that?*

*I pressed my lips together, then looked up at her.*

*You ban their books. (p. 78)*

*Words on Fire* is a powerful historical fiction novel that resonates profoundly with themes of censorship, the importance of cultural identity, and the courage to defy oppressive regimes. Set in late 1800s Lithuania under Russian rule, the story centers around 12-year-old Audra Zikaris, whose life changes dramatically when she joins the underground network of book smugglers. These brave individuals risked everything to distribute Lithuanian books, which the Russian Empire banned to suppress the Lithuanian language and culture. Audra's journey is one of resilience, bravery, and the transformative power of literature. The book not only highlights the historical impact of book banning but also celebrates the spirit of resistance and the vital role of access to literature in preserving cultural identity. This narrative offers middle school teachers a compelling resource to discuss the consequences of censorship and the enduring value of intellectual freedom with their students.

### Discussion

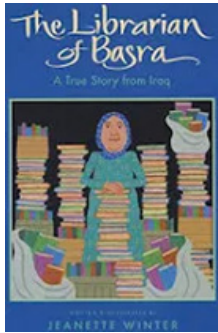
- How did the actions of the book smugglers in *Words on Fire* challenge the idea of censorship? What risks did they face, and why do you think they believed those risks were worth taking?
- In what ways does banning books affect a community or culture, as shown in *Words on Fire*? Discuss how the absence of particular books can shape or limit our understanding of the world.
- If you were in Audra's situation in *Words on Fire*, what would you do and why? Would you risk breaking the law to preserve and share your culture's literature? Discuss the moral and ethical considerations in such a situation.

### Teaching Ideas & Activities

- **Create a Book Smuggler's Diary:** Have students create a diary or journal entry from the perspective of a book smuggler in *Words on Fire*. Encourage them to express the challenges, fears, and motivations of a smuggler. This activity will help students empathize with those who fought against censorship and understand the importance of preserving cultural literature.
- **Debate on Book Banning:** Organize a classroom debate on book banning. Assign roles to students – some as censorship authority members and others as literary freedom defenders. This exercise will allow students to explore and articulate both sides of the issue, fostering critical thinking and understanding of the complexities surrounding censorship.
- **Interactive Map Exploration:** Use online resources to create an interactive map (such as Google Maps) showing locations where book banning has occurred historically and in modern times, including the setting of *Words on Fire*. This can be a collaborative project where students research and add information to the map, learning about the global impact of censorship and the fight for intellectual freedom.

***The Librarian of Basra: A True Story from Iraq* (2005) by Jeanette Winter**

Narrative nonfiction, picturebook, 32 pp., ISBN 9780152054458



*All through the night, Alia, Anis, his brothers,  
and shopkeepers and neighbors take the books  
from the library shelves, pass them over the seven-foot wall,  
and hide them in Anis's restaurant. (p. 14)*

This story is an accurate account of a librarian in Basra risking everything to save the books in Basra's Central Library. The librarian, Alia Muhammad Baker, fears for the safety of the books in her library because there are rumors of war among her people. As those rumors become true, Alia must act fast. She is not alone. Her fellow citizens answer her cries for help. But will they act in time to save all 30,000 books in the city's library?

### Discussion

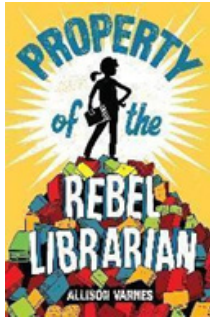
- Alia and the villagers took significant risks to save their books during the war. Why do you think they considered these books so valuable, and what does this tell us about the importance of preserving literature in times of conflict or censorship?
- Considering Alia's effort to save the library, how does access to books and literature contribute to a community's resilience and identity, especially in challenging times like war?

### Teaching Ideas & Activities

- **Book Rescue Simulation:** In this classroom activity, students act as a community deciding which books to save in a crisis. Split into groups, they choose books based on criteria like historical and cultural importance, mirroring the challenging decisions in literature preservation. For added engagement, students can bring their favorite books, imagining them as the last existing copies, to deepen their understanding of the value and impact of saving books during adversity.
- **Writing Prompt:** What would a book think? Pose this question to students and have them respond from the perspective of a book in Alia's library. Students can focus on the book's journey, its significance to the citizens of Basra, and its feelings about being saved. This will help students empathize with the emotional value books can hold and explore the impact of losing access to literature.



***Property of the Rebel Librarian*** (2018) by Allison Varnes  
Realistic fiction, novel, 288 pp., ISBN 9781524771478



*Don't count yourself out just yet, June,*

*she [Ms. Bradshaw] says, gathering a stack of books into her arms.*

*You read that one book, and one book can change everything.* (p. 14)

June Harper has never caused trouble a day in her life. She loves to read, and she loves Ms. Bradshaw, the librarian at her school, Dogwood Middle School. Ms. Bradshaw is super friendly and recommends great books, like the one June just finished reading, *The Making of a Witch*. But when June's dad discovers the book, he is not pleased at all! "Missing kids. Witches. It's too scary for you." This discovery leads to many books being banned from the school library and a recourse of action by Ms. Bradshaw that devastates June. It is just too much for someone in middle school! However, when June discovers a Little Free Library one day, an idea is sparked, and she takes matters into her own hands. She becomes the Rebel Librarian, secretly providing books for the students at Dogwood Middle to read. But if her secret identity is revealed, will it just make the matter worse? Will she ever make her parents and principal understand the fundamental importance of reading?

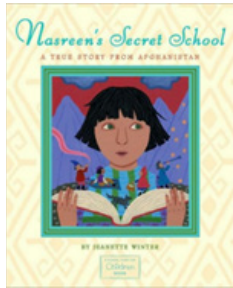
### Discussion

- *In Property of the Rebel Librarian*, June's actions challenge the book ban at her school. Discuss the importance of individual actions in opposing censorship. What impact can a single person's efforts have in situations like these?
- Considering the consequences faced by the librarian and the impact on the school community, what does this story teach us about the broader effects of censorship on education and intellectual freedom?

### Teaching Ideas & Activities

- **Reflective Letter Writing:** As an individual or class project, students can write letters to Allison Varnes, the author of *Property of the Rebel Librarian*. In their letters, students should discuss their interpretation of why she wrote the book and the key messages they believe she conveyed about censorship and freedom of reading. Additionally, they should include their personal takeaways and how the story resonated with them.
- **School-Wide Reading Campaign:** Organize a school-wide reading campaign featuring books that have been challenged or censored. Students can collaborate to create promotional materials and host events to discuss the themes of these books, involving teachers, parents, and other students. This can culminate in a school assembly or community event where the importance of intellectual freedom and diverse literature is highlighted, creating a broader conversation about censorship and its impact on the learning environment.

***Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan*** (2009) by Jeanette Winter  
 Narrative nonfiction, picturebook, 40 pp., ISBN 9781416994374



*The Taliban soldiers don't want girls to learn about the world,  
 the way Nasreen's mama and I learned  
 when we were girls. (p. 5)*

For five years, the Taliban took over Afghanistan, leaving a lasting imprint where the way of life for women and girls had forever been changed. This is the story of one little girl, Nasreen, and her grandmother, who were resilient to the changes in her world. This book is dedicated to the courageous women and girls of Afghanistan.

### Discussion

- In the story, education becomes a secret and risky endeavor. How do you think the act of banning books and restricting education can impact a community, especially its younger members?
- Considering Nasreen's experience and the secret school, discuss why you think access to education and books is essential for personal growth. What might be the consequences in a society where such access is denied?

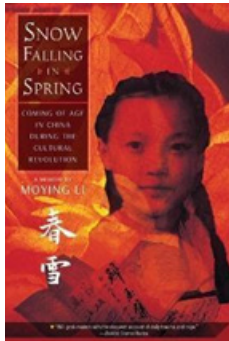
### Teaching Ideas & Activities

- **Secret Classroom Activity:** Transform the classroom into a 'secret school' similar to the one in the book. Have students experience a day of learning as if they were doing it in secret, discussing what it feels like to have restricted access to education. This activity can help students appreciate their right to learn and understand the challenges faced in environments where education is banned.
- **Comparative Freewrite\*:** Ask students to freewrite for 15 minutes, comparing their own educational experience with Nasreen's. Encourage them to explore themes like freedom of education, access to books, and the impact of censorship on learning. This exercise can deepen their understanding of the value and privilege of education in different cultural and political contexts.

\*A freewrite is the practice of continuously writing down thoughts as they come, without pausing to edit for spelling, grammar, or structure.

***Snow Falling in Spring: Coming of Age in China During the Cultural Revolution* (2010) by Moying Li**

Memoir, novel, 192 pp., ISBN 9780312608675



*There was nothing Baba treasured more than his books (p. 79)*

*...From Baba I learned to value books. But I never truly appreciated them until one day in 1968 (p. 82) ...the soldiers dumped all our books into large hemp sacks that they pulled from the back of the truck.*

*The paper factory will turn this trash [books] into pulp in no time, they announced. Dragging the sacks through our gate, they flung them, one after another, onto the open truck. Then hurling Baba on top of the bulging bags, the soldiers drove away in a cloud of dust. (p. 84)*

This memoir offers readers a vivid look into the Cultural Revolution in China, a period marked by intense censorship and suppression of literature. Li's story began in Beijing and went on from 1966 to 1976. Through her eyes, readers experience the harrowing effects of censorship and the loss of intellectual freedom as Mao's Red Guards purge books, culture, and free thought. The author's recollections provide a personal account of a critical historical moment and underscore the importance of preserving access to literature and cultural heritage. These themes resonate deeply with contemporary discussions on book banning and censorship.

### Discussion

- How did the Cultural Revolution's censorship and book ban impact Moying Li's life and education? Discuss the importance of having access to a variety of books and ideas during one's formative years.
- Compare the experiences described in *Snow Falling in Spring* with current situations where books are banned or censored. What similarities and differences do you observe?
- Moying Li's story shows the power of literature in difficult times. Why do you think access to books and diverse ideas is important, especially in challenging circumstances?

### Teaching Ideas & Activities

- **Personal Memoir Project:** Encourage students to write their own short memoirs or diary entries, reflecting on a time when they felt their voice or choices were limited. This exercise will help students connect with Moying Li's experiences and understand the impact of censorship on a personal level.
- **Cultural Revolution Research and Presentation:** Assign students to research different aspects of the Cultural Revolution, such as its impact on education, literature, and personal freedoms. Students can then create presentations or posters to share their findings, helping them to understand the historical context of Moying Li's memoir and the broader implications of censorship.

The ten selected books outlined above provide a foundation for deeper exploration into censorship and literary freedom. Moving to Table 1, we present a range of resources for further exploration. We hope this collection, which incorporates various viewpoints on censorship, book banning, and access to literature, equips middle-level educators with essential tools for enriching classroom dialogues on these vital topics.

**Table 1: Resources to Explore Perspectives of Censorship, Book Banning, and Access to Literature and Education**

Title & Link	Description	Possible Use for Teachers
<p><b>The History of Book Bans—and Their Changing Targets—in the US.</b></p> <p><a href="https://bit.ly/3TjBIZM">bit.ly/3TjBIZM</a></p> <p>*Please note that you will need to create a <a href="#">free account</a> with <b>National Geographic</b> to have free unlimited access to content.</p>	<p>This article examines the rise in book banning in the U.S., highlighting its historical context. It covers various eras, from early religious censorship in colonial times to modern challenges against books discussing LGBTQIA+ issues, race, and sexuality.</p> <p>The piece also discusses the evolution of censorship targets over time, including classic authors like Twain and Stowe, and how schools and libraries have become contemporary battlegrounds for book bans. The article emphasizes the impact of these bans on intellectual freedom and education.</p>	<p>Teachers can use this article as a resource to educate students about the historical and contemporary context of book banning in the U.S. It provides examples across different eras, illustrating how the targets of censorship have evolved.</p> <p>This can foster discussions on the reasons behind book bans and their impact on society.</p> <p>The article can be used to explore themes of intellectual freedom and how censorship challenges democratic values, encouraging critical thinking and debate in the classroom.</p>
<p><b>Banned Books – Top 3 Pros and Cons</b></p> <p><a href="https://bit.ly/3NkXanI">bit.ly/3NkXanI</a></p> <p>*This article is from a nonpartisan issue-information source (<a href="https://ProCon.org">ProCon.org</a>)</p>	<p>This article highlights the increasing trends in book challenges in the U.S.</p> <p>It outlines arguments for banning books, including parental rights to shield children from certain content, and arguments against emphasizing the importance of diverse literature for educational and emotional development.</p> <p>The article also discusses the role of parents, schools, and libraries in these challenges and highlights the changing reasons for book bans over the years.</p>	<p>Teachers can use this article to provide a balanced view of the debate surrounding banned books, illustrating both sides of the argument.</p> <p>It can be a resource for discussion, encouraging students to critically evaluate the reasons for and against book banning.</p> <p>The article contains a "Take Action" section where students are provided with five action items ranging from learning more about book banning and censorship to encouraging students to write letters to their US representatives to voice their opinions.</p>
<p><b>American Library Association (ALA)</b></p> <p><a href="https://ala.org">ala.org</a></p>	<p>This comprehensive website offers extensive materials on advocacy, current censorship issues, and statistical data on book challenges. These resources can help create informative, engaging lessons exploring the dynamics of intellectual freedom and censorship in contemporary society.</p>	<p>Links to resources for more information regarding <a href="#">Advocacy &amp; Public Policy</a>, <a href="#">Banned &amp; Challenged Books</a>, <a href="#">Censorship by the Numbers</a>, <a href="#">How to Report censorship</a> (report challenges or bans of materials, resources, programs, and services), and <a href="#">Books for All</a> (with the New York Public Library).</p>
<p><b>Sample Script About Book Bans for School Board Meetings</b></p> <p><a href="https://bit.ly/46UewyT">bit.ly/46UewyT</a></p> <p>*To learn more about PEN AMERICA: The Freedom to Write, please visit <a href="https://pen.org/about-us/">pen.org/about-us/</a></p>	<p>The article provides a sample script for addressing school board meetings about book bans, advocating against challenges to books that often target themes of race, gender, and sexuality. It emphasizes the importance of the freedom to read and argues against the imposition of one group's preferences over others.</p>	<p>Teachers can use this article to provide students with a practical example of civic engagement in the context of book bans and censorship. The sample script can be modified to express both sides of the argument.</p> <p>It demonstrates how individuals can effectively communicate their concerns to school boards, promoting an understanding of advocacy and the democratic process.</p>

### Final Thoughts

In this article, we delved into books that tackle themes of book banning, censorship, and limited access to literature and education. By bringing these stories into middle-level classrooms, educators can help students understand and question these complex issues. As the character Lucas stated in *Words on Fire* (2019), “Books themselves are freedom. Freedom to think, to believe, to dream” (Nielsen, 2019, p. 109). This quote underscores the importance of our collection of

suggested texts and the provided teaching ideas, which open up opportunities for critical discussion, giving students insights into the consequences of limiting access to diverse voices.

Looking ahead, our role as educators in promoting free and open access to literature is essential. Exploring these books is more than just an academic exercise; it is a commitment to freedom and access. It is our responsibility to guide students in appreciating a variety of perspectives, fostering a generation of U.S. citizens who value the freedom to read and learn. We must keep advocating for the open exploration of literature, setting the stage for a future where every book is available, and every viewpoint is accessible.

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## Reading-Aloud as Complex Art, not Simple Activity: A Cautionary Tale, Part II

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores the nuanced art of reading aloud, positioning it as a complex, multifaceted practice rather than a mere activity. Drawing on a personal vignette involving a read-aloud session gone awry, the author, a literacy educator with a deep affinity for picturebooks and reading-aloud strategies, delves into the curricular and instructional implications of reading aloud. The discussion extends into a comprehensive review of literature across five major categories, including the significance of picturebooks and their role in engaging diverse readers like emergent bilingual students and special needs students. Through reflective analysis, the author shares insights on selecting picturebooks, employing effective read-aloud strategies, and the overall impact of reading aloud on children's literacy development. Concluding with practical tips for educators and caregivers, the article underscores reading aloud as a sophisticated art that enriches the educational experience, advocating for its thoughtful integration into literacy instruction.

### KEYWORDS

reading aloud;  
picturebooks;  
science read  
alouds; emergent  
bilingual  
students; special  
needs students

Charles Darwin, the famous 19th-century scientist, once stated, “If I had my life to live over again, I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once every week.” Unlike Darwin, I am not a scientist. I am a teacher educator in literacy education with professional interests in picturebooks and reading aloud strategies. Like Darwin, I also like to listen to music and read poetry, especially poems about fathers, grandfathers, and teachers. One of my favorite poems is “What Is It You Like To Do.”

What is it that you like to do  
With someone you care about  
In a comfortable place  
With a lot of expression  
And with no interruptions?  
READ ALOUD! (of course)

(Layne, 2001, p. 53)

As a teacher, father, and now grandfather, I have always loved to read aloud to my children, my granddaughter, and my students, be they undergraduate, graduate, or doctoral students. In fact, I conduct a read aloud at the beginning of each class, and students always state that it was one of the most beneficial experiences in the course.

Recently, I spent time reading, rereading, and reflecting on “What Is It That You Like to Do” for a special occasion. I planned to take my 5-year-old granddaughter to a read-aloud session for young children at a local university. I was excited to take her to this session, if only for her to experience a read-aloud from somebody other than her grandfather. Unfortunately, the read-aloud session did not go as expected. What it did was inspire this article.

I begin by sharing a vignette about my experience observing an adult read aloud to a small group of young children, including my granddaughter. Next, I describe several literacy lessons I learned from the whole experience about the process of reading aloud, and the curricular and instructional implications for reading aloud to children. Then, I briefly review research on reading aloud, highlighting five major categories: picturebooks, picturebooks and reading aloud, research on reading aloud, reading aloud picturebooks to older readers, and reading aloud to emergent bilingual students and special needs students. I share tips for selecting picturebooks, tips for using instructional strategies to read aloud, and tips for reading aloud in general. I end with some final thoughts.

### Vignette

Recently, I took my 5-year-old granddaughter to a read-aloud session for young children. The session was sponsored by Scholastic Publication and took place in a library/media center at a local university. A total of 9 children attended, each accompanied by at least one parent, grandparent, or caregiver. The guest speaker was an educational administrator.

The children sat in a semi-circle in front of the administrator, who sat in a soft, cozy chair. He introduced himself and his 9-year-old son and identified the picturebook he selected to read that morning. It was *The Good Egg* (John, 2019). Here is a precis.

A good egg is both an idiom and a description of the main character. It tells the story of a verrrrrry good egg who is kind to, generous with, and thoughtful of other eggs. He is perfect and that is the challenge. The good egg lives in a recycled carton with 11 other eggs, all of whom, except for the good egg, get into mischief and trouble. His carton-mates behave rotten. Metaphorically, the good egg starts to crack from the pressure of feeling like he, unlike the other eggs, must be perfect. He decides it's time for a change. The good egg makes time for himself, goes on a road trip, and learns the value of caring for self is as important as caring for others (even if they are rotten).

Before starting, the administrator invited his young son to sit next to him and be his co-reader. Then, he started to read aloud the picturebook, but soon invited his son to take over. His son read the rest of the story aloud to the children in a simple, word-by-word, monotone way. The administrator interjected comments at different points in the story, such as, “See, boys and girls, how well-behaved the good egg is and how all the other eggs behave badly.” However, at one point in the story, one child interrupted the son and interjected her own question, asking, “Can I come up and read now?” Politely, the administrator stated that his son needed to first finish reading the whole story.

### Implications for Curricular and Instructional Decisions

I was a grandfather at the read-aloud session. However, I am also a literacy educator specializing in reading education and am familiar with the power and potential of reading aloud to children.

Reading aloud is universally recognized and commonly practiced around the world. The practice is a good thing for teachers and students to do at school and for parents and children to do at home.

At the same time, many adults, including teachers and parents, all too often see reading aloud to children as a simple thing to do. In many ways, this is understandable. Reading aloud only requires one adult (teacher, parent, grandparent, or caregiver) and one picturebook to read to young children. This read-aloud session, however, reminded me that reading aloud is anything but a simple activity; rather, it is a complex art, requiring adults to make important curricular and instructional decisions as part of the process.

