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Empowering Readers: Student-Centered Strategies for Literacy Success

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ABSTRACT

The Fall 2024 issue of the *Georgia Journal of Literacy*, themed "