To start the process, a curricular decision must be made. This decision is based on the question: *What gets read?* Will it be a picturebook, chapter book, short story, poem, etc.? In this instance, a picturebook was a good curricular decision for this small group of children, all of whom were at or under the age of five years old. At the same time, during and after the read-aloud, I found myself questioning whether *The Good Egg* was a good curricular decision for this session. Here's why.

The major theme of the picturebook is how the good egg has difficulty dealing with being perfect, exacerbated by the fact that his carton-mates are just the opposite. During the reading by both the administrator and his son, the children sat quietly but did not appear highly engaged. The administrator kept pausing his son and reminding the children about how important it is for the bad eggs to be more like the good egg. They need to be perfect, not bad. I suspect the lack of engagement was because this theme was not highly interesting to this group of children. Moreover, the overall tone of the picturebook was didactic, almost moralizing, because of the importance it placed on behaving like the good egg and not like the mischievous eggs.

In addition to curricular, an instructional decision must be made. This decision is based on the question: *How will this book be read?* Many before, during, and after instructional strategies can be used to conduct enjoyable and effective read-alouds. Before reading strategies are particularly important because they are designed to create interest, spark curiosity, and promote inquiry. *Let's Look at the Front Cover* is one such before-reading strategy.

Before reading, the adult displays the front cover of the book to the children. Next, the adult states, "This page is called the front cover of the book. Let's look at the front cover." Silently, the adult slowly shows the front cover so all the children can see it. Then, the adult says, "Let's look at it again. This time, though, let's share with others what you notice or what really catches your eye." Once again, the adult slowly shows the front cover and encourages the children to share what they noticed. Finally, the adult continues to display the front cover but asks the children, "So now, what do we think the story will be about?" Once children share their story predictions, the adult says, "Let's find out!" and begins to read aloud.

Unfortunately, there were no before, during, or after reading strategies used in the read-aloud session I attended with my granddaughter. The administrator provided no engaging introduction to the read-aloud experience other than quickly displaying the front cover and then immediately starting to read. There was no attempt to generate curiosity, no invitation for the children to ponder the front cover and make inferences and predictions about the story, no connection to children's personal experiences, and no wondering about what the title, characters, or story meant.

Lastly, I noticed the son read aloud most of the book but was not prepared to do so. It was clear he had not rehearsed reading aloud the picturebook before his father invited him to join him as a co-reader. For example, at one point in the story, the good egg returns to see his carton-mates, greeting each of them by their first name, e.g., "Hey, Greg." When the son got to the text, which

read, “Aloha, Shelly,” he struggled to read the word aloha. He tried to decode the word several different ways but was not sure which, if any, were correct. Finally, a grandparent in the group helped, offering the correct reading and pronunciation of the word. The son smiled and continued to read.

I share this vignette for two reasons. One, I want to emphasize that reading aloud to children is one of the most important and effective strategies for all readers, especially beginning readers. Two, I want to promote the idea that reading aloud is not a simple activity but a complex art that requires attention to *what book gets read* (curriculum) and *how a book gets read* (instruction). I did not share this vignette to criticize an administrator, much less his son, for the way they read aloud *The Good Egg* to other people’s children. On the contrary, I recognize that they kindly and generously volunteered their time and energy to a community event and asked for nothing in return. I was truly grateful to both of them for their time and commitment to the community.

### Picturebooks

Historically, a picturebook has been defined in different ways. Almost fifty years ago, Sutherland and Hearn (1977) defined a picturebook as “one in which the pictures either dominate the text or are as important” (p. 158). Similarly, Marantz (1977) stated that “a picturebook, unlike an illustrated book, is properly conceived of as a unit, a totality that integrates all the designated parts in a sequence in which the relationships among them—the cover, endpapers, typography, pictures—are crucial to understanding the book” (p. 149).

Since then, definitions have continued to change but still emphasize that “a picturebook is the inextricable connection of words and pictures and the unique qualities of the form, always rejecting the notion that a picturebook is not simply a book that happens to have pictures” (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007, p. 273). From a semiotic perspective, a picturebook is an aesthetic object that involves three sign systems (language, illustration, design), and each system has meaning potential by itself and with each other (Sipe, 2002). Here, I advocate and use the following most cited definition of a picturebook:

A picturebook is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historic document; and foremost, an experience for a [reader]. As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page. (Bader, 1976, p. 1)

### Picturebooks and Reading Aloud

Traditionally, reading aloud has been associated with picturebooks, often referred to as children’s literature. Picturebooks are a staple in most if not all, elementary schools as well as public and private libraries. Recently, they have also become increasingly popular and visible in middle school libraries, as well as in middle school teachers’ classroom libraries.

There are many benefits to using picturebooks as instructional tools to read-alouds. First, they are short in length, only having an average of 32 pages. While some picturebooks are quantitatively sophisticated and have many words per page, the majority are sparse in words when compared to other forms of literature. Thus, most picturebooks are deemed as having a lower text complexity when assessed quantitatively compared to short stories, essays, and novels. Because picturebooks are often short in length, they are excellent tools to provide readers with opportunities to monitor their ongoing comprehension and make sense of their thinking.

Second, picturebooks have deep and multiple meanings. Often, this is shown in their qualitative text complexity and text potential. Qualitative text complexity includes the levels of meaning, structure, language conventionality, and knowledge demands. Picturebooks may be less quantitatively complex, but they have the potential to be complex qualitatively and thus engage readers in high levels of thinking as they create sophisticated meanings.

Third, picturebooks provide opportunities for teachers and students to create a community of learners. They are instructional tools that help students feel connected, valued, and respected. In large part, this is due to the fact that many children personally connect with the characters in picturebooks and also with each other.

Fourth, picturebooks support the process of making intertextual connections. Since these books are shorter in length, teachers can read two or more picturebooks that are related in some way. Text sets are one way to combine picturebooks that are connected in some way, e.g. topic, theme, main character, problem, etc. Afterward, students spend time thinking, recording, and discussing the intertextual connections they see between the picturebooks.

Fifth, despite specific grade levels and grade bands, reading aloud picturebooks provides opportunities that reading other materials cannot do, e.g., basal stories, commercially produced program texts, or textbooks.

Sixth, picturebooks not only can increase student engagement in reading, but also foster a positive disposition about reading (Bintz, 2015).

Lastly, picturebooks have much potential for students of all ages and across all content areas. Braun (2010) states that “picturebooks serve to help middle grade students visualize concepts, become familiar with vocabulary, connect to content, and get excited about science” (p. 46).

### **Research on Reading Aloud**

According to Fox (2008), “Reading aloud to children of any age improves their literacy” (p. 5). This assertion is based on an extensive body of research. In this section, I briefly review research on reading aloud across five categories: reading aloud picturebooks across the curriculum, reading aloud picturebooks to older readers, and reading aloud to emergent bilingual students and special needs students.

#### ***Reading Aloud Picturebooks across the Curriculum***

Reading aloud nonfiction picturebooks is also important (Hoyt, as cited in Oczkus, 2004; Oczkus, 2012). Specifically, reading aloud nonfiction picturebooks is beneficial when introducing complex content area material across the curriculum. Wadsworth and Laminack (2006) use the idea of a bridge as a metaphor for the role picturebooks can play across the curriculum:

Picturebooks have the very real potential for bringing together ideas, images, content, vocabulary, language, and art in the minds of any learner. Picturebooks often do become a bridge to span the curriculum, connecting each subject and each topic into one interconnected entity. This makes it possible for both teaching and learning to travel freely in the territory of ideas and information. (p. 208)

Picturebooks can be used to introduce a new topic or generate interest in a concept across the curriculum. Science is a good example. Reading aloud nonfiction picturebooks in science helps students better understand scientific ideas (Webster, 2009). They can also “help students develop an interest in science, as well as help them read better” (Lee, 2010, p. 424). Reading aloud

picturebook biographies of scientists can help students understand how scientists think, observe, infer, formulate, and test hypotheses, and draw conclusions (Zarnowski & Turkle, 2011, 2012).

Reading aloud picturebooks in mathematics is also important. Reading aloud nonfiction picturebooks in mathematics can “provide students with opportunities to explore ideas, discuss mathematical concepts, and make connections to their own lives” (Hintz & Smith, 2022, p. 104). Making personal connections in math class helps make mathematics accessible for students. Integrating literature and mathematics also helps students make sense of their lives.

Social studies is yet another good example. Columba et al. (2009) state, “Events in the past are told in stories; we learn about others in remote places through stories; and myths and legends from ancient civilizations are passed down as stories” (p. 21). Nonfiction picturebooks are also ideal for integrating literacy and social studies. They can be used “to promote civic competence, the underlying reason for teaching social studies” (Balantic et al., 2011, p. 2). Lastly, reading aloud picturebooks across the content areas can also increase word knowledge, syntax knowledge, and genre knowledge, and thus motivation to read (Allen, 2000), as well as support student conceptual understanding (Hoffman et al., 2015).

### **Reading Aloud with Older Readers**

Compared to younger readers, less research has been conducted on reading aloud with older readers. And yet, in *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, the Commission on Reading states: “[Reading aloud] is a practice that should continue throughout the grades” (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 51), including middle grades education. Despite this emphasis, little is known about the effectiveness of read-aloud practices beyond elementary school (Ariail & Albright, 2006). This may be because students are exposed to read-alouds less frequently as they move from primary through intermediate grades (Brooks, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2000), and in middle and high school, the practice of reading aloud has all but disappeared (Delo, 2008).

And yet, reading aloud is an instructional strategy teachers can use to encourage literacy for students regardless of their age. In fact, it is one of the most preferred instructional strategies by middle grades teachers (Harvey & Goudvis, 2017). For middle grades students, reading aloud can have positive outcomes for motivation, interest, engagement, and learning (Ariail & Albright, 2006; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). McCormick and McTigue (2011) state that “because students can often comprehend orally presented texts that are normally above their own reading level, teacher read-alouds allow middle school students to experience texts that may be otherwise inaccessible” (p. 46).

Similarly, for middle grade teachers, it allows them to model aspects of fluent reading, such as pronunciation, intonation, rhythm, and style, and it makes texts more accessible to students (Ariail & Albright, 2006). It also helps teachers enhance student vocabulary development, especially when teachers pause to go over difficult words and then have conversations with students using the new words after reading (Reutzel & Cooter, 2008).

Reading aloud benefits students at all grade levels including middle grades and high school (Routman, 1994; Zehr, 2019). Jim Trelease, author of *The Read-Aloud Handbook* (2019), believes that continuing to read aloud to learners at any age is beneficial. Similarly, Routman (2002) notes that “reading aloud—in all grades—has long been viewed as a critical factor in producing successful readers as well as learners who are interested in reading” (p. 20). In particular, older students who are less fluent readers receive the greatest benefits from teachers reading aloud (Herrold et al., 1989; Meloy et al., 2002). Trelease states that “the first reason to read aloud to older kids is to consider the fact that a child’s reading level does not catch up to his listening level

until about the eighth grade . . . You have to hear it before you can speak it, and you have to speak it before you can read it. Reading at this level happens through the ear” (as cited in Korbey, 2013, pp. 1-2). In addition to children and adolescents, Pitts states that even “college students read more and better books when they are read to” (as cited in Krashen, 2004, p. 78).

### **Reading Aloud to Emergent Bilingual Students and Special Needs Students**

Reading aloud helps emergent bilingual students develop English fluency, word meanings, oral language, and thinking skills (Hickman & Pollard-Durodola, 2004). Interactive read-alouds help emergent bilingual students’ language development, curiosity, vocabulary development, particularly incidental vocabulary acquisition (Hoyt, 2009; Layne, 2001), learning, and comprehension, especially making connections with and across texts (Giroir et al., 2015, p. 647).

Similarly, reading aloud is beneficial with special needs students. The practice helps “build a sense of community in any class that experiences the same shared, secret joy of listening to the same great pieces of literature, be they brief or much longer. The class bonds in such a way that it becomes more like a family than a class” (Fox, 2008, p. 6).

### **Tips for Selecting Read-Aloud Texts**

In real life, selecting anything for the purpose of entertainment, enjoyment, or information is a subjective, if not risky, process. It is not as easy as it sounds. The traditional practice of returning Christmas gifts is a yearly reminder. Selecting picturebooks to read aloud is also a subjective process, and it, too, is not as easy as it sounds. Fortunately, there has been and continues to be, much professional literature on tips for selecting texts to read aloud (see Trelease, 1992). The following tips and rationales are based on the literature included after the reference section of this article.

**Table 1: Tips for Selecting Read-Aloud Texts**

<b>Tip 1</b>	Select picturebooks that are likely to be personally relevant and potentially meaningful to the age and background of the children; that is, select picturebooks that mean more to the children than they do to the reader;
<b>Tip 2</b>	Select familiar and popular picturebooks geared for a particular group of children. Children need to see children like themselves in the books they read and are read to them;
<b>Tip 3</b>	Select picturebooks with colorful and evocative illustrations. Picturebooks integrate, not separate, language and illustrations. Children do not privilege language over illustration. They use both to make sense of the picturebook;
<b>Tip 4</b>	Select picturebooks that reflect examples of good writing. Children internalize story structures from reading and use them in their own writing;
<b>Tip 5</b>	Select picturebooks that introduce different kinds of genres, e.g., stories, biographies, poetry, etc. It is important that children read deeply and broadly;
<b>Tip 6</b>	Select picturebooks that provide natural stopping points to pause during a read-aloud. At each stopping point, share ongoing understanding of the story. Children need to hear not only what good reading sounds like, but also hear how good readers understand stories.

**Tip 7**

Select picturebooks in which the author uses authentic, patterned, and predictable language. These three characteristics are fundamental to language and language learning.

*Patterned Picturebooks* and *Predictable Picturebooks* are two genres that offer a wealth of high-quality and award-winning picturebooks to meet these tips for selecting read-aloud texts. Based on my personal experience, young children find the following patterned and predictable picturebooks enjoyable, engaging, and memorable. *Who Sank the Boat* (Allen, 1996), *The Important Book* (Brown, 1999), *Fortunately* (Charlip, 1993), *Mrs. Wishy Washy's Farm* (Cowley, 2006), *Tough Boris* (Fox, 1998), *It Didn't Frighten Me* (Goss & Harste, 1984), *Don't Forget the Bacon* (Hutchins, 1989), *Dog In, Cat Out* (Rubinstein, 1993), *Gotta Go, Gotta Go* (Swope, 2000), *No Baths for Tabitha* (Thomas & Siegal, 1982), *Noisy Nora* (Wells, 1999), and *Grandpa's Slippers* (Watson, 1989).

### Tips for Using Read-Aloud Strategies

There are many strategies adults can use to read aloud. Here, I share several popular and different ways for reading aloud to students.

#### *Traditional Read-Aloud*

This is an instructional strategy in which an adult reads aloud a picturebook to a large or small group of children but also to an individual child. In this strategy, the primary role of children is to listen to the story and view the illustrations which are shared visually by the adult. The primary goal of the practice is for the adult to model proficient reading, share rich and authentic language, promote conversation, motivate readers, and support comprehension (see International Literacy Association, 2023).

#### *Interactive Read-Aloud*

This is an instructional strategy in which an adult reads aloud a picturebook to a whole group or small group of children. While reading, the adult pauses at predetermined, selective, and strategic places in the picturebook. At these places, the adult invites children to respond to the picturebook and share their responses with others (Fountas & Pinnell, 2019)

#### *Turn & Talk*

This is an instructional strategy that can be used with an interactive read-aloud (see Routman, 2002). Children are placed in pairs. Then, the adult starts to read aloud a picturebook, pausing at strategic places. At these places, the adult invites children to turn and talk for a minute or two with their partner about what they are understanding about the picturebook. The talk is informal, conversational, and open-ended. Afterward, pairs of children are invited to share what they talked about.

#### *Echo Reading*

This is an instructional strategy that, like Turn and Talk, can be used with an interactive read-aloud. The adult reads a short segment of text, e.g., line by line, sentence by sentence, etc. After

each line, the adult pauses, and a student(s) echoes the line or sentence back. This strategy helps children develop expressive, fluent reading.

### Choral Reading

This is an instructional strategy in which the adult reads aloud but pauses at places when students can read aloud a repeated choral line in unison as a whole class or as a small group. *Daisy, Eat Your Peas* (Gray & Sharratt, 2000) is a good example of a picturebook that has a repeating choral line.

### Think Aloud

This is an instructional strategy in which an adult reads aloud strategic sections of a picturebook, pausing after each section to share with children what s/he is understanding up to that point and what strategies s/he is using to maintain and extend understanding of the picturebook. This strategy allows adults to share what they understand and what strategies they are using to broaden and extend their understanding. Simply put, this strategy is like adults allowing children to eavesdrop on their reading and thinking. It allows adults to share with children what is going on behind their eyes and demonstrate what is going on in the minds of good readers.

### Reverse Think Aloud

Like the Think Aloud, this is an instructional strategy in which an adult reads aloud strategic sections of a picturebook, pausing after each section. Unlike the think aloud, when pausing after each section, the adult invites children to make comments and ask questions to the adult about the picturebook. For example, based on my own experience with this strategy, children make simple comments like, “I really like the way you read. You sound my dad when he reads to me.” They also ask questions like, “I’m liking this book. Are you liking it?” “I love the illustrations. Do you love them?” “What is your favorite part of the story so far?” “Why is that your favorite part?” “Are there any parts of the story you don’t like?” One of my favorite questions was from a little boy who asked me, “Do you ever read stories and not know all of the words?”

### Tips for Reading Aloud

Much professional literature exists on tips for effectively reading aloud (see Table 2). Like many other reading teachers, I have been influenced by much of this literature, specifically the work of two authors, Jim Trelease (1992; 2019) and Mem Fox (2008). These authors have informed not only my own beliefs and practices on reading aloud but also those of parents and teachers around the world.

**Table 2: Tips for Reading Aloud**

<b>Tip 1</b>	Practice, practice, practice. Reading aloud is not a simple activity but a complex art;
<b>Tip 2</b>	Preview the picturebook yourself. Look for sections of the story you want to shorten or emphasize;
<b>Tip 3</b>	Do not rush into the read-aloud. Allow children time to get comfortable and ready for the read-aloud;

<b>Tip 4</b>	Allow yourself time to get comfortable. Your head should be above the heads of your listeners so all children can hear your voice;
<b>Tip 5</b>	Set the stage for reading. Display the cover page, read the title, and introduce the author and illustrator. If applicable, note any special features on the front cover, e.g., won an award, written in interesting and/or multiple font(s), includes unusual colors, etc.;
<b>Tip 6</b>	Don't privilege language over illustrations. Both are integral parts of the process, so make sure the children can see the pictures easily;
<b>Tip 7</b>	Use prosody and reading with expression when reading aloud (see Rasinski & Smith, 2018; Rasinski & Young, 2023). Read fluently and change your tone of voice to fit the language and dialogue;
<b>Tip 8</b>	Don't read too fast or too slow. Adjust your pace to fit the story and the comfort of the children;
<b>Tip 9</b>	Don't be unnerved by questions during the reading. Foster curiosity with patient answers, then resume reading;
<b>Tip 10</b>	Allow time for discussion after reading a picture book. Ask open-ended questions like, <i>How did you like our story? What part of the story did you like the most? How did I do as a reader? What did I do as a reader that you really liked?</i> Do not turn discussions into quizzes.
<b>Tip 11</b>	Most importantly, relax and have fun!

### Final Thought

As noted earlier, the purpose of this article was not to critique one read-aloud session. Rather, it was to offer a cautionary tale. I hope this tale will help promote a big idea; namely, that reading aloud is a complex art, not a simple activity. The fact that it is complex is what makes it such a powerful instructional teaching and learning tool. The fact that it is an art is what makes it such an effective instructional practice, provided it is planned thoughtfully.

I also hope that sharing tips for selecting picturebooks, using instructional strategies to read aloud, and reading aloud will help all adults, especially teachers, put this idea of reading aloud into practice. Let's start reading aloud and having lots of fun.

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# Using Companion Texts to Widen Student Perspective Across the Curriculum

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## ABSTRACT

This article is based on an unexpected experience between a grandfather (William Bintz, the first author) and his six-year-old granddaughter. This experience sparked a collaborative inquiry project that explored companion texts as a new way to develop paired texts. The purpose of this article is to share examples of companion texts and instructional strategies to use across the curriculum. We begin by describing four theoretical frameworks underpinning the notion of companion texts. These include the concept of paired text, the benefits of paired text, the process of intertextuality, and reader response theory. Next, we describe companion texts as a new way to pair texts and include a rationale for the development and use of companion texts across the curriculum. Then, we share samples of instructional strategies that teachers can use with companion texts to widen student perspectives and enrich knowledge across the curriculum. We end with concluding thoughts.

## KEYWORDS

literature; paired text; companion texts; intertextuality

Teachers can be bearers of gifts . . . We have the privilege of introducing good literature to young, imaginative minds. (Cullum, 1967, p. 23)

This article introduces the notion of *companion texts* as a new way to develop paired texts and shares examples of instructional strategies teachers can use with these texts to widen student perspective and learning across the curriculum. We begin with a vignette between a granddaughter and grandfather (William) that sparked our interest in developing and using companion texts in the classroom. We situate companion texts within four major theoretical frameworks: (a) the concept of paired text, (b) the benefits of paired text, (c) the process of intertextuality, and (d) reader response theory. Next, we describe companion texts as one way to pair texts, include a rationale for the development and use of companion texts, and share examples of companion texts across the curriculum. Then, we share samples of instructional strategies teachers can use with companion texts to widen student perspectives across the curriculum. We end with concluding thoughts.

## Vignette

One of us (William) has a six-year-old granddaughter who just finished kindergarten at the time. Since preschool, she and I have practiced a tradition of visiting a local bookstore to browse and

purchase picturebooks. Afterward, we went to an ice cream parlor to enjoy some ice cream while we read a few of the picturebooks we bought together.

Recently, she and I visited one bookstore, sat on the floor, and started browsing the picturebooks. At one point, my granddaughter showed me the front cover of a book and stated, “Grandpa, look at this one. I like it.” The book was *The Hello, Goodbye Window* by Norton Juster. (Juster, 2005). Here is a precis:

This story describes and illustrates the loving relationship between Nanna, Poppy, and their granddaughter. When the granddaughter visits, she must pass a large kitchen window. The window is important to the little girl because this is how she first sees Nanna and Poppy when she visits them. Sometimes, they play peek-a-boo with her or make funny faces through the window. Once inside the house, other fun and games continue. The colorful illustrations of Nanna and Poppy suggest a multicultural family and interracial marriage and thus have much power and potential to address the topic of diversity.

I asked my granddaughter, “Why do you like that book?” She responded, “It has pretty colors, and a little girl like me is in the story.” I asked, “How is she like you?” She started flipping through the pages of the book, stopped at one point, and stated:

See, here’s the little girl, and here’s her grandma and grandpa. They are playing with the little girl inside their house. I like it because it’s like you, grandma, and me. You and grandma play with me when I come to your house. Let’s buy it.

I bought it and we read the story while later sharing a delicious chocolate sundae.

### Reflection

Afterward, I reflected on this experience as a grandfather and a literacy teacher educator. As a grandfather, reading this picturebook to my granddaughter at the ice cream parlor was an enjoyable experience. While eating her chocolate sundae, she stopped periodically and made many personal connections to the little girl and her grandparents. For example, she stated, “See, Grandpa, the little girl is playing with her grandma and grandpa, just like you and me when we play with my dolls.”

As a literacy teacher educator, I was not surprised but intrigued by the personal connections she made to the text. I read the picturebook again by myself, and, like her, also made several personal connections to the text. For example, the picturebooks reminded me of the fun times I had when I visited my own grandparents as a child. It also reminded me of two friends who, like the grandma and grandpa in the story, enjoy a happy, interracial marriage. At the same time, I also made professional connections between the picturebook, *The Hello, Goodbye Window* and another one of my favorite picturebooks, *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* by Selina Alko. Here’s a precis:

*The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* (Alko, 2015) tells the story of a remarkable but little-known family consisting of Mildred Loving, her husband Richard Perry Loving, and their three children. Mildred and Richard fell in love and were married in Washington, D.C. It was an interracial marriage. When they relocated back to their hometown in Virginia, they were arrested because of a state law that prohibited interracial marriage. Mildred and Richard were determined not to allow their children or themselves to consider their marriage was wrong. For years, they fought the unfair law, eventually bringing their case before the highest

court in the land. In 1967, the Supreme Court issued its decision in *Loving vs. Virginia*, in favor of Mildred and Richard Loving.

I shared this whole experience with a colleague who is also a literacy teacher educator (Author 2). At one level, we saw these two picturebooks as a traditional paired text that shares a variety of intertextual connections. For example, both picturebooks address the topic of cultural diversity and interracial marriage. Both involve happy families, one with married grandparents from different cultures and a granddaughter, and the other with married parents from different races and three children. Both include illustrations that beautifully complement the text.

At another level, we saw important differences between this paired text. These differences included genre, narration, tone, time, and purpose. *The Hello, Goodbye Window* is realistic fiction, whereas *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* is nonfiction and includes an author's note, bibliographic references, and suggestions for further reading. *The Hello, Goodbye Window* is told through first-person narration by the little girl, whereas *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* is told through third-person narration. The tone of *The Hello, Goodbye Window* is evocative. It indirectly suggests, rather than directly states, through illustrations that Nana and Poppy are in an interracial marriage. The tone of *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* is not suggestive, but direct and factual. *The Hello, Goodbye Window* is told as a contemporary story, one that is occurring in present time, whereas *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* is a historical story, one that occurred in 1958. Lastly the purpose of *The Hello, Goodbye Window* is to entertain, whereas the purpose of *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* is to inform.

In the end, we continue to see these two picturebooks as a traditional paired text. At the same time, we see this pair of picturebooks as a different way to conceptualize and a new way to develop paired text. Specifically, we view these picturebooks as companion texts.

### Companion Texts

The word companion is defined as “one of a pair of things intended to complement or match each other” (Google Dictionary, n.d.). Typically, this definition of “things” often refers to two people, be they companions, friends, colleagues, significant others, married couples, etc. While a pair, companions are also independent people who live their own lives in their own ways. At the same time, companions enjoy each other's company and spend much time together. In the process, they enrich their own life as well as the life of their companion.

Here, we refer to two texts, not as human companions, but as companion texts. They are a paired text on a particular topic in which each text complements and enriches the other in unique ways. Here, we focus on one way; namely, companion texts complement each other by working together to widen student perspective and enrich knowledge across the curriculum.

We believe that widening student perspective is essential. For some time now, Carolyn Burke (1995), an internationally recognized reading and curriculum theorist, has stated that a significant goal of curriculum and curriculum development is to widen student perspective. One way to widen student perspective is to provide multiple and different perspectives on a particular topic or theme. Companion texts do just that.

For example, reading *The Hello, Goodbye Window* first provides not only a heartwarming and entertaining story but also an excellent introduction to the notion of cultural diversity and interracial marriage. Among other things, this introduction can provide some initial background knowledge for students unfamiliar with interracial marriage, as well as extend existing background knowledge for students who are already familiar with interracial marriage.

*The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* is a companion text because it widens the perspective on and enriches the knowledge of cultural diversity and interracial marriage. This picturebook provides an important historical perspective on cultural diversity and interracial marriage, a perspective missing in *The Hello, Goodbye Window*. For instance, Nanna and Poppy are depicted as happy, loving, and healthy grandparents in *The Hello, Goodbye Window*. However, there is no information included, in text or illustration, that directly states or indirectly suggests, that Nanna and Poppy may have experienced challenges before, during, or after their interracial marriage.

Moreover, *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* widens the historical perspective on interracial marriage. Unlike Nanna and Poppy, it describes the many significant challenges Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter faced before, during, and after their interracial marriage in 1958. One challenge was that they lived and wished to marry in Virginia; however, Virginia, and many other states at the time, was a segregated state. Therefore, mixing of races was strictly prohibited.

Another challenge was the fact that interracial marriage was illegal at the time. Laws at the time, existed to prosecute and punish people who married interracially. Nevertheless, Richard and Mildred married. Soon after, however, they were arrested, charged with “Unlawful Cohabitation”, and imprisoned in jail. Several days later, were given an ultimatum by law enforcement: leave Virginia or stay in jail. Reluctantly, they moved to Washington, D.C. After six years, however, they moved back to Virginia in 1966, vowing to overturn the law. Ultimately, they did just that. They won their case in the Supreme Court. Unfortunately, they also continued to encounter and overcome many challenges that continued in the state.

Since then, of course, increasing numbers of people have engaged in interracial marriages in Virginia, across the United States, and around the world. Fortunately, many of these marriages did not have to face challenges like segregation and the threat of incarceration. However, Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter did face both and, although it wasn’t documented in this picturebook, continued to face other challenges and threats, even though they won their case in court.

Ultimately, we see this paired text as an example of a *companion text*. Individually, each addresses cultural diversity and interracial marriage in different ways. Together, they both introduce and widen student perspective on cultural diversity and interracial marriage. In the next section, we describe the theoretical framework underpinning the notion of companion texts.

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Paired Text.** Paired text is not a new concept. Much research has been conducted and much professional literature has been published on the development and implementation of paired text (Ciecierski et al., 2016, 2017; Lupo et al., 2019). Historically, paired text have been defined conceptually as two texts that are related in some way, e.g. genre, theme, topic, etc. (Short et al., 1988). It is primarily a curricular resource that is based on a multiple-text mentality. This mentality posits that multiple, interrelated texts help students read broadly and deeply, make intertextual connections between texts, and learn new information from, about, and through books. Instructionally, paired text is grounded in a theory that posits learning is a matter of creating patterns that connect (Bateson, 2000). In other words, students learn something new when they can make connections to something they already know.

**Benefits of Paired Text.** Benefits of Paired Text. When thinking about the benefits of paired text, we find it helpful to remember the words of Plotinus (The Six Enneads, n.d.), who stated, “It is a wise man who can learn about one thing from another.” From this perspective, we

believe that paired text has several benefits. Among others, these include: 1) they enable students to learn about one book from the other and reading and sharing understandings of paired text can contribute to learning across all subjects (Neufeld, 2005, p. 302), 2) they enable students to share and extend understandings of each text differently than if only one text had been read and discussed (Short et al., 1996, p. 537), 3) they enable students to read one text and in the process build background knowledge for reading a second, related text (Soalt, 2005, p. 680), 4) they provide experiences with multiple genres and content areas, 5) they demonstrate how different genres provide students with different lenses for interpreting text (Murray, 1985, p. 122) and therefore different ways of knowing about texts (Paretti, 1999), 6) they increase vocabulary by seeing exact words in different contexts, and 7) they increase motivation to explore topics students are not initially interested in (Soalt, 2005, p. 681).

**Intertextuality.** Intertextuality is a term first coined in the 1960s by Julia Kristeva (Allen, 2000) and essentially means “to weave together” (King-Shaver, 2005, p. 1). Since then, much professional literature continues to focus on the concept of intertextuality. Today, it is commonly referred to as making connections between texts (Harvey & Goudvis, 2017).

Intertextuality refers to the “personal connections students make between the books they are currently reading and their past experiences” (Short et al., 1988, p. 358). Paired text is based on the notion of intertextuality. Reading paired text invites and supports the making of intertextual connections across texts. In the process, students develop both an expectation for connections and strategies for searching for connections more productive and wide-ranging (Short et al., 1996, p. 537).

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2010) does not explicitly use the term intertextuality. However, the CCSS does provide a rationale for developing and using paired text in the classroom. One standard states that students will “Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take” (CCSS, 2010). Operationally, paired text is a curricular resource that helps teachers at all grade levels and all content areas to put intertextuality into action and address this CCSS standard in the classroom at the same time.

**Reader Response Theory.** Historically, reader response theory, also known as the transactional theory of literature, gained international attention based on the work of Louise Rosenblatt (1994). Fundamentally, this theory posits that a literary text (picturebook, short story, novel, poem, etc.) does not inherently possess a fixed, correct, or final meaning. In fact, it posits that a literary text has multiple meanings, what Van Leeuwen (2015; see also, Halliday, 1978) characterizes as meaning potentials, depending on the reader, the context, the purpose for reading, etc. The meaning(s) of a literary text is the result of “the two-way transactional relationship between the reader and the text” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 21). Simply stated, reader response theory posits that a literary text does not have a predetermined meaning and the role of the reader is to discover that single meaning; rather, a literary text has meaning potentials, and the role of the reader is to create personal meanings depending on personal interest, background knowledge, purpose and context for reading, opportunities for discussion, etc.

Finally, this theory posits that reader response of personal meanings can be viewed along a continuum ranging from aesthetic at one end and efferent at the other end (Rosenblatt, 1995; see also, Rosenblatt, 1994; 2005). Aesthetic refers to a personal response and is commonly referred to as making connections to self and others. Efferent refers to a response that is information and commonly referred to as making connections to similar books, topics, and themes. Making aesthetic or efferent, or both, depends on the reader's stance and the purpose of the reading.

**Example of Reader Response Theory.** The vignette described earlier is an example of reader response theory at work. For example, my granddaughter and I responded very differently to *The Hello, Goodbye Window*. Essentially, and of course, without knowing it (she's five years old), my granddaughter took an aesthetic stance to *The Hello, Goodbye Window*. During and after reading aloud the picturebook to her, she made personal responses and connections to the text. For example, she made connections to herself and the girl in the story. She made connections to her grandparents. Like the girl, she has two grandparents. She made connections to her parents. Like the girl, her parents drop her off at her grandparents' house so they can spend time together. She made connections to games. Like the girl, her grandparents play games with her in their house. Lastly, like the girl, she finds it hard to say goodbye but knows she will visit her grandparents again soon.

I, too, took an aesthetic stance to *The Hello, Goodbye Window*. During and after reading it aloud to my granddaughter, I made personal connections to the text. For example, I made connections to the times I visited with my own grandparents, and I also played games with them in their house. I also made connections to friends of mine who are involved in interracial marriages.

Afterward, however, I reread the picturebook. I did so because I wanted to take an efferent stance on the text. Specifically, I wanted to read the text from the perspective of a teacher and reading educator to explore how I might be able to use it in my graduate courses. In other words, I wanted to make professional, not just personal, connections to the text.

One efferent connection was that I saw this paired text as an opportunity to illustrate the power and potential of taking a contemporary and historical perspective on an important historical event, in this case, interracial marriage. Another connection was that I saw this paired text as a different way to pair text. I already knew that there are a variety of ways to pair text. One way is to pair contradictory texts, e.g., two texts tell the same story but in contradictory, and corresponding texts, e.g., two texts address the same theme but in different ways. I saw this paired text as another way to pair companion texts.

### Examples of Companion Texts Across the Curriculum

In this section, we share examples of companion texts across the curriculum, specifically in English Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, and Math.

#### English Language Arts

*Cycling: Lance Armstrong's Impossible Ride* (Sandler, 2006) and *Cycling: Lance Armstrong's Impossible Ride* (Sandler, 2006) are companion texts on the topic of famous and little-known professional cyclists.

*Cycling: Lance Armstrong's Impossible Ride* (Sandler, 2006). This picturebook is an inspirational and illustrated biography of cyclist and cancer survivor Lance Armstrong. He is regarded as one of the greatest cyclists in sports history at both the amateur and professional levels. In 1991 he was the National Amateur Cycling Champion. He went on to win six consecutive Tour de France races. Afterward, he was diagnosed with cancer and courageously survived. Lance Armstrong's accomplishments in the sport of cycling are unparalleled in the 20th century.

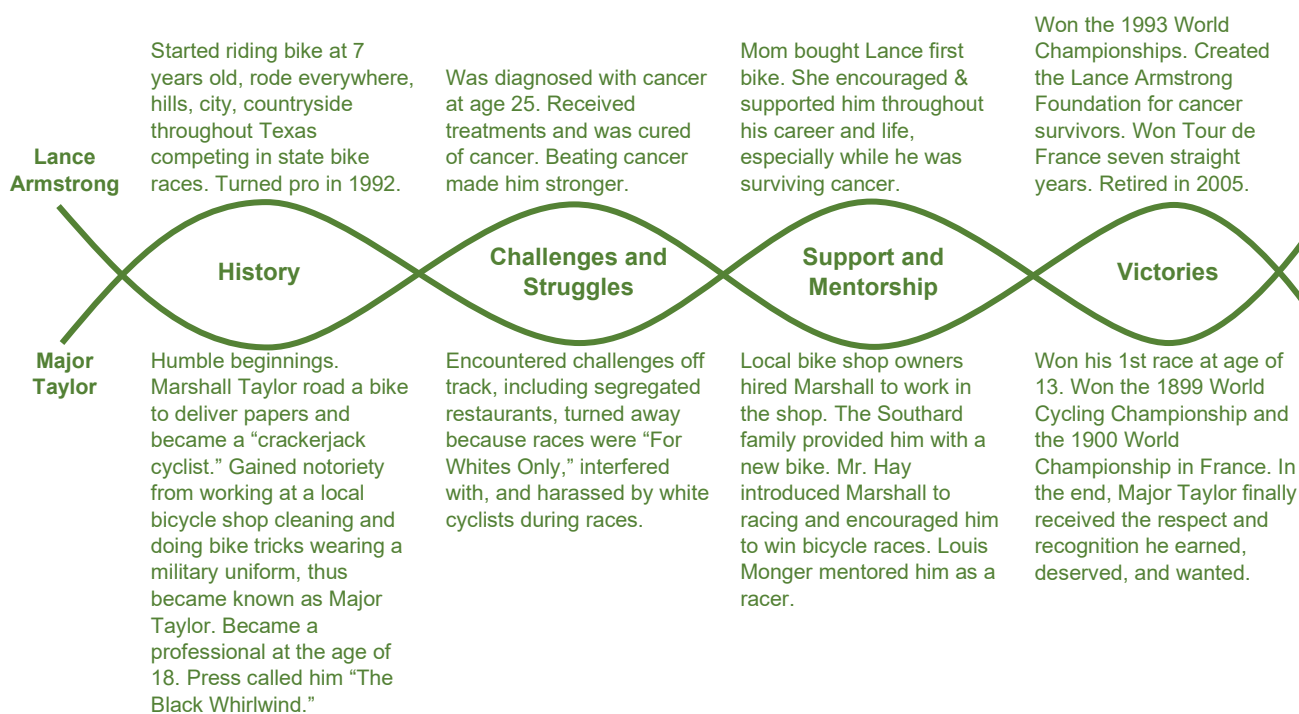
*Major Taylor: Champion Cyclist* (Cline-Ransome, 2004) is a companion text because it widens the perspective not only on the life of Lance Armstrong and the sport of international cycling but also on important but little-known accomplished cyclists who preceded him. This picturebook tells the remarkable story of Marshall Taylor, an internationally recognized and accomplished cyclist who preceded Lance Armstrong by almost a century. Taylor grew up in

Indiana, and by 1891, people in his community were amazed at this thirteen-year-old black boy who could perform amazing stunts on his bicycle. Over the years, people began to call this teenager Major Taylor because of the red military uniform he wore while riding his bicycle. At the age of eighteen, he became a professional cyclist. Later, Major Taylor became an American hero by winning the world cycling title at the age of twenty-one, while also encountering and battling racism all along the way.

This companion text can broaden the perspective on the history of international cycling. One text can be used to introduce Lance Armstrong as a famous international cyclist. It can also extend understanding for students already familiar with Lance Armstrong. At the same time, this companion text can introduce Major Taylor as an accomplished but little-known international cyclist, as well as spark student curiosity about other little-known sports figures who have not received their well-deserved recognition.

Figure 1 illustrates an instructional strategy in the form of a graphic organizer that students can use to record and discuss intertextual connections between a companion text. We used it with companion texts on Lance Armstrong and Major Taylor. In addition, Table 1 illustrates other companion texts on the topic of sports and sports figures.

**Figure 1: Interwoven Companion Texts**



### Social Studies

*A Picture Book of Lewis and Clark* (Adler, 2003) and *My Name is York* (Steenwyk, 1997) are companion texts based on the topic of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

*A Picture Book of Lewis and Clark* (Adler, 2003) provides an informative and colorful introduction to Meriwether Lewis and William Clark and their famous journey into unknown territory. It provides a historical account of the "Corps of Discovery" led by Lewis and Clark, as they set out in 1804 on a journey for American expansion. The explorers overcame many

difficulties along the way, such as bitter cold winters, dangerous snakes, troublesome mosquitoes, grizzly bears, and endless rain and snowstorms. Ultimately, Lewis and Clark were triumphant, reaching the Pacific Ocean in November 1805.

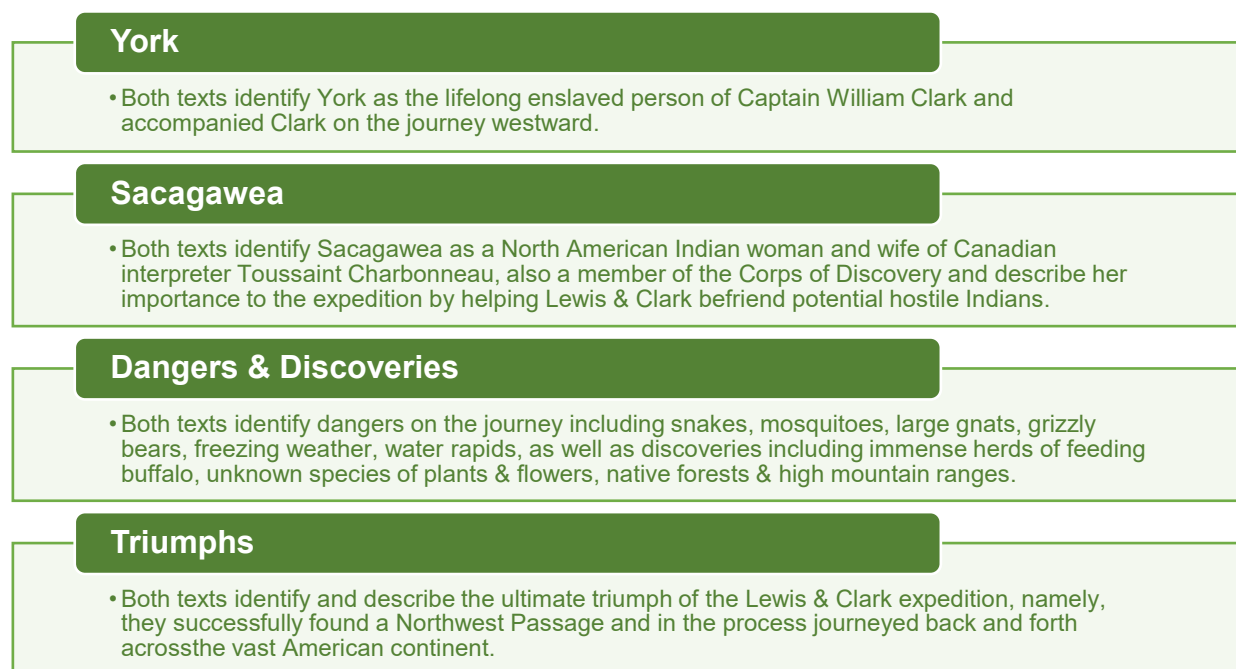
While informative and enjoyable, this picturebook focuses the narrative almost exclusively on Lewis and Clark. For example, the “Corps of Discovery” consisted of a total of thirty American explorers, but little, if any, information was provided on any of the other explorers. One of the explorers, however, was a man named York. He was Captain Clark’s enslaved person and accompanied Clark on this journey westward in hopes of becoming a free man.

*My Name is York* (Steenwyk, 1997) is a companion text to *A Picture Book of Lewis and Clark* (Adler, 2003) because it provides a broader perspective to this historical event and the people involved in it. Unlike *A Picture Book of Lewis and Clark*, which is told in 3rd person narration, *My Name is York* is told by York in first person narration. Throughout the story, York invites readers into his world and in the end reveals his secret. Unlike Captain Clark, York seeks freedom, not the “Western Waterway.” He also reveals pride when Captain Clark carved the names of all “Corps of Discovery” members on a pine tree after reaching the Pacific Ocean, including the name of York.

This companion text can broaden the perspective on the famous Lewis and Clark expedition. *A Picture Book of Lewis and Clark* can be used to introduce students to Lewis and Clark and the adventure of Western Expansion. It can also be used to extend understanding of students who already possess some understanding about the expedition. *My Name is York* widens the perspective by introducing and acknowledging York, a famous but little known African American historical character who was a valuable member of the expedition.

Figure 2 illustrates an instructional strategy in the form of a graphic organizer that students can use to record and discuss intertextual connections between a companion text. Here, we use it with the companion texts *A Picture Book of Lewis and Clark* and *My Name is York*.

**Figure 2: Complimentary Companion Texts**



### Corps of Discovery

- Both texts refer to the Corps of Discovery as a group of more than 30 American explorers who accompanied Lewis & Clark on a journey west of the Mississippi River.

### Dreams

- Both texts describe personal dreams. Lewis & Clark dreamed of finding the Northwest Passage to the Pacific Ocean. York dreamed about the passage, but also dreamed about finding freedom.

Table 2 presents companion texts on the Lewis and Clark expedition, while Table 3 features additional companion texts covering various Social Studies topics.

## Science

*Star Stuff: Carl Sagan and the Mysteries of the Cosmos* (Sisson, 2014) and *Look Up! Henrietta Leavitt, Pioneering Woman Astronomer* (Burleigh, 2013) are companion texts on the topic of astronomers and astronomy.

*Star Stuff: Carl Sagan and the Mysteries of the Cosmos* is a biography of the famous astronomer. As a boy, Carl Sagan was an imaginative child, curious about everything. The 1939 World's Fair fascinated him. There, he saw a mechanical man and a time capsule filled with messages to the future. Carl Sagan, however, was fascinated by stars; he spent many hours at the library reading books about stars and astronomers who studied planets. Over time, he became Dr. Carl Sagan and, with other scientists, used mechanical explorers to study planets. These explorers collected and sent data back to Earth. Based on these data, he and his team prepared to launch Voyager 1 and Voyager 2, carrying greetings from Earth to space.

*Look Up! Henrietta Leavitt, Pioneering Woman Astronomer*, tells the story of Henrietta Leavitt, a pioneering astronomer who was amazed by the brilliance of stars and the vastness of the sky. *How high is the sky?* is the question she asked as a young girl. She used the position of stars to help her answer the question. Later, as an astronomy student, she was fascinated with vast distances and the notion of light years. After graduation, she worked at an observatory, peering through a magnifying glass to measure tiny star dots on photographs of the night sky. Day after day, she studied new photographs of the stars. One day, she saw a pattern in the blinking of stars. This pattern allowed her to determine how far the star is from the Earth. Her discovery allowed other astronomers to make new discoveries about the Milky Way and the existence and distance of other galaxies.

This companion text can broaden the perspective on the history of astronomers and astronomy, as well as understanding famous and little-known pioneers of space. *Star Stuff: Carl Sagan and the Mysteries of the Cosmos* can introduce or extend understanding of the valuable contributions made to science and astronomy by the famous scientist Carl Sagan. It reminds readers of the valuable contributions he made during his life, as well as the significant influence he has had on astronomers today and in the future. *Look Up! Henrietta Leavitt, a Pioneering Woman Astronomer*, can introduce and extend understanding of the famous but little-known female astronomer Henrietta Leavitt.

Figure 3 illustrates an instructional strategy in the form of a graphic organizer that students can use to record and discuss intertextual connections between companion texts. Here, we used it with *Star Stuff: Carl Sagan and the Mysteries of the Cosmos* and *Look Up! Henrietta Leavitt, Pioneering Woman Astronomer*.

Figure 3: New Understandings, Ways of Thinking, Inquiry Questions

My new understanding about these famous scientists	My new way of thinking differently about this topic (universe)	My new inquiry question
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carl Sagan was curious and imaginative about everything, especially the cosmos, throughout his life. He asked questions, sought answers, studied diligently, and read profusely. He developed the idea of sending mechanical explorers to gather data about planets, e.g. Voyager 1 and Voyager 2. Henrietta Leavitt was curious, too, about stars, specifically the distance of stars from earth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From Sagan, I am thinking differently about stars, e.g each star is a sun, stars made the ingredients of life, and interstellar space. and the vastness of the universe. From Leavitt, I am thinking differently about vast distances, the importance of astronomy, and how the tiniest discovery can lead to important findings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did Carl Sagan become such a popular TV personality in the 1960's? How is the scientific work of Sagan and Leavitt interconnected with the work of Stephen Hawking? What are asteroids and cosmic dust? Why do some stars blink? How far away is the Milky Way? How high is the sky?</li> </ul>

Table 4 illustrates other companion texts on different topics in science.

### Mathematics

*What's Your Angle, Pythagoras?* (Ellis, 2004) and *Sir Cumference and the Great Knight of Angleland* (Neuschwander, 2001) are companion texts on the topic of angles and the Pythagorean theorem.

*What's Your Angle, Pythagoras?* tells the story of a young, curious boy named Pythagoras who loved solving problems. He helps two builders balance crooked columns on a temple and finds a quicker route for his father to deliver his tiles to Crete. One day, while on a trip with his father to Egypt, Pythagoras meets Nef, a master builder, who uses a rope to teach him a special number pattern. Pythagoras uses this pattern to solve problems involving right angles. This pattern is the Pythagorean theorem.

*Sir Cumference and the Great Knight of Angleland* uses clever and informative wordplay to tell the story of Radius, a young boy who is a squire but wants to be a knight. He is the son of Sir Cumference and Lady Di of Ameter, and his teacher is Sir D'Grees, who teaches him to ride his horse at specific angles – right angles and straight angles. To be a knight, Radius must undergo a quest. He must find King Lell, who has mysteriously disappeared. To help, his parents give him a medallion in the shape of a perfect circle, and Sir D'Grees reminds him to remember right angles. Radius encounters a village with rooftops pointing in steep angles and calls them “cute.” Then, he travels to the Mountains of Obtuse and eventually to a walled castle, where he finds a note from the brothers Zig and Zag about how to find King Zell. Radius follows the instructions and uses the medallion to follow which paths to take. Eventually, he finds and frees King Lell.

This companion text can widen the perspective on introducing or extending the understanding of the mathematical importance of the Pythagorean theorem. It can also introduce or extend our understanding of Pythagoras, the famous mathematician who developed and applied the theorem in real life. In many ways, this companion text can introduce or extend the mathematician behind the man and the man in front of the math.

Figure 4 illustrates an instructional strategy in the form of a graphic organizer that students can use to record and discuss intertextual connections between companion texts. Here, we used it

with *What's Your Angle, Pythagoras? A Math Adventure* and *Sir Cumference and the Great Knight of Angleland: A Math Adventure*.

Figure 4: Intertextual Connections Chart

Book Title	Mathematical Names	Mathematical Concepts	Journey	Discovery
<b><i>Sir Cumference and the Great Knight of Angleland</i></b>	<p>Main characters include <i>Radius</i>, son of <i>Sir Cumference</i> &amp; <i>Lady Di of Ameter</i>, and squire to <i>Sir D'Grees</i>, King Lell's pet dragons, <i>Zig &amp; Zag</i>.</p> <p>Locations include the <i>Kingdom of Angleland</i>, the <i>a(cute) rooftops</i>, and the <i>Mountains of Obtuse</i>,</p> <p>Radius takes a <i>knightly angle</i> (a right angle) to the castle.</p>	Circumference, diameter, acute, obtuse, and right angles, degrees,	King Lell of Angleland has mysteriously disappeared. Radius must find him. On horse, he travels through the kingdom to the King's castle. Using a medallion to make knightly right angles, he enters the castle only to find two fire-breathing dragons. The dragons are King Lell's pets and help Radius rescue the King who proclaims Radius as Sir Radius.	At one level, Radius successfully discovered the whereabouts of King Lell and saved him from harm. At another level, Radius discovered power and potential of angles, especially the Knightly right angle, to solve real-life problems. He also discovered differences between acute and obtuse angles in terms of degrees.
<b><i>What's Your Angle, Pythagoras?</i></b>	Main characters include Pythagoras, Saltos (salt) and Pepros (pepper), Leapus and Boundus	Balance vs. imbalance, vertically and horizontally straight, column, relationship between distance & time, right angles, base, triangles, right triangles, squares, length, squaring, sides. Pythagorean Theorem.	Pythagoras's father is a merchant who sells tiles. He and Pythagoras set sail for Egypt and arrive in Alexandria. There, they meet Nef, a builder of buildings. Nef shows Pythagoras the secret of his buildings, a knotted roper in the shape of a right triangle. Pythagoras uses this triangle to solve problems with leaning buildings, and a quicker route for his father to sail to Crete.	Historically, Pythagoras became a philosopher, musician, and astronomer. However, his legacy is as a mathematician who made a famous discovered. Today his discovery is commonly referred to as the pythagoreum theorem. $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ when a and b are two legs of a right triangle, and c is the side opposite the right angle.

Table 5 illustrates other companion texts on different topics in mathematics.

### Concluding Thoughts

We began this article with a vignette about a reading experience between Author 1 and his six-year-old granddaughter. This vignette sparked a collaborative inquiry project that explored a new way to develop and use companion texts across the curriculum. The results of this inquiry project raise several implications for curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Regarding curriculum, we believe national and/or state academic standards are the driving force behind curriculum and curriculum development. From a blended genres perspective, one implication is that teachers become curriculum developers. Teachers use academic standards as a starting point to develop blended genres that address these standards.

A blended genres perspective also raises implications for instruction. One implication is that teachers move from a single-text to a multi-text view of reading and reading instruction. Like paired text in general, a blended genre consists of two texts or readings designed to be read together in a single reading and learning experience. Reading instruction is not viewed as reading single but multiple texts.

Lastly, a blended genres perspective raises implications assessment. In general, much reading assessment is based on a single text, uses text-based and objective instruments like a fill-in-the-blank worksheets, multiple choices questions, and summaries/retellings of the text, and focuses on text-based elements like main idea, character, setting, problem, solution, etc. One implication is that assessment of blended genres focuses not on each text, but on the reader creating intertextual connections between the two texts. Intertextual connections can, and often do, differ from reader to reader. From this perspective, creating and sharing intertextual connections offer readers to not only create personal meanings, but also learn multiple meanings from others. In the end, we hope this article will do for readers what a granddaughter did for her grandfather and his colleague. It allowed them to start new conversations and spark new thinking about the untapped and unlimited potential of companion texts.

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**Table 1: Sports and Sports Figures**

Topic	Text #1	Text #2
<b>Golf:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective on the sport of golf by introducing/extending understanding about a little known, but famous, character named William Powell	<b><i>Golf Course Aerial Photobook: 30 Best Selected Images of Most Beautiful Golf Courses in the World</i></b> (Cooper Photo Gallery, 2022)	<b><i>Twice as Good: The Story of William Powell and Clearview, the Only Golf Course Designed, Built, and Owned by an African American</i></b> (Michelson, 2012)
<b>Little League Baseball:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective on the history of the Little League Baseball World Series by introducing/extending understanding about the Cannon Street YMCA All-Stars.	<b><i>Baseball for Kids: A Young Fan's Guide to the History of the Game</i></b> (MacKinnon, 2020)	<b><i>Let Them Play</i></b> (Raven, 2005)
<b>Professional Baseball:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective on professional baseball by introducing/extending understanding about a little known, but famous, deaf baseball player named William Hoy.	<b><i>Baseball's Greatest Players: 10 Baseball Biographies for New Readers</i></b> (Martin, 2022)	<b><i>The William Hoy Story: How a Deaf Baseball Player Changed the Game</i></b> (Churnin, 2016)
<b>Japanese Internment Camps:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective on Japanese internment camps by introducing/extending understanding of day-to-day life of Japanese Americans during World War II.	<b><i>Write to Me: Letters from Japanese American Children to the Librarian They Left Behind</i></b> (Grady, 2019)	<b><i>Baseball Saved Us</i></b> (Mochizuki, 1993)
<b>Women's Professional Baseball Team:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective on professional baseball by introducing/extending understanding of women as professional baseball players and highlighting Marcenia Lyle, the 1 <sup>st</sup> woman to play for a professional baseball team.	<b><i>Meet the Philadelphia Dolly Vardens: Inspired by the First African American Women's Professional Baseball Team</i></b> (Brinson, 2020)	<b><i>Catching the Moon: The Story of a Young Girl's Baseball Dream</i></b> (Hubbard, 2005)
<b>Women's Olympics:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective on women's Olympics by introducing/extending understanding of two, historic women Olympians: Lucille Godbold and Wilma Rudolph.	<b><i>Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the World's Fastest Woman</i></b> (Krull, 2000)	<b><i>Long-Armed Ludy and the First Women's Olympics</i></b> (Patrick, 2019)
<b>Professional Baseball:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective on professional baseball by introducing/extending understanding of one famous player, Joe DiMaggio, and one little known, female player, Jackie Mitchell.	<b><i>The Streak: How Joe DiMaggio Became America's Hero</i></b> (Rosenstock, 2014)	<b><i>Mighty Jackie: The Strike-Out Queen</i></b> (Moss, 2004)
<b>Baseball:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective on baseball by introducing/extending understanding about Josh Gibson, a famous, African American home run hitter and Bunny Taliaferro, a little known, but famous African American little boy named Bunny Taliaferro.	<b><i>Coming Home: A True Story of Josh Gibson, Baseball's Greatest Home Run Hitter</i></b> (Mellage, 1999)	<b><i>A Home Run for Bunny</i></b> (2013)
<b>Negro Baseball Leagues:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective by introducing/extending understanding on the differences between the Negro Baseball Leagues and the Major Leagues.	<b><i>A Negro League Scrapbook</i></b> (Weatherford, 2022)	<b><i>Leagues Apart: The Men and Times of the Negro Baseball Leagues</i></b> (Ritter, 1995)

<p><b>Professional Baseball:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective on professional baseball by introducing/extending understanding of two little known, but famous, historic stories. One story is about the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, and the other about a spy for the United States during World War II and playing professional baseball after the war.</p>	<p><i>Players in Pigtails</i> (Corey, 2003)</p>	<p><i>The Spy Who Played Baseball</i> (Jones, 2018)</p>
<p><b>Girls in Baseball:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective on girls in baseball by introducing/extending understanding two girls who are famous, but little known, for their groundbreaking athletic achievements.</p>	<p><i>Anybody's Game: Kathryn Johnston, the First Girl to Play Little League Baseball</i> (Lang, 2018)</p>	<p><i>Girl Wonder: A Baseball Story in Nine Innings</i> (Hopkinson, 2003)</p>

Table 2: Lewis and Clark

Topic	Text #1	Text #2
<p><b>Lewis &amp; Clark Expedition:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective by introducing/extending understanding about the important historical characters on the Lewis &amp; Clark expedition.</p>	<p><i>The Lewis &amp; Clark Expedition</i> (Houk, 1999)</p>	<p><i>The Journey of York: The Unsung Hero of the Lewis and Clark Expedition</i> (Davis, 2019)</p>
<p><b>Lewis &amp; Clark Expedition:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective by introducing/extending understanding about the important historical characters on the Lewis &amp; Clark expedition, both human and non-human.</p>	<p><i>How We Crossed the West: The Adventures of Lewis and Clark</i> (Schanzer, 2002)</p>	<p><i>York's Adventures with Lewis and Clark: An African American's Part in the Great Expedition</i> (Blumberg, 2003)</p>
<p><b>Lewis &amp; Clark Expedition:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective by introducing/extending understanding about the day-to-day life on the Lewis &amp; Clark expedition.</p>	<p><i>I Am Sacajawea, I Am York: Our Journey West with Lewis and Clark</i> (Murphy, 2005)</p>	<p><i>American Slave, American Hero: York of the Lewis and Clark Expedition</i> (Pringle, 2006)</p>
<p><b>Explorers &amp; Exploratory Tools:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective by introducing/extending understanding about the explorers and the tools they used on the Lewis &amp; Clark expedition.</p>	<p><i>The Lewis and Clark Expedition</i> (Peritano, 2010)</p>	<p><i>SeaMan: The Dog Who Explored the West with Lewis and Clark</i> (Karwoski, 2003)</p>
<p><b>Sacagawea:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective on one of the most important historical characters involved in the Lewis &amp; Clark expedition.</p>	<p><i>Lewis &amp; Clark</i> (Mulhall, 2017)</p>	<p><i>Seaman's Journal: On the Trail with Lewis and Clark</i> (Eubank, 2010)</p>
<p><b>Lewis &amp; Clark Expedition:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective by introducing/extending understanding about the day-to-day life on the Lewis &amp; Clark expedition.</p>	<p><i>The Lewis and Clark Trail: Now and Then</i> (Patent, 2002)</p>	<p><i>Lewis and Clark and Me: A Dog's Tale</i> (Myers, 2002)</p>
<p><b>Explorers &amp; Exploratory Tools:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective by introducing/extending understanding about the explorers and the tools they used on the Lewis &amp; Clark expedition.</p>	<p><i>Plants on the Trail with Lewis and Clark</i> (Patent, 2003)</p>	<p><i>Cooking on the Lewis and Clark Expedition</i> (Gunderson, 2000)</p>
<p><b>Sacagawea:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective on one of the most important historical characters involved in the Lewis &amp; Clark expedition.</p>	<p><i>Lewis and Clark: Explorers of the American West</i> (Kroll, 1994)</p>	<p><i>Lewis and Clark's Compass: What an Artifact Can Tell Us About the Historic Expedition</i> (Micklos, 2021)</p>
<p><b>Sacagawea:</b> These companion texts widen the perspective on one of the most important historical characters involved in the Lewis &amp; Clark expedition.</p>	<p><i>The Lewis &amp; Clark Expedition</i> (Domnauer, 2012)</p>	<p><i>What's So Great About Sacagawea?</i> (Rogers, 2014)</p>

*Sacagawea: Journey into the West* (Gunderson, 2006)

*Sacagawea* (Erdrich, 2003)

**Table 3: Social Studies**

Topic	Text #1	Text #2
<b>Japanese Internment Camps:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about Japanese Internment Camps in America during WWII.	<i>So Far from the Sea</i> (Bunting, 2009)	<i>Home of the Brave</i> (Say, 2002)
<b>Winnie the Pooh:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the true story behind the famous teddy bear created by A.A. Milne.	<i>Finding Winnie: The True Story of the World's Famous Bear</i> (Mattick, 2015)	<i>Winnie: The True Story of the Bear Who Inspired Winnie-the-Pooh</i> (Walker, 2015)
<b>Civil Rights Figures:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about two civil rights figures, one famous, Malcolm X, and one famous but little-known figure, Fannie Lou Hamer.	<i>Voice of Freedom, Fannie Lou Hamer: Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement</i> (Weatherford, 2015)	<i>Malcolm X: A Fire Burning Brightly</i> (Myers, 2003)
<b>Holocaust:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the holocaust from two children's perspectives.	<i>Rose Blanche</i> (Innocenti, 2011)	<i>A Picture Book of Anne Frank</i> (Adler, 1993)
<b>Migrant Workers:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about migrant workers, one famous, Cesar Chavez, and one famous, but little-known, Dolores Huerta.	<i>Dolores Huerta: A Hero to Migrant Workers</i> (Warren, 2012)	<i>Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez</i> (Krull, 2003)
<b>Decoders:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about codes and coding during WWII.	<i>Alan Turing: The Power of Curiosity</i> (Valenti, 2021)	<i>The Unbreakable Code</i> (Hunter, 2007)
<b>Nazi Resistance:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about Nazi resistance during WWII from two different European countries.	<i>The Yellow Star</i> (Deedy)	<i>The Whispering Town</i> (Elvgren, 2014)
<b>Boston Tea Party:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the Boston Tea Party and one famous child in the Boston Tea Party.	<i>The Boston Tea Party</i> (Freedman, 2013)	<i>Crispus Atticks: Hero of the Boston Massacre</i> (Beier, 2003)
<b>Civil War:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about warfare in the water during the Civil War by a battleship, The Monitor, and a submarine, H.L. Hunley.	<i>The Monitor: Civil War Battleship</i> (Thompson, 2003)	<i>Secrets of a Civil War Submarine: Solving the Mystery of the H.L. Hunley</i> (Walker, 2023)
<b>Civil Rights:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the actions of a famous person, Harriet Tubman, and a famous but little-known person, Henry Brown, to gain freedom.	<i>Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom</i> (Weatherford, 2006)	<i>Box: Henry Brown Mails Himself to Freedom</i> (Weatherford, 2020)
<b>Pirates:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about a famous male pirate, Blackbeard, and a famous but little-known female pirate, Zheng Yi Sao.	<i>Blackbeard the Pirate King</i> (Lewis, 2006)	<i>Pirate Queen: A Story of Zheng Yi Sao</i> (Becker, 2020)

<b>Revolutionary Spies:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about famous female spies during the Revolutionary War.	<b><i>Culpers, Codes, and Quakers: Female Spies of the Revolutionary War</i></b> (Ryan, 2016)	<b><i>The Scarlet Stockings Spy</i></b> (Noble, 2004)
<b>American Revolution Heroes:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about famous American Revolution female spies, and one famous but little-known spy, Sarah Edmonds.	<b><i>Great Women of the American Revolution</i></b> (Hall, 2012)	<b><i>Nurse, Soldier, Spy: The Story of Sarah Edmonds, a War Hero</i></b> (Moss, 2016)
<b>Buffalo Soldiers:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about Buffalo Soldiers.	<b><i>From Slave to Soldier</i></b> (Hopkinson, 2007)	<b><i>Buffalo Soldiers: Heroes of the American West</i></b> (Baker, 2015)
<b>Abraham Lincoln:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the life and times of Abraham Lincoln.	<b><i>Young Abe Lincoln: The Frontier Days 1809-1837</i></b> (Harness, 2008)	<b><i>My Best Friend Abe Lincoln: A Tale of Two Boys from Indiana</i></b> (Bloch, 2011)
<b>American Civil War:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about two famous but little known child soldiers during the Civil War.	<b><i>Johnny Reb: The Confederate Soldier in the Civil War</i></b> (Books, 1993)	<b><i>Johnny Clem's Civil War Story</i></b> (Marsico, 2018)
<b>American Revolution:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about warfare in water during the Revolutionary War, one a battleship, one a submarine.	<b><i>The Monitor vs. The Merrimac: Ironclads at War</i></b> (Abnett, 2006)	<b><i>American Turtle Submarine: The Best-Kept Secret of the American Revolution</i></b> (Lefkowitz, 2012)
<b>World War II:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the bravery and patriotism of WWII pilots, especially The Tuskegee Airmen.	<b><i>You Wouldn't Want to Be a World War II Pilot</i></b> (Graham, 2009)	<b><i>The Tuskegee Airmen Story</i></b> (Homan, 2002)
<b>Animals Soldiers:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about two famous but little-known animal soldiers, one a horse and one a donkey.	<b><i>Bunny the Brave War Horse</i></b> (Macleod, 2014)	<b><i>The Donkey of Gallipoli: A True Story of Courage in World War I</i></b> (Greenwood, 2008)
<b>Animal Soldiers:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about two famous but little-known animal soldiers, one a dog and one a horse.	<b><i>Stubby: The Dog Soldier and World War I Hero</i></b> (Hoena, 2014)	<b><i>Sgt. Reckless the War Horse: Korean War Hero</i></b> (Higgins, 2014)
<b>Animal Soldiers:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about two famous but little-known animal soldiers, one a pigeon and one a dog.	<b><i>Cher Ami: Based on the World War I Legend of the Fearless Pigeon</i></b> (Potter, 2022)	<b><i>Rags: Hero Dog of WWI: A True Story</i></b> (Raven, 2014)
<b>Statue of Liberty:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the statue of liberty from two different but complimentary perspectives.	<b><i>The Story of the Statue of Liberty</i></b> (Maestro & Maestro, 1989)	<b><i>Emma's Poem</i></b> (Glaser & Nivola, 2013)
<b>American Revolutionary War Soldiers:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the life of an American Revolutionary war soldier and one famous but little-known female war soldier, Deborah Sampson.	<b><i>How to Be a Revolutionary War Soldier</i></b> (Ratliff, 2006)	<b><i>Cloaked in Courage: Uncovering Deborah Sampson, Patriot Soldier</i></b> (Anderson, 2022)
<b>Martin Luther King:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the life, work, and funeral of Martin Luther King.	<b><i>Belle, the Last Mule at Gee's Bend</i></b> (Ramsey & Stroud, 2016)	<b><i>The Cart That Carried Martin</i></b> (Bunting, 2018)

<b>Black Enslaved Heroes:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the history of black enslaved heroes and one famous but little-known hero, Ona Judge.	<b><i>Black Heroes of the American Revolution</i></b> (Davis, 1992)	<b><i>Never Caught, the Story of Ona Judge: George Washington's Courageous /Slave Who Dared to Run Away</i></b> (Dunbar, 2020)
<b>Underground Railroad:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the underground railroad and about a famous figure, Harriet Tubman and a famous but little-known figure, Henry "Box" Brown.	<b><i>Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky</i></b> (Ringgold, 1995)	<b><i>Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad</i></b> (Levine, 2007)
<b>Civil Rights:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about civil rights and a about a famous figure, Rosa Parks, and a famous but little-known figure, Claudia Colvin.	<b><i>Rosa</i></b> (Giovanni, 2007)	<b><i>Claudia Colvin: Twice Toward Justice</i></b> (Hoose, 2010)
<b>World War I:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the life and challenges of soldiers in WWI and how the war changed modern warfare.	<b><i>How WWI Changed Modern Warfare</i></b> (Professor, 2021)	<b><i>The Letter Home</i></b> (Decker, 2009)
<b>Historic Aviators:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about historic aviators, two famous, Wilbur and Orville Wright, and one famous but little known, Katherine Stinson Otero.	<b><i>First to Fly: How Wilbur &amp; Orville Wright Invented the Airplane</i></b> (Busby, 2002)	<b><i>Katherine Stinson Otero: High Flyer</i></b> (Petrick, 2006)
<b>Historic Women Aviators:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about two famous but little-known women aviators, Ruth Law and Harriet Quimby.	<b><i>Fearless Flyer: Ruth Law and Her Flying Machine</i></b> (2016)	<b><i>Brave Harriet: The First Woman to Fly the English Channel</i></b> (Moss, 2001)
<b>Civil War:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about	<b><i>Drummer Boy</i></b> (Turner, 1998)	<b><i>Red Legs: A Drummer Boy of the Civil War</i></b> (Lewin, 2001)
<b>Niagara Falls:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about two famous, but little-known women who went over Niagara Falls in barrels.	<b><i>Maggie's Adventure: I'm Going Over Niagara Falls</i></b> (D'Arcangelo & Kirchmyer, 2018)	<b><i>Queen of the Falls</i></b> (van Allsburg, 2010)
<b>American Revolutionary War:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the American Revolutionary War and about a famous, but little-known female soldier who fought bravely during the war.	<b><i>Molly Pitcher: Young American Patriot</i></b> (Glaser, 2006)	<b><i>They Called Her Molly Pitcher</i></b> (Rockwell, 2002)
<b>Martin Luther King:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the life, times, and funeral of Martin Luther King.	<b><i>Belle, The Last Mule at Gee's Bend: A Civil Rights Story</i></b> (Ramsey & Stroud, 2016)	<b><i>That Cart That Carried Martin</i></b> (Bunting, 2013)
<b>Musicians:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about two internationally recognized musicians, one famous, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and one famous, but little-known, Chevalier de Saint-George.	<b><i>That's My Piano, Sir!: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart</i></b> (Gerhard, 2021)	<b><i>The Other Mozart: The Life of the Famous Chevalier de Saint-George</i></b> (Brewster, 2007)

Table 4: Science

Topic	Text #1	Text #2
<b>Galileo:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about Galileo and his inventions and discoveries.	<i>Starry Messenger: A Book Depicting the Life of a Famous Scientist, Mathematician, Astronomer, Philosopher, Physicist</i> (Sis, 1996)	<i>Galileo's Treasure Box</i> (Brighton, 1987)
<b>Stars:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about the stars. One text is non-fiction, the other fiction, highlighting the story of Hypatia and her work on numbers and stars.	<i>Stars</i> (Simon, 2006)	<i>Of Numbers and Stars: The Story of Hypatia</i> (Love, 2006)
<b>Archimedes:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about Archimedes and experimental design.	<i>Archimedes: Ancient Greek Mathematician</i> (Keating, 2002)	<i>Mr. Archimedes Bath</i> (Allen, 2001)
<b>Big Bang:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about the Big Bang	<i>It Started with a Big Bang: The Origin of Earth, You, and Everything Else</i> (Bal, 2019)	<i>Born with a Bang: The Universe Tells Our Cosmic Story</i> (Morgan, 2002)
<b>Oceanographers:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about one famous oceanographer, Jacques Cousteau, and famous, but little-known oceanographer, Sylvia Earle.	<i>Manfish: A Story of Jacques Cousteau</i> (Berne, 2015)	<i>Life in the Ocean: The Story of Oceanographer Sylvia Earle</i> (Nivola, 2012)
<b>Astronauts:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about women astronauts, one famous, Sally Ride, and one famous, but little-known, Mae Jemison.	<i>Astronaut and Physicist Sally Ride</i> (Goldstein, 2018)	<i>Mae C. Jemison</i> (Pincus, 2019)
<b>Astronaut:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about famous women scientists, and one famous, but little-known astronaut, Ellen Ochoa.	<i>She Persisted in Science: Brilliant Women Who Made a Difference</i> (Clinton, 2022)	<i>The Astronaut with a Song for the Stars: The Story of Dr. Ellen Ochoa</i> (Mosca, 2019)
<b>Plate Tectonics:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about plate tectonics and a famous pioneer of plate tectonics, Alfred Wegener.	<i>The Island That Moved: How Sifting Forces Shape Our Earth</i> (Hooper, 2004)	<i>Alfred Wegener: Pioneer of Plate Tectonics</i> (Young, 2010)
<b>DNA:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about DNA, Gregor Mendel, and experimental design.	<i>Grow: Secrets of Our DNA</i> (Davies,	<i>Gregor Mendel: The Friar Who Grew Peas</i> (Bardoe, 2006)
<b>Albert Einstein:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about	<i>Albert Einstein</i> (Inspired Inner Genius, 2021)	<i>Alfie's First Word: A Tale Inspired by Albert Einstein's Childhood</i> (Tourville, 2014)
<b>Inventors:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about the accomplishments and the competitions between two famous inventors, Thomas Edison and Nikola Tesla.	<i>A Wizard from the Start: The Incredible Boyhood and Amazing Inventions of Thomas Edison</i> (Brown, 2010)	<i>Electrical Wizard: How Nikola Tesla Lit Up the World</i> (Rusch, 2013)
<b>Wireless Communication:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about wireless communication.	<i>Making Contact!: Marconi Goes Wireless</i> (Kulling, 2013)	<i>Radio Boy</i> (Denslow, 1995)

<b>Butterflies and Metamorphosis:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about butterflies, metamorphosis, and the famous, but little-known, scientist, Maria Merian.	<b><i>Butterfly Boy</i></b> (Kroll, 2002)	<b><i>Summer Birds: The Butterflies of Maria Merian</i></b> (Engle, 2010)
<b>Comets:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about comets, and the famous, but little known, female astronomer, Maria Mitchell.	<b><i>Famous Comets and Asteroids in Our Solar System</i></b> (Piffikus, 2016)	<b><i>Maria's Comet</i></b> (Hopkinson, 1999)
<b>Lunar Landing:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about the first lunar landing, and Margaret Hamilton, the scientist who saved the first lunar landing.	<b><i>The First Lunar Landing</i></b> (Fradin, 2010)	<b><i>Margaret and the Moon: How Margaret Hamilton Saved the First Lunar Landing</i></b> (Robbins, 2017)
<b>Atomic Bomb:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about the development and use of the atomic bomb in World War II.	<b><i>The Secret Project</i></b> (Winter, 2017)	<b><i>Faithful Elephants</i></b> (Tsuchiya, 1997)
<b>Nuclear Fission:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about nuclear fission, one famous nuclear scientist, Albert Einstein, and one famous, but little-known nuclear scientist, Lise Meitner.	<b><i>The Story of Albert Einstein: A Biography Book for New Readers</i></b> (Katz, 2020)	<b><i>Lise Meitner: Had the Right Vision about Nuclear</i></b> (Venezia, 2010)
<b>Fossils:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about fossils and one famous, but little-known paleontologist, Mary Anning.	<b><i>All About Fossils: Discovering Dinosaurs and Other Clues to the Past</i></b> (Crane, 2021)	<b><i>The Fossil Girl</i></b> (Brighton, 1999)
<b>Fossils:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about the science of fossils, and a famous, but little-known paleontologist, Mary Leakey.	<b><i>Where Do Fossils Come From? How Do We Find Them? Archaeology for Kids</i></b> (Bobo's Little Brainiac Book, 2016)	<b><i>Fossil Huntress: Mary Leakey, Paleontologist</i></b> (Diehn, 2019)
<b>Charles Darwin:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about Charles Darwin, Theory of Evolution, and Natural Selection.	<b><i>Animals Charles Darwin Saw</i></b> (Markle, 2009)	<b><i>The Mystery of Darwin's Frog</i></b> (Crump, 2013)
<b>Charles Darwin:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about Charles Darwin, scientist and father.	<b><i>The Tree of Life: Charles Darwin</i></b> (Sis, 2003)	<b><i>The Bumblebee Hunter: Inspired by the Life &amp; Experiments of Charles Darwin and His Children</i></b> (Hopkinson, 2010)
<b>Moon:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about the moon and science as evidence not belief.	<b><i>When We Walked on the Moon</i></b> (Long, 2019)	<b><i>No One Walks on My Father's Moon</i></b> (1996)
<b>Pluto:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about the discovery of Pluto.	<b><i>The Man Who Discovered Pluto</i></b> (Dubowski)	<b><i>Pluto's Secret: An Icy World's Tale of Discovery</i></b> (Weitekamp & DeVorkin)
<b>DNA:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about DNA and the scientists who discovered the phenomenon.	<b><i>James Watson and Fricis Crick</i></b> (Annis)	<b><i>Masterminds: Rosalind Franklin</i></b> (Howell)

<b>Imprinting:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about Konrad Lorenz, the scientist who pioneered the concept of imprinting in animal behavior.	<i>Goose Family Book</i> (Kalas, 1991)	<i>The Goose Man: The Story of Konrad Lorenz</i> (Greenstein, 2009)
<b>Gravity:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about the concept of gravity.	<i>The Day Gravity Goes Loco</i> (Maloney, 2016)	<i>Gravity</i> (Chin, 2014)
<b>Katherine Johnson:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about the life and work of Katherine Johnson, the scientist and mathematician who put astronauts on the moon.	<i>One Step Further: My Story of Math, the Moon, and a Lifelong Mission</i> (Johnson, 2021)	<i>Counting on Katherine: How Katherine Johnson Put Astronauts on the Moon</i> (Becker, 2018)
<b>Galileo:</b> These companion texts can introduce/extend understanding about Galileo and his inventions and discoveries.	<i>Starry Messenger: A Book Depicting the Life of a Famous Scientist, Mathematician, Astronomer, Philosopher, Physicist</i> (Sis, 1996)	<i>Galileo's Treasure Box</i> (Brighton, 1987)

**Table 5: Mathematics**

Topic	Text #1	Text #2
<b>International Mathematicians:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about two famous, but little known, mathematicians.	<i>Nothing Stopped Sophie: The Story of Unshakable Mathematician Sophie Germain</i> (Bardoe, 2018)	<i>Maryam's Magic: The Story of Mathematician Maryam Mirzakhani</i> (Reid, 2021)
<b>International Mathematicians:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about two international mathematics, one famous, the other little known.	<i>Pythagoras</i> (Klepis, 2017)	<i>The Boy Who Loved Math: The Improbable Life of Paul Erdos</i> (Heiligman, 2013)
<b>International Coders:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about coding and two famous international code breakers.	<i>Alan Turing and the Power of Curiosity</i> (Valenti, 2021)	<i>Grace Hopper: Queen of Computer Code</i> (Wallmark, 2017)
<b>Measurement:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about measurement.	<i>The Know-Nonsense Guide to Measurements: An Awesomely Fun Guide to How Things are Measured</i> (Fiedler, 2017)	<i>The Librarian Who Measured the Earth</i> (Hawkes, 1994)
<b>Computer Programming:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about computer programming, highlighting a famous, but little, known computer programmer.	<i>Computer Coding: An Introduction to Computer Programming</i> (DK, 2014)	<i>Ada Byron Lovelace and the Thinking Machine</i> (Wallmark, 2015)
<b>Tangrams:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about tangrams based on a traditional fairy tale.	<i>The Three Pigs</i> (Weisner, 2012)	<i>Three Pigs, One Wolf, and Seven Magic Shapes</i> (Maccarone, 1997)
<b>Counting:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about counting.	<i>The History of Counting</i> (Schmandt-Besserat, 1999)	<i>Counting with an Abacus: Learning the Place Value of Ones, Tens, and Hundreds</i> (Murphy, 2004)

<b>Math Squares:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about Benjamin Franklin and math squares.	<b><i>A Picturebook of Benjamin Franklin</i></b> (Adler, 2018)	<b><i>Ben Franklin and the Magic Squares</i></b> (Murphy, 2001)
<b>Cartesian Coordinate System:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the Cartesian Coordinate System.	<b><i>Mister Descartes and His Evil Genius</i></b> (Mongin, 2016)	<b><i>The Fly on the Ceiling</i></b> (Glass, 1998)
<b>Dimensionality:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about dimensionality.	<b><i>The Flatland Dialogues</i></b> (Sayre, 2018)	<b><i>Flatland</i></b> (Sayre & Emberley, 2013)
<b>Fibonacci:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about Fibonacci and the Fibonacci number system.	<b><i>Blockhead: The Life of Fibonacci</i></b> (D'Agnese, 2010)	<b><i>The Rabbit Problem</i></b> (Gravett, 2009)
<b>Fibonacci:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about Fibonacci and the Fibonacci number system.	<b><i>Growing Patterns: Fibonacci Numbers in Science</i></b> (Campbell, 2010)	<b><i>Wild Fibonacci: Nature's Secret Code Revealed</i></b> (Hulme, 2010)
<b>Problem Solving:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about problem solving.	<b><i>M.C. Escher Pop-Ups</i></b> (McCarthy, 2011)	<b><i>Palazzo Inverso</i></b> (Johnson, 2010)
<b>Probability:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about probability.	<b><i>That's a Possibility!: A Book About What Might Happen</i></b> (Goldstone, 2013)	<b><i>Probably Pistachio</i></b> (Murphy, 2001)
<b>Probability:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about probability.	<b><i>Bad Luck Brad: Probability</i></b> (Herman, 2006)	<b><i>A Very Improbably Story</i></b> (Edward Einhorn, 2008)
<b>Graphing:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about graphing.	<b><i>Groovy Graphing: Quadrant One and Beyond</i></b> (Arias, 2019)	<b><i>Tiger Math: Learning to Graph From a Baby Tiger</i></b> (Nagda & Bickel, 2000)
<b>Graphing:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about graphing.	<b><i>Lemonade for Sale</i></b> (Murphy, 1998)	<b><i>The Great Graph Contest</i></b> (Leedy, 2005)
<b>Tessellations:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about tessellations.	<b><i>Giraffe Pattern and Others Like It: Tessellations in Nature</i></b> (Bine-Stock, 2021)	<b><i>Toads and Tessellations: A Math Adventure</i></b> (Morrisette, 2012)
<b>Fractions:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about fractions.	<b><i>Fractions in Disguise</i></b> (Einhorn, 2014)	<b><i>Polar Bear Math: Learning about Fractions from Klondike and Snow</i></b> (Nagda & Bickel, 2004)
<b>Multiplication:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about multiplication.	<b><i>The Best of Times: Math Strategies That Multiply</i></b> (Tang, 2002)	<b><i>Multiplying Menace: The Revenge of Rumpelstiltskin</i></b> (Calvert, 2006)
<b>Division:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about division.	<b><i>The Great Divide</i></b> (Dodds, 1999)	<b><i>Cheetah Math: Learning about Division from Baby Cheetahs</i></b> (Nagda, 2004)
<b>Doubling:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about doubling.	<b><i>The King's Chessboard</i></b> (Birch, 1988)	<b><i>One Grain of Rice: A Mathematical Folktale</i></b> (Demi, 1997)

<b>Polygons:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about polygons.	<b><i>The Greedy Triangle</i></b> (Burns, 1994)	<b><i>Shape Up! Fun with Triangles and Other Polygons</i></b> (Adler, 1998)
<b>Estimation:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about estimation.	<b><i>Great Estimations</i></b> (Goldstone, 2010)	<b><i>Jellybeans for Sale</i></b> (1996)
<b>Pi:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about Pi.	<b><i>Happy Pi Day to You</i></b> (Worth, 2020)	<b><i>Sir Cumference and the Dragon of Pi: A Math Adventure</i></b> (Neuschwander, 1999)
<b>Perimeter:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about perimeter.	<b><i>Perimeter, Area, and Volume: A Monster Book of Dimensions</i></b> (Adler, 2013)	<b><i>Spaghetti and Meatballs for All! A Mathematical Story</i></b> (Burns, 1997)
<b>Circles:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about circles and circumference as a measurement of an attribute of a circle.	<b><i>Circles</i></b> (Adler, 2016)	<b><i>Sir Cumference and the First Round Table</i></b> (Neuschwander, 1997)
<b>Multiplication:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about multiplication.	<b><i>Minnie's Diner: A Multiplying Menu</i></b> (Dodds, 2007)	<b><i>Amanda Bean's Amazing Dream: A Mathematical Story</i></b> (Neuschwander, 1998)
<b>Angles:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about different kinds of mathematical angles.	<b><i>Right, Acute and Obtuse Angles: Geometry for Kids</i></b> (Professor, 2017)	<b><i>The Great Knight of Angleland: A Math Adventure</i></b> (Neuschwander, 2001)
<b>Code Breaking:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about two famous, but little known, code breakers.	<b><i>Code Breaker and Mathematician Alan Turing</i></b> (Schwartz, 2018)	<b><i>Code Breaker, Spy Hunter: How Elizabeth Friedman Changed the Course of Two World Wars</i></b> (Wallmark, 2021)
<b>Mathematics and Wartime:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the use of mathematics during wartime.	<b><i>The H.L. Hunley Submarine: History and Mystery from the Civil War</i></b> (Hawk, 2017)	<b><i>The Girl with a Mind for Math: The Story of Raye Montague</i></b> (Mosca, 2020)
<b>Algebra:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about algebra.	<b><i>Algebra and Geometry: Anything but Square</i></b> (Green, 2011)	<b><i>Mystery Math: A First Book of Algebra</i></b> (Adler, 2011)
<b>Metric System:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about the metric system.	<b><i>Caveman Teach Children Metric System</i></b> (Rammage, 2022)	<b><i>The Metric System</i></b> (Adler, 2022)
<b>Pythagoras:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about Pythagoras.	<b><i>The Encounter with Pythagoras</i></b> (dos Santos, 2020)	<b><i>Pythagoras and the Ratios: A Math Adventure</i></b> (Ellis, 2010)
<b>Measurement:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about measurement.	<b><i>The Know-Nonsense Guide to Measurements: An Awesomely Fun Guide to How Things are Measured</i></b> (Fiedler, 2017)	<b><i>How Long or How Wide: A Measuring Guide</i></b> (Cleary, 2009)
<b>Big Numbers:</b> These companion texts introduce/extend understanding about big numbers.	<b><i>Millions, Billions, and Trillions: Understanding Big Numbers</i></b> (Adler, 2013)	<b><i>Mind-Boggling Numbers</i></b> (Rosen, 2016)

# Igniting the Fire Within: Culturally Relevant Expository Writing

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents the findings of an action research study that explored the impact of culturally relevant writing instruction in an English classroom. Research practitioners have used terms such as *real-life* (Moore-Hart, 2005), *innovative* (Kinloch, 2009), and *culturally relevant writing pedagogy* (Winn & Johnson, 2011) to denote the type of experiential and relevant writing instruction that should be occurring in classrooms. These terms are synonymous because they require students to leverage their culture, perspectives, interests, and personal experiences as inspiration for writing. The discussion begins by presenting the literature on culturally relevant literacy instruction. Then, the author discusses the steps for implementing this pedagogical approach and provides key insights on the subject matter.

## KEYWORDS

writing instruction; culturally relevant writing pedagogy; culturally relevant literacy instruction

**A**s a lifelong learner and English Language Arts educator, I have always wanted my students to have a passion for writing. One of the ways that I developed my students' writing knowledge and skills was through culturally relevant writing instruction. Over the past 18 years, I have taught students who had negative attitudes and dispositions regarding writing. Many of the students I served were reluctant to engage in class, reluctant to read, and, more importantly, reluctant to write.

I often thought to myself: *How do I ignite my students' passion for writing?* When I reflect on my writing passion, I equate it to that of a fire. For me, this is a powerful juxtaposition because, in the right environment, a fire is very difficult to put out. In the same way, I created an instructional environment that converged around student choice and culturally relevant texts, fueling my students' passion for writing. This article presents the findings of an action research study that explored the impact of using culturally relevant writing pedagogy to build students' expository writing skills. In this paper, I discuss how I leveraged this pedagogical approach to create a space for students to take on issues reflecting their cultural, social, and personal experiences. By facilitating relevant instruction, I legitimized students' voices and ignited a fire for writing that could not be extinguished.

The diversity in today's schools requires that teachers use diverse pedagogy strategies to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Researchers have cited writing as a major educational issue in the United States. At the elementary level, there is a strong emphasis on learning to write (Graham et al., 2013). At the secondary level, the writing instruction does not challenge students to make connections with issues or show depth and breadth of knowledge (Applebee & Langer, 2011).

To increase the writing capacity of students, particularly students of color, there is a need for more culturally relevant approaches to writing. Winn and Johnson (2011) noted,

Writing is a natural fit for pairing culturally relevant pedagogy to create meaningful learning opportunities for all students. Though teachers must be strategic and deliberate in ways in which they consider content, curriculum, and culturally relevant pedagogy right alongside writing instruction and assessment, doing so can have a positive effect on the educational outcomes in our classrooms. (p. 87)

According to these scholars, culturally relevant writing instruction challenges students to write for authentic audiences, leverages the ideas, voices, and perspectives of students, and inspires them to engage critically with the world.

### Culturally Relevant Literacy Instruction

Literacy is defined as “the ability and willingness to use reading and writing to construct meaning from printed text in ways that meet the requirement in a particular social context” (as cited in Callins, 2004, p. 3). Culturally relevant literacy instruction “bridges the gap between the school and the world of the student and is consistent with the values of the student’s own culture” (as cited in Callins, 2004, p. 4). Literacy instruction that is culturally situated places emphasis on using reading and writing strategies that are relevant to the culture, background experiences, and frames of reference of students. Researchers (Au, 2001; Irizarry, 2009; Johnson & Eubanks, 2015; Murphy & Murphy, 2016; Rozansky, 2010; Winn & Johnson, 2011) have found that one method for implementing culturally relevant literacy instruction is through integrating texts that connect to student’s cultural background and experiences. Au (2001) maintained that integrating texts that connect with students’ lives “may help them gain insight about themselves, their families, and discover the value of their own experiences” (p. 7).

Similarly, Irizarry (2009) found that one teacher’s literacy instruction for African American and Latino students involved the use of rap music. Students were able to use their language preferences, such as African American Vernacular English and Spanish language, to craft raps about their identities and dreams for the future. He suggested that using popular culture music and communication practices congruent with the lives of students increased students’ writing capacity. Rozansky (2010) provides another example of integrating culturally relevant texts in the classroom. She conducted a case study that explored an 8th-grade reading teacher’s understanding and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom. This was seen through the teacher providing students the opportunity to discuss personal tragedies, such as a student’s cousin who was shot by a police officer, and selecting articles that connected to students’ lives. These articles consisted of topics about unfairness, lack of opportunity, or various types of oppression that connected to students’ experiences.

Meanwhile, other researchers (Johnson & Eubanks, 2015) explored the impact of anthem essays in an 8th-grade middle school classroom. The anthem lesson diverged from traditional writing assignments because it focused on students analyzing anthems such as *The Star-Spangled Banner* and *Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing* and then choosing contemporary anthems such as Modest Mouse’s *Float On*, Janelle Monae’s *Queen*, and Beyonce’s *Run the World* and then analyzing how these texts connected to their identity, experiences, or cultural background. The authors found that when teachers connect writing instruction to texts aligned with students’ experiences, it provides rich opportunities for them to learn about themselves, learn about others, and make meaning of the world.

Murphy and Murphy (2016) agreed that reading should be used as a conduit for building student writing proficiency. The authors conducted a mixed methods study to explore the impact of culturally relevant approaches to writing instruction with Latino students in a pre-collegiate English program. The authors used culturally relevant texts written by Latino authors to build students' writing capacity in (1) descriptive, (2) narration, (3) exemplification, and (4) persuasive writing. Texts were chosen based on the author's Latino heritage and relevance to the lives of the students. The text needed to be 1,000 to 1,800 words. Students read the text associated with each genre of writing and created an original piece of writing using the text read as a model. The authors discovered that student enthusiasm increased, and they felt the texts were relevant to their lives and experiences. All things considered, the literature in this section gives credence to the importance of using culturally relevant approaches to facilitate writing instruction. The sections that follow will make connections to the literature in this section and explain how culturally relevant writing instruction can be utilized to build students' expository writing skills.

### **Culturally Relevant Writing in Action**

**Step 1: Cultural Questionnaire.** One of the initial steps required to enact culturally relevant writing involved students completing a cultural questionnaire (Figure 1). The cultural questionnaire was a critical component of the writing process for two important reasons. Firstly, I wanted to build my cultural competency and learn about my students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, customs, and their family makeup, as well as understand more about their country of origin. Secondly, I wanted to *empower* students and help them *see their culture* (Milner, 2011) as an asset for writing about content and topics important to them.

Before the beginning of the writing lesson, students answered the cultural questions independently or interviewed a member of their family who was familiar with their cultural background. I encouraged my students to interview family members because I wanted them to begin to think about how their family culture and history influenced their cultural sense of self (Heuman, 2009). Throughout the unit, students were encouraged to leverage this reflective tool as a resource for creating their writing products. Student responses from the cultural questionnaire provided rich descriptions of their cultural background, and students leveraged the content as a resource for creating their expository essays.

**Figure 1: Cultural Questionnaire**

**Instructions:** Answer the questions that deal with your culture, social, and personal experiences. It may be beneficial to consult someone in your immediate family (i.e., mother or father) or extended family (i.e., grandmother, grandfather, uncle, aunt, cousin) if you have difficulties answering any of the questions. Work carefully! Make sure you respond to each question in 5–7 sentences.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. What is your definition of "culture?"   | 15. Do you have any eating habits/rituals that are specific to your culture?   |
| 2. How do you define "family?"   | 16. Define and describe the most important (or most celebrated) holiday of your culture.   |
| 3. Who holds the most "status" in your family? Why?  | 17. If you are from a culture that speaks English as a second language, do you speak your native language? If not, why? If so, will you teach your native language to any children you have? |
| 4. How do you define success?  | 18. How are displays of affection viewed in your culture?  |
| 5. Do you consider your parents to be successful?  | 19. What is considered most disrespectful in your culture?   |
| 6. How important is education in your family?  | 20. What is considered most respectful in your culture?  |
| 7. Is punctuality important to you? Why or why not?  | 21. What would you say is, from your perspective, the most held misconception about people of your culture?  |
| 8. What is the most important meal of the day?   | 22. Have you ever experienced racism? In what form?  |
| 9. Do you eat foods that are indigenous to your culture? Why or why not? If you answered yes, name some of the foods that you eat. If you answered no, what types of foods do you eat? |  |

10. Did you ever live with your grandparents or extended family?	23. What can be done about racism and prejudice, in your opinion?
11. Do you actively participate in organized religion?	24. Do young people today have a sense of culture?
12. How important is religion in your family? Why?	25. Have you ever felt excluded based on your Culture or Gender?
13. If religion is important in your family, do you plan to pass this on to your children? Why or why not?	26. Do you remember excluding others based on Culture or Gender?
14. Are the roles of men and women specifically defined in your family? If so, what are they?	

**Step 2: Writing Interest Form.** The next step in engaging in relevant instruction involved assessing student writing interests. The writing interest form (Winn & Johnson, 2011) was used to gather information about students' reading/writing preferences, the last text students read, activities they participated in and outside of school, and they ranked their writing preferences for expository writing on a scale from 1–3. This was a valuable tool because it supported students in making sure that the texts selected were culturally relevant for the students in the English I course. The open-ended questions in the survey provided rich details about students' reading preferences, and the ranking of the writing preferences provided numerical data so that the percentage of students who preferred expository writing could be determined.

Data from the writing interest form revealed that 12.6% ( $n = 8$ ) of students identified expository writing as their first preference, 39.6% ( $n = 25$ ) of students identified expository writing as their second preference, and 47% ( $n = 30$ ) of students identified expository writing as their third preference. The writing interest form was an essential component of the research study as it provided critical data that supported the researcher in selecting culturally relevant texts for students.

**Step 3: Lesson Planning.** After assessing student writing interest, the next step involved planning for the lesson. Lemov (2021) maintains that teachers sometimes prioritize learning activities instead of first framing the objective. Researchers (Kaplan et al., 2017; Laidlaw-Alamguer, 2012) contend that deconstructing a standard to develop mastery objectives is an essential component of lesson planning, and engaging in this process ensures that lesson objectives are aligned with the learning standard.

The standard was identified from the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). English I is an End of Course Test (EOCT) in the state of Texas. At the time of the study, E1.15A was a high-leverage standard that students were required to master at the ninth-grade level. The following components were deconstructed: (1) knowledge/skill, (2) genre, (3) verbs, and (4) content knowledge. Table 1 provides an example of the deconstruction process.

**Table 1: Deconstructed Standard**

Standard	Knowledge & Skills	Genre	Verb(s)	Content
<b>E1.15A</b> Students write expository and procedural or work-related texts to communicate ideas and information to specific audiences for specific purposes.	Writing/Expository and Procedural Texts	Expository	Write Communicate	Expository, Procedural, Work-related Texts Ideas, Information, Audience, Purpose

Once the deconstructing standard process was completed, the next step involved selecting texts that were culturally relevant to the lives of the students. Students chose one text from 10 expository options to read and analyze. Data from the writing interest form indicated that 72% of students preferred reading online materials. As a result, the text options consisted of both text and multimedia videos. Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) explored the leisure reading habits of urban adolescents. The authors found that students in the study preferred reading on the internet and suggested that the definition of reading must change to include websites, e-books, e-mail, discussion boards, chat rooms, instant messaging, and listservs. Fisher and Frey (2018) reported that using videos as a tool for writing in the classroom provides students the opportunity to use their critical thinking skills and content knowledge to understand, analyze, and evaluate the world around them.

In another study, Shimray et al. (2015) reported on students' mobile reading habits and how students have shifted from print to online texts. The authors posited that reading on the internet is a popular practice for young people because they are constantly spending their time reading electronic resources as well as scanning and surfing the internet. Reading online is a preference because the development of digital mass media has low cost, ease of access, and up-to-date content. Seok and DaCosta (2017) explored the gender differences, propensity, and preferences for digital and printed text. The authors maintained that the advancement of technology and the convenience of smartphones have provided a variety of options for content to reach students. In addition to providing students access to a variety of texts, the researchers explain that online reading has a positive impact on learning outcomes. Table 2 provides a list of expository text options provided for students.

**Table 2: Expository Text Options**






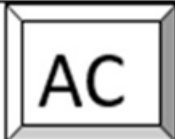
Author/TV Studio	Title of Text/Video Media
Soledad O'Brien	<i>Latino in America</i>
Good Morning America/ PBS	<i>Two Men Interviewed/Police Chief News Conference</i>
Allison Graham	<i>How Social Media Makes Us Unsocial</i>
Debbie Sterling	<i>Inspiring the Next Generation of Engineers</i>
Joseph Weber	<i>House to Vote on School Gun Violence Bill</i>
Jon Pareles and Zachary Woolfe	<i>Kendrick Lamar Music Pulitzer Prize</i>
Rumeana Jahangir	<i>How does Black Hair Reflect Black History</i>
Rozina Sabur	<i>Ramadan 2018: How Muslims Celebrate the Revelation of the Koran</i>
Marilyn Price-Mitchel	<i>The Psychology of Youth Sports</i>
Monsy Alvarado	<i>As Trump Crackdown Continues, More Immigrants are Choosing to Self-Deport</i>

**Step 4: Lesson Delivery.** The first step in preparing students for culturally relevant writing involved them selecting an expository text based on their lives, experiences, or cultural background. After this, students who selected the same text were assigned in pairs to annotate their

text using visual annotations (Figure 2). As mentioned by Fisher and Frey (2018), the process of taking notes during reading is an essential practice for closely reading a text.

Students annotated their text for the following content: (1) vocabulary, (2) thesis, (3) topic sentence, (4) supporting details, (5) text structure, and (6) author's craft. If they chose a multimodal text, then they answered comprehension questions (Figure 3) as they watched the visual text. Multimodal texts were provided as an option for students because it was important to deepen their critical thinking skills (Hobbs et al., 2022) and to provide students an opportunity to write about their stances on contemporary social issues important to them (Unsworth & Mills, 2020).

Figure 2: Visual Annotations

<h2>Visual Annotations</h2>	
<b>Instructions:</b> Use the Visual Images below to annotate an expository text. Read the descriptions below on how to use the visual images.	
<i>Visual Images</i>	<i>How to use?</i>
	Use this visual image when you encounter unknown <b>vocabulary</b> words in a text. Next, use context clues to determine the meaning of the unknown words.
	A <b>thesis</b> is a statement that summarizes the claim of an expository text. Use this visual image to identify the thesis of an expository text.
	A <b>topic sentence</b> is a sentence that captures the meaning of a paragraph. Use this visual image to identify the topic sentence of a paragraph in an expository text.
	<b>Supporting details</b> are words or phrases or statements that support topic sentences in a paragraph. Use this visual image to identify the supporting details of a paragraph in an expository text.
	<b>Text structure</b> refers to how an expository text is organized. Use this visual image to identify the text structure of an expository text. (i.e. description, sequence, <b>cause</b> and effect, compare and contrast, and problem and solution).
	<b>Author's Craft</b> are the tools that an author uses to create a text. Use this visual image when you are identifying elements of author's craft employed in a text.

**Figure 3: Multimodal Comprehension Questions**

Number	Question
1	Who is the target audience (and how do you know)?
2	Who might benefit from this message? Who might be harmed by it?
3	Why might this message matter to me?
4	What is this about (and what makes you think that)?
5	What ideas, values, information, and/or points of view are overt? Implied?
6	What is left out of this message that might be important to know?
7	How credible is this (and what makes you think that)?

Once they completed reading and annotating their texts, students created an expository writing prompt aligned with the text they selected. The purpose of this process was for students to create a prompt (Figure 4) aligned with how they would be assessed on the EOCT. This process required students to identify a topic, select a quote that connected to their topic, create a critical thought question to stimulate reflection, and then create a writing task that they would use to write their text. As students began the writing process, they were reminded that their expository writing should be connected to their lives, experiences, or cultural background. Additionally, students were also reminded that they could use their cultural questionnaire as a resource or inspiration to craft their essays.

Many of the students commented on how they enjoyed the autonomy of creating their writing prompt. Tommy (all names are pseudonyms) explains how he chose an article about the psychology of sports. He grew up playing sports and aspired to major in psychology in college. Therefore, the article connected to his current interests and future aspirations:

I am able to be creative about what I want to write about based [on] what I have read from the article. When you write, your writing must come from experience of what the topic is about. The article was about sports psychology [and it was] something I could relate to. I related to this article because I have grown up playing sports and I want to major in Psychology.

Jackson captures the same sentiments in his writing reflection. He commented, “The part of the instruction that I really enjoyed was making my own prompt. It helped me write about something I clearly understand.”

Figure 4: Culturally Relevant Prompt

## Written Composition: Expository

English I Prompt

**Step 1:**  
 You are going to create your own expository prompt based on your own cultural, social, and personal experiences. In the box below select a broad quote that aligns with the topic that you are going to write about. It maybe beneficial to review the example on the back and search the internet for quotes. Consider complete the following steps in reverse order (3,2,1).

Quote: "Race, Religion, Ethnic Pride, Nationalism does nothing but teach you how to hate people you have never met."  
- Doug Stanhope

**Step 2:**  
 Create a critical thought question. It maybe beneficial to review the example on the back.

How does race, a social construct, affect individuals in modern society?

**Step 3:**  
 Create your own prompt. It maybe beneficial to review the example on the back.

Write an essay explaining the affects of the social construct of "race" on society.

Be sure to –

- clearly state your thesis
- organize and develop your ideas effectively
- choose your words carefully
- edit your writing for grammar, mechanics, and spelling

If possible, research the use of the word "race" in the back culture. If the word is used by and the race is this an example of cultural appropriation?

After creating their prompt, students began the drafting process. This process included using the Longhorn Box, a self-regulated writing strategy (Figure 5) used by students to craft their expository essays. Students used this tool to write their hook, thesis, body paragraphs, and conclusion. It has been documented by scholars (Campbell & Filimon, 2018; Graham & Perin, 2007) the importance of using self-regulated writing strategies to explicitly develop students' writing skills. Several of the participants commented on the advantages of using the Longhorn Box. Mason captures the commentary that most students shared about the strategy. He stated,

Using the Longhorn box method, I was able to effectively plan out my essay in the provided method. The structure of the longhorn box helped me identify what [was] needed to put into my writing.

After students finished with the prewriting strategy, students completed their essays on a 26-line template (Figure 6). For the EOCT, their essay could not extend more than 26 lines, so it was important for students to follow this guideline as they created their relevant writing products. Once students completed the drafting process, they engaged in partner feedback.

Figure 5: Longhorn Box

LONGHORN BOX		
Step 1 Introduction	Step 2 Topic Sentence- Remember to use a transitional sentence to discuss your first supporting detail. (avoid: first, second, last)	Supporting Details
<p>Hook: Attention. The addiction that is craved within any relationship, yet the desire that can corrupt any bond.</p> <p>Thesis: Technology is capable of twisting one's resolve and stature. The instant downfall of a relationship once you are hooked on its leash. An aberration to the connection.</p>	<p>Our society is clogged with judgements and criticisms. A couple's public performance of love can ravage the couple's personal relationship.</p>	<p>An individual may deem their insufficient presence on their significant others page as deficient love. This may cause quarrels and disputes that can shatter the bond.</p>
	Step 3 Topic Sentence- Remember to use a transition or transition to discuss your first supporting detail. (avoid: first, second, last)	Supporting Details
	<p>Thirst for attention. Lust. Common ideas that are mistaken for love. Yet can be taken away so easily by simple mechanics.</p>	<p>Technology can inflict a great deal of distractions. Relationships tend to last longer when both side of the bond receives the same amount of attention.</p>
Step 4 Conclusion	<p>Attention is considered a necessity in every relationship. However, relational authenticity can be corrupted by technology. An individual in a relationship needs to put their partner before their technology.</p>	

Figure 6: Sample Student Essay Titled "Altruism"

The voices encompassing the mind. Clouding the thoughts, heart beats unsteady. No longer able to see as the vision has become blurry. Each day has become a game, one no longer worth living. Expectations feeds frustrations. This frustration shifting to disappointment in ourselves and others. An unhealthy attachment to an unrealistic mindset set by societal wants and beliefs.

Each unreleasitic expectation is a like a fox reaching for the grapes that are placed at an unimaginable height. Each day, the constant pressure clouding one's thoughts. Pressure to do their best, to be their best. Not for their own personal benefits, but for a title. For someone to be proud of their accomplishments. This title putting the person in a power-bearing position.

A continuous cycle of pressure is known to be a lead factor in the formation of a deteriorating self-confidence, and lack of will to complete tasks. Putting a person in a fragile mental state, more easily turning to depressive thoughts and loss of determination. A feeling of not having the power to make choices for themselves. Tears being the safety valve of the heart, as too much pressure has been laid upon it.

Many confuse the complexities and disparities between realities and drowning in a delusional mindset. Rash decisions are made out of self-pity, a blissful feeling no longer present. As the darkness known as sorrow, has strangled the serenity and altruism out of that being. Though it is significant to have goals, too demanding of wants only leads to the person to be placed in an unhappy position, filled with guilt for not being able to live up to the unreachable expectations. An unhealthy attachment to these beliefs set by societal figures of power, should not be intensified, to save one from drowning in a negative mental state, unable to breathe, unable to think.

In pairs, students used a writing feedback form (Winn & Johnson, 2011) to give feedback to their assigned partner. Students gave feedback on the ideas of the text, organization, sentence fluency, word choice, and voice. Moreover, the researcher provided holistic feedback for the class based on informal observations. The goal of the feedback was to create an environment in which writing was a “collective responsibility and collaborative activity” (Calhoun-Dillahunt et al., 2022, para. 24) that provided high-quality feedback for students to improve their essays. Johnathon articulated the sentiments that most students shared when they discussed the impact of the writing feedback process. He stated, “I really think communicating with others and getting their viewpoints on my work and the ideas really helped me.” Table 3 provides the reflective questions students considered as they crafted their final draft.

**Table 3: Reflective Questions**

<b>Reflective Question 1</b>	How will you address your cultural, social, or personal experiences in your text?
<b>Reflective Question 2</b>	How will you leverage your cultural lens and language to craft your text?
<b>Reflective Question 3</b>	How will you address the historical and contemporary norms of your culture to craft your text?

Students did not need to address all the reflective questions in their writing. Instead, these questions served as a checklist to ensure that students used either their experiences, culture, or interests in the creation of their product. Once students completed the writing feedback form and considered the reflective questions, students created the final draft.

**Step 5: Class Presentations.** The final step in this lesson involved students sharing their writing products with the class. Researchers have found that providing students the opportunity to share their writing instills ownership and pride (Winn & Johnson, 2011) and builds community (Williamson, 2019). At the end of the lesson, students presented their final products to (1) their feedback partner, (2) their writing table group, and (3) the entire class. Classroom time limits did not allow every student to share their writing product. As a result, students nominated 3 to 4 students to share their products with the entire class.

## Conclusion

Culturally relevant writing instruction has the potential to ignite students’ fire for writing. This pedagogical approach prioritizes their writing choices and provides them the opportunity to write about content and topics important to them. Blessing captures this sentiment as she reflects on the steps in creating her expository essay. She explained,

I have improved on my expository essays because I used objects that are most influential in [my] life and wrote about them. It showed me that I can only write my best when I pull my own experiences into my writing.

Several students indicated that the writing instruction provided them with the inspiration to write, and they were able to create, in their opinion, some of their best work. In a conversation with Charles, a student from a past class, he stated, “You significantly exposed me to worldwide literature and essential black literature from a perspective reflective of mine, [and that] sparked the match for me. I’m forever grateful.” If teachers encourage students to pull from within, this will

ignite their writing voices and help them develop a burning desire for writing that cannot be extinguished.

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# Ten Quick and Easy Ways to Enhance Early Literacy Instruction: Tips from a School Occupational Therapist

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## ABSTRACT

Occupational therapists (OTs) can be valuable team members because of their expertise in activity and environmental analysis and, in particular, their skills in facilitating access to curricular and extracurricular activities for students with unique learning needs (AOTA, 2017). School OTs can assist with creating multi-sensory activities and providing suggestions for environmental modifications to increase children's engagement in learning activities to support literacy learning. Research shows that when children use multiple senses to learn new skills, they are not only able to remember the new skills more quickly, but they are also able to attend to activities longer (Golden & McCracken, 2016). The more parts of the brain involved in tasks, the greater the likelihood of learning; thus, multisensory learning through participation in meaningful, fun literacy activities can increase learning!

## KEYWORDS

early literacy instruction; occupational therapy; environmental modifications; multimodal literacy

**D**o you know your school's occupational therapist (OT)? If you are not already on a first-name basis, you could be missing out on a new school bestie! Historically, OT's role in schools has been limited to a related service under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). However, OTs can be valuable team members who can address the needs of all students because of their expertise in activity and environmental analysis (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2017).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides free and appropriate education for children with disabilities, including the provision of related services. To qualify for IDEA, students must have a disability that adversely affects their educational performance. Related services are defined as "developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education" (USDOE, 2017). OT is just one of twelve related services identified by the Georgia Department of Education (2023) that may be provided as part of the student's individualized educational program (IEP) when a student is unable to access or progress in their educational program without consistent support. OT is part of the educational/IEP team to support student participation, engagement, and success in the school environment.

OT may also be provided under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). According to the 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Pub. L. 89-313),

the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; Pub. L. 114-95), related service personnel are identified as essential contributors that enhance the education of all students by supporting the instruction, curriculum, and environment. ESSA requires that states and local educational agencies (LEAs) must conduct “timely and meaningful consultation with” related service personnel (ESSA, 2015, § 1112[a][1][A]) who are identified as specialized instructional support personnel within ESSA (Laverdure et al., 2023). Hence, OT is a valuable collaborator on the educational teams for both regular and special education programs.

In the early literacy classroom, combining OT’s knowledge of play, language, cognition, and emotional regulation with teachers’ knowledge of literacy instruction and classroom management can lead to a powerful multisensory approach that has proven to have a positive impact on literacy outcomes for young children with and without identified disabilities (Jasmin et al., 2018; Strong et al., 2018). Emerging research has found that OTs can impact student literacy rates and academic participation, especially for students who are reading below grade level or have been unsuccessful in traditional reading programs (Grajo & Candler, 2016; Grajo et al., 2020).

OTs consider learning to read and write to be children’s primary “occupation” in the early grades. OTs further recognize that early literacy learning is fundamental to the child’s role as a student and to their adult selves as social beings who practice self-care and engage in meaningful occupations throughout their lives (Arnaud & Gutman, 2022).

Academic skills are developed in a hierarchical manner, and until foundational skills are mastered, new skills cannot be fully developed (Kramer et al., 2018). When children use multiple senses to learn new skills, they are not only able to remember the new skills more easily, but they are also able to attend to activities longer (Golden & McCracken, 2016). Essentially, the more parts of the brain that are involved in learning tasks, the greater the likelihood that learning will occur. Most educators are aware that OTs can support handwriting objectives. However, they may not be aware that OTs specialize in understanding a broad range of foundational developmental sequences and in embedding activities into learning environments that support the development of those skills.

You can integrate OT into early literacy instruction even if you don’t have an OT spending time in your classroom or school. Here are ten suggestions to get educators started!

## Ten Suggestions for Infusing OT into Early Literacy Learning

### 1. GET STRONG!

**Let children develop core strength.** Core strength supports the development of handwriting and increases engagement in learning activities. Children who have not yet developed core trunk control spend excessive physical energy maintaining posture and may become overly fatigued, impacting classroom attention, behavior, and overall performance (North Shore Pediatric Therapy, 2024). Incorporating motor skills into daily routines will positively impact the development of core strength, helping young children gain awareness and learn to control their growing bodies. When children are aware of where their bodies are relative to the world around them, they are more ready to learn and to be able to make precise movements like those required for legible handwriting, a skill that impacts reading skills into upper elementary grades (Lê et al., 2021). Pairing literacy concepts such as letter names and sounds, rhyming, and segmenting sounds with controlled motor activities such as yoga, twister, and hopscotch increases movement and builds core strength while practicing early literacy skills.

**Figure 1: GET STRONG! Example Activities**



## 2. GET SMART!

**Let children learn to use helpful reminders.** Helpful reminders or cues support independence and confidence during literacy activities. Learning laterality (left vs. right) and directionality (front vs back) are foundational skills for being able to differentiate between letters, numbers, and words and for learning physical relationships between objects in the world (Griswold, 2021). Becoming independent is vital as young learners who are supported and encouraged to be autonomous in their learning activities are more motivated to persevere with those activities (Erickson & Wharton-McDonald, 2019). Honing skills by using the tools in their academic toolbox helps young learners develop the ability to “self-correct” during reading and writing. Some of us still use our thumbs and index fingers to make an “L” or backward “L” to differentiate between left and right. We can teach the use of motor cues like these to assist children with alphabetic differentiation. Similar cues are also available for *b* and *d* and *p* and *q*.

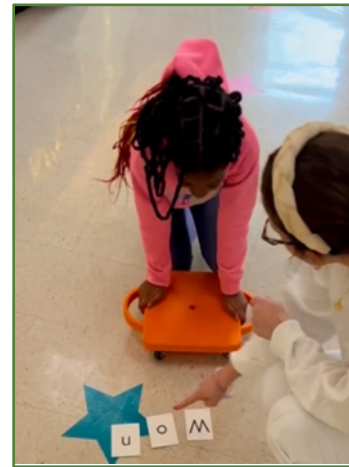
**Figure 2: GET SMART! Examples of Motor Cues**



### 3. GET ON THE FLOOR!

**Let children lie on the floor.** Lying on the floor (tummy down) supports skills necessary for writing development and legibility. Lying tummy down while reading and writing increases muscle development of the hands, wrists, and arms due to weight bearing. “Tummy time” during infancy has proven to positively impact upper body strength and development. In contrast, children who spent more time lying on their backs during infancy later acquired motor skills (Carson et al., 2022). Weight-bearing activities in the classroom can enhance the continued development of muscles that impact handwriting and other school-related fine motor activities, including cutting, drawing, buttoning, snapping, and shoe tying (Flynn, 2020; Pearl & Duckart, 2023). Examples of weight-bearing activities for the classroom include independent reading on the floor, writing on whiteboards while lying on the floor, and child-friendly yoga.

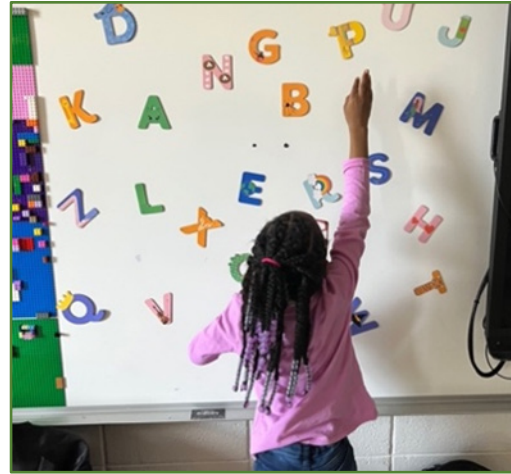
*Figure 3: GET ON THE FLOOR! Example Activities*



### 4. GET MOVING!

**Let children move.** Movement helps increase attention (Muallem et al., 2018). Young children are often expected to sit still, but few children in early elementary have the ability to sit for long periods of time. Did you know that children can only attend to a task for a maximum of 3 minutes per year of age? (Brain Balance, n.d.). This means a 5-year-old should only be expected to attend for 15 minutes, and a 10-year-old for no longer than 30 minutes at a time. Therefore, taking short rest breaks (approx. 5 min) is important to break longer tasks into smaller chunks. This will allow young children to move, stretch, and refocus. Teachers can also allow children opportunities to change positions during learning activities by standing, lying on pillows, or sitting on beanbags. Literacy-focused movements can include reading and writing the room, classroom scavenger hunts, and schoolwide story walks.

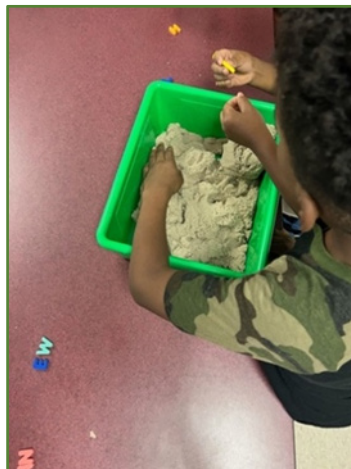
*Figure 4: GET MOVING! Example Activities*



### 5. GET MESSY!

Let children explore a variety of materials, even if they get a little messy. “Messy play” allows children to utilize multiple senses to develop creativity, curiosity, and sensory motor skills. Increased engagement results from messy play because it is just plain fun (Casey & Prendiville, 2020). Increased engagement through multi-sensory activities leads to greater concept formation and retention (Broadbent et al., 2018). It is easy to infuse literacy activities with a bit of messy play. Messy play activities also provide students with a repertoire of experiences to talk and write about! Literacy activities can easily be infused into messy play activities. Young children can explore letters and words by writing on sandpaper, in shaving cream, or using finger paints; by searching for letters in sand using tweezers; and by finding hidden objects in water beads.

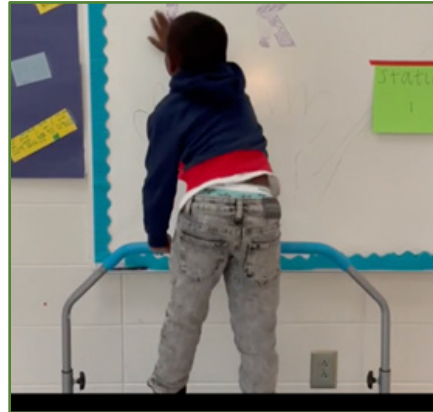
*Figure 5: GET MESSY! Example Activities*



## 6. GET REACHING!

**Let children reach across their bodies.** Reaching across the midline of the body is crucial for the two sides of the brain to learn to communicate with each other- resulting in smooth coordinated muscle movements (Therapies for Kids, n.d.). When both sides of the brain communicate effectively with each other, hand and eye movement is highly coordinated, leading to fluent hand and eye muscle movements. This is important to reading and writing since eyes and hands need to move across a page from left to right in the process of reading and writing (Robertson & Riek, 2022). Many children lack spontaneous opportunities to reach across their body's midline during routine play due to the overuse of smartphones, computers, and gaming consoles in lieu of play. Crossing midline activities can easily be incorporated into movement breaks, recess, and any time children are lining up. Literacy activities to promote crossing midline include having children write large letters on the whiteboard, standing in one spot and touching letters or words spread out on the wall, or even walking along a literacy-focused sensory path.

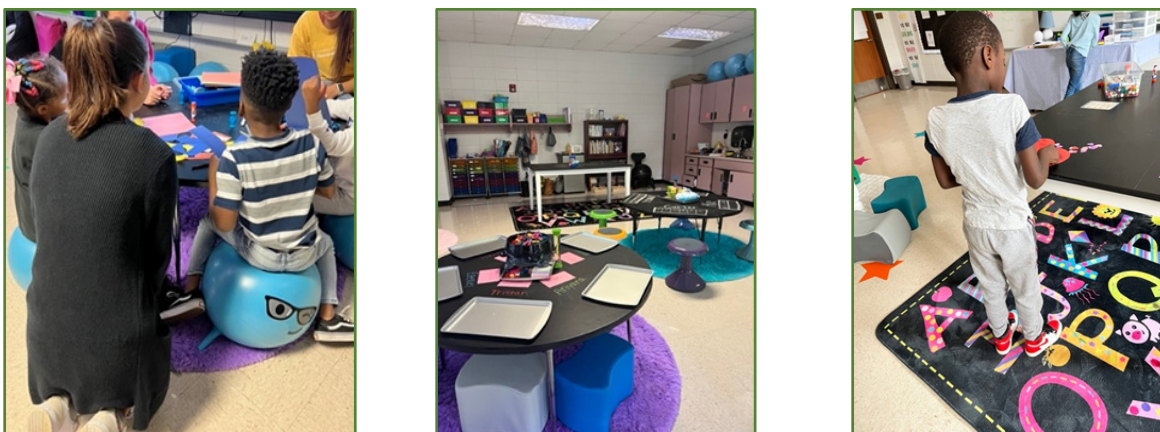
*Figure 6: GET REACHING! Example Activities*



## 7. GET FLEXIBLE!

**Let children choose from a variety of flexible seating options.** Flexible seating has become more common in various learning and work settings, including schools and classrooms. Flexible seating accommodates and facilitates all bodies which not only come in a variety of shapes and sizes but with different sensory preferences. Individual preferences can change based on mood, time of day, and activity. Having various seating options in the classroom will allow children to select the “right” chair for their needs so their bodies and minds will be ready to learn (Castellucci et al., 2016). By using flexible seating, teachers can reduce disruptive behavior and increase attention to tasks, which in turn impacts academic teaching time and performance (Hardin, 2017). Examples of flexible seating options for the classroom include bean bag chairs, standing tables, wobble stools, foam wedges, and ball chairs.

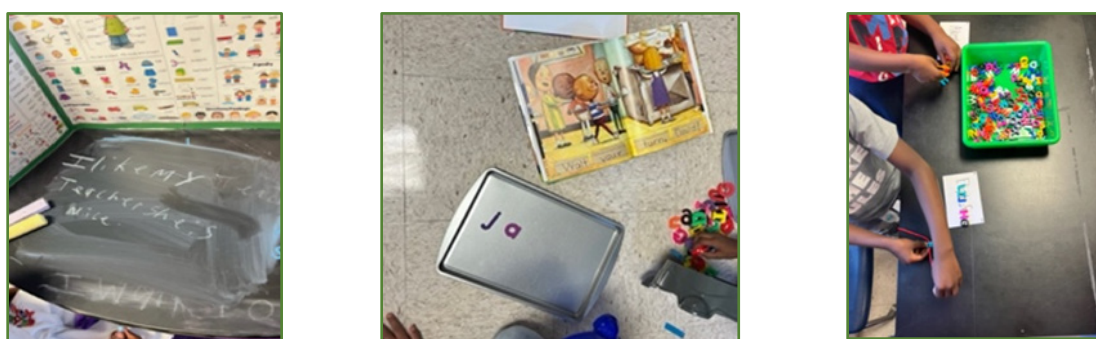
*Figure 7: GET FLEXIBLE! Example Activities*



### 8. GET RID OF THE PAPER AND PENCIL!

**Let children use a variety of hands-on materials for learning.** Hands-on materials activate multiple senses during learning activities. This results in more brain areas being stimulated, increasing learning and retention (Okray et al., 2023). There are many ways to work on literacy activities other than using paper and pencil. Incorporate the use of magnetic letters, blocks, and string alphabet beads for letter identification, sequencing, and spelling. Turn classroom tables into chalkboards or whiteboards. Many children lack the fine motor skills necessary to successfully engage in classroom tasks such as writing (Seo, 2018). Getting rid of paper and pencil allows children to engage with classroom materials that promote fine motor skill development. Classroom activities that promote fine motor skills include using tongs to pick up and sort items, shape punchers to create artwork, and building blocks. Even clean-up tasks like putting caps back on markers and glue sticks build fine motor skills.

*Figure 8: GET RID OF THE PAPER AND PENCIL! Example Activities*



### 9. GET A SENSORY-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT!

**Let children learn in a sensory-friendly environment.** Sensory-friendly classrooms protect young children from becoming over-stimulated and help them maintain focus on learning activities (Barrett et al., 2013). Think of the impact the bright lights, sounds from the hallways, and people talking to you all day have on YOUR sensory system. Children experience the same impact from their environment, and many are not able to tell us when they are overstimulated.

They tend to simply shut down (i.e., zone out) or act out. One of the quickest and easiest solutions to sensory overload is to adapt the lighting in your room. Research has shown that fluorescent lights negatively impact alertness, attitude, and energy level (Morrow & Kanakri, 2018). Adding fluorescent light covers can change the entire mood of your classroom and your students! Other ideas for making learning environments sensory-friendly include using white tree lights for an added soothing glow, indirect and soft lighting, sound-absorbing rugs, or tennis balls to reduce chair noise. Also, soothing music and white noise can have a calming effect.

**Figure 9: GET A SENSORY-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT! Examples**



## 10. GET PLAYFUL!

**Let children have fun.** Fun instructional activities are effective for your students and for you! Play is considered the work of a child. Research shows that active play has a positive effect on academic performance as it impacts behavior and children’s ability to self-regulate (Becker et al., 2014). We often view what children are doing as “mere play” when, in reality, they are learning about the world, how objects interact, and how to use their bodies. Children are not always ready to join the serious adult world, so let us join them in making learning fun! Playful activities that can support literacy learning include coloring and drawing, Play-Doh creations, and card and board games. All of these can easily be adapted for literacy learning.

**Figure 10: GET PLAYFUL! Example Activities**



## Conclusion

The tips included in this article should be appropriate for most students in early education classrooms as part of regular classroom activities. If teachers have questions about additional ways to incorporate multisensory activities into their classrooms, they should reach out to their school's OT. OTs may provide classroom and curriculum-level suggestions to maximize student engagement and success (AOTA, 2017).

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# Tips for Organizing a Dyslexia Simulation Workshop for Pre-Service Teachers

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## ABSTRACT

The impact of dyslexia on literacy has gained much attention in recent years, resulting in the need for additional training for teachers at all levels of the educational system. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to provide tips on how to organize a dyslexia simulation. Authors recount their experiences building a team, identifying participants, selecting a simulation, planning, organizing, setting up, and implementing a dyslexia simulation workshop for pre-service elementary and special education teachers. Initial expectations, challenges, and successes are highlighted. Final reflections, lessons learned, tips, and resources (Table 3) are shared. Overall, the facilitators and participants found the experience beneficial.

## KEYWORDS

educator preparation; dyslexia; experiential learning; simulations; literacy; elementary and special education

**D**yslexia is the most identified specific learning disability, affecting anywhere between four to twenty percent of children (Riddick et al., 2012). At its most basic, dyslexia is defined as a word-level reading impairment in individuals with normal intelligence. However, dyslexia is a complex disorder that can vary in presentation and severity in different individuals (Miles & Miles, 1999). Elliot (2020) contends there are four distinct conceptions of dyslexia, including: (a) students identified within the lowest end of the normal range of reading, (b) a neurobiological disorder affecting decoding, spelling, and word recognition, (c) a persistent reading disability that does not improve with academic interventions, and (d) a pervasive neurodiverse disorder that adversely affects working memory, processing speed, concentration, time management, self-organization, and verbal expression in addition to reading difficulties. With such a variety of ideas circulating about dyslexia, it is understandable that preservice and novice

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teachers would have difficulty recognizing and addressing the needs of students with this condition. Further, it comes as little surprise that there is an abundance of myths and stereotypes about dyslexia as well.

### **Myths and Stereotypes**

To ensure students with dyslexia (SWD) are provided with the required education to become literate and succeed, educators must be properly trained to identify (a) the signs of the disability, (b) the effects on student learning, and (c) the proper methods to address learning needs. This has been a daunting task due to the aforementioned lack of a cohesive definition of dyslexia as well as persistent misconceptions about the nature of the syndrome. For example, a myth persists that the main characteristic of dyslexia is that students see words and letters backwards (Riddick, 1995). Gonzalez (2021) found that stereotypes continue to proliferate linking dyslexia to a specific gender, intelligence level, and socioeconomic status despite their repeated refutation. Similarly, Gonzalez (2021) reported that some educators mistakenly believe students can “grow out of” dyslexia, or that interventions such as diet and exercise, colored overlays for reading, eye tracking exercises, or medications are effective approaches to treating dyslexia.

To address these misconceptions, in the last 5 years, multiple states, including Georgia, have passed bills codifying the characteristics, methods of identification, and selection of scientifically researched methods and curricula to appropriately educate SWD. The Georgia Department of Education officially adopted the definition of dyslexia endorsed by the International Dyslexia Association:

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (IDA, 2002)

Further, the legislation in Georgia specifies that educator preparation programs (EPPs) such as ours provide specific training in dyslexia to our preservice teachers (PSTs) to combat misinformation and cultivate competence (S.B.48, 2019). As part of our efforts to meet this mandate, we conducted a simulation activity with our PSTs in the Department of Elementary and Special Education (ESE).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Kolb’s experiential learning theory highlights the significance of experience in the learning process. This theory is not separate and positioned as a stand-alone from previous theories such as behaviorism. Instead, the experiential theory is viewed as a complement to other learning theories to provide a comprehensive perspective (Kolb, 1984). Most importantly, Kolb posits that learning is a process that is regenerative and not fixed. To that end, the dyslexia simulations offered our PSTs multiple opportunities for teaching and learning.

## Context

The EPP at our University utilizes a Professional Development Community (PDC) model. Our students are assigned to a cohort and typically take the same classes together. Classroom instruction takes place two days a week and may be delivered using face-to-face, online, or hybrid approaches. The other three days, our students are placed in an internship at a local public school working with a mentor teacher. PSTs in our program may work in small groups or individually with students who need additional support. Our PSTs stay in their placements for roughly 6 weeks and then move to another classroom. PSTs log approximately 120 hours in each placement. Our program provides a dual degree that can lead to certifications in Elementary and Special Education, so PSTs are placed in both general and special elementary education classrooms. At the end of every six-week placement, PSTs attend a debriefing session. These sessions cover a variety of topics to help students succeed in their education.

In response to the state mandate in 2022, ESE faculty members in our College of Education created four dyslexia modules for teacher candidates to complete at their own pace, before embarking on student teaching in the spring. The modules cover the characteristics, accommodations, development of instruction, and intervention support for SWD. Students complete a quiz at the end of each module, with an 80% passing score requirement. However, to provide a more active learning experience for our students, we decided to embed the dyslexia simulation in a debriefing session.

## Steps to Implement a Dyslexia Simulation

To comply with the new legislation, we chose The Experience Dyslexia simulation because it provides hands-on experiences that simulate the challenges faced by SWD (International Dyslexia Association of North Carolina [IDANC], 2018). We expected that the simulation would help decrease stereotypes, increase empathy and awareness, and support students in developing lesson plans that accommodate SWD. Therefore, we began organizing and preparing our simulation. We outline the steps for implementing a simulation below:

### ***Step 1: Build Your Team and Identify Participants***

First, find colleagues who are willing to help organize and facilitate the simulation activity. Because we are organized in PDCs, it was natural for us to work as a team. Ensure all team members know their initial roles and responsibilities. Then, identify participants. We decided to focus on our approximately 50 seniors because they would soon be graduating.

### ***Step 2: Select Simulation***

Next, research available programs and simulations and examine the scope and focus to determine a fit for your program. When deciding, examine costs and available resources. The Experience Dyslexia simulation is low-cost and includes background information, detailed directions, and sample reflection questions.

### ***Step 3: Plan and Organize***

Next, enlist any additional facilitators needed for the simulation. You may want to involve both faculty and internship supervisors to ensure there is one facilitator for each of the six stations. Allow facilitators to choose which station they would like to manage. The stations simulate

challenges typically experienced by individuals with dyslexia such as foundational reading, auditory, visual, and motor skills. Stations are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Simulation Stations**

Station Number	Station Name	Purpose of the Station
1	Learn to Read	Simulates a beginning reading problem
2	Listen to Me	Simulates an auditory figure-ground problem
3	Write with Mirrors	Simulates a visual-motor and writing problem
4	Name That Letter	Simulates a letter-word identification problem
5	Write or Left	Simulates a copying and writing problem
6	Hear and Spell	Simulates an auditory discrimination problem

Then, meet with all facilitators to discuss the materials needed, decide what outcomes you would like students to experience as a result of participating in the workshop, and make a plan to measure the outcomes. We incorporated some of the post-station reflection questions provided in the Dyslexia Simulation kit. Additionally, we created our own post-simulation reflection questions for students to complete when the entire simulation was finished. Questions are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Reflection Questions**

Post-Station Reflection Questions
How did the activity make you feel?
Did the activity give you any insights about the experiences of students with dyslexia?
As a result of this activity, how likely are you to change your teaching approach?
How might you use your experience from this activity to inform your teaching?
Post-Simulation Reflection Questions
The Simulation Workshop improved my awareness and knowledge of students with dyslexia.
I have developed increased empathy and perspectives for students with dyslexia through this simulation workshop.
This Simulation Workshop decreased my stereotypes toward students with dyslexia.
This Simulation Workshop increased my interest in wanting to learn more about students with dyslexia.
Based on your experience in the Simulation Workshop, what practical strategies (accommodations) could you use to facilitate the learning of students with dyslexia or to decrease their challenges?

Questions included open-ended responses and Likert-scale response options. Students accessed and answered the reflection questions through QR codes we generated and linked to Google Forms. These questions provide insights into students' perceptions and conceptions of the simulation experience overall.

#### **Step 4: Set Up Materials and Space**

Next, locate a space that is large enough to hold all the students and allow for movement between stations. Select a room supplied with tables, chairs, and (if possible) technology such as a public address system, computer, interactive whiteboard, and Wi-Fi, to support the facilitation of the simulation event. Reserve the space for at least ninety minutes, to ensure plenty of time.

Then, print and organize the materials needed for the stations. Materials consist of templates and directions provided with the simulation. At Stations 2 and 6, devices to play audio are needed (Table 1). In addition, mirrors or other means of reflecting written text backward are required for activities at two Stations 3 and 5 (Table 1). We brought laptops to play audio and a combination of mirrors and cell phones for "mirror writing" activities.

#### **Step 5: Implement Simulation**

Finally, set up and implement the simulation. Arrange six tables with seating, label the stations, and provide enough materials for each group. Describe the simulation and its purpose to the participants. Explain that they will have a predetermined amount of time at each station to complete activities, access and answer reflection questions, and transition to the next station. We recommend allotting at least 10 minutes for each rotation. Let participants know that there are questions to complete and a final group discussion after the simulation. Set a timer and begin the simulation. After the post-simulation discussion with participants, plan to meet with facilitators to debrief and reflect upon the outcomes of the event.

#### **Reflection and Debriefing**

Soon after the simulation, the facilitators should meet to debrief and reflect on the simulation and review the students' feedback and reflections. We determined that the active participation of students was a key achievement. Although most facilitators indicated that the students appeared confused, stressed, and unsure when addressing certain tasks, PSTs maintained their positivity by smiling, assisting one another, and working together to overcome the challenges. Some of our students reflected that the noises in the room posed challenges for them to complete and focus on tasks. Others indicated that the rotations through the stations made them feel overwhelmed. However, we explained to PSTs that this was precisely the purpose of the exercise: to simulate the real-life environmental challenges of a typical classroom, where students must adapt to varying levels of stimulation and dissonant sounds while managing transitions and attending to instruction.

**Table 3: Resources About Dyslexia**

<b>Title of Resource</b>	<b>Link to Resource</b>
<b>Dyslexia Facts &amp; Myths Handout</b>	<a href="http://education.ufl.edu/uflifiles/2019/09/Dyslexia-Myths-and-Facts.pdf">education.ufl.edu/uflifiles/2019/09/Dyslexia-Myths-and-Facts.pdf</a>
<b>GADOE Dyslexia Resources</b>	<a href="http://gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Pages/Dyslexia.aspx">gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Pages/Dyslexia.aspx</a>

<b>UFLI Dyslexia Resource Hub</b>	<a href="https://education.ufl.edu/uflfi/dyslexia-resources/">education.ufl.edu/uflfi/dyslexia-resources/</a>
<b>Understood.org</b>	<p>What is dyslexia? <a href="https://understood.org/en/articles/what-is-dyslexia">understood.org/en/articles/what-is-dyslexia</a></p> <p>Skills that can be affected by dyslexia <a href="https://understood.org/en/articles/skills-that-can-be-affected-by-dyslexia">understood.org/en/articles/skills-that-can-be-affected-by-dyslexia</a></p> <p>Signs of dyslexia at different ages <a href="https://understood.org/en/articles/checklist-signs-of-dyslexia-at-different-ages">understood.org/en/articles/checklist-signs-of-dyslexia-at-different-ages</a></p>

We encountered several challenges while facilitating the workshop. First, we did not have sufficient time to give the students an overview of the activities and provide them with essential background information about dyslexia at the beginning of the workshop. This lack of information left some students feeling confused and embarrassed as they struggled to grasp the instructions. The takeaway is that at the beginning of the workshop, it is critical to provide students with a comprehensive introduction, including an overview of all planned activities and what is expected of them. This approach will enable them to comprehend the purpose of the workshop and prepare for the tasks they will encounter later. Another challenge was that in the writing station, where the students were requested to write with their dominant hand while looking in the mirror to complete three tasks, some students expressed their difficulty in finding the right angle to view their own handwriting by using their camera in the smartphone. Using a small self-standing mirror as a more practical alternative to a smartphone is suggested.

In the future, we would pair this simulation activity directly with the dyslexia modules to provide additional information addressing facts and myths about dyslexia. Additionally, we would highlight not just the academic impact of dyslexia but the social, emotional, and behavioral components. To achieve these goals, we would prioritize debriefing and reflection throughout the simulation, encouraging PSTs to make explicit connections between simulation activities and real-world applications. The simulation provided a concrete way to better understand SWD and with more context and debriefing PSTs will be better prepared to meet these students' needs. A final suggestion is to implement this simulation with juniors so they can build knowledge and experience earlier. See Table 3 above for additional resources on dyslexia.

Overall, we felt that the simulation provided PSTs with insights into what it is like to be a student with dyslexia. Despite the initial frustration, stress, and confusion expressed by our students during the activities, it became evident that this simulation activity ultimately provided them with valuable and positive experiences. During the reflection activity, PSTs indicated a reduction in stereotypes, development of empathy, and increased awareness of SWD, and their ability to generate appropriate accommodation strategies to meet the needs of these students.

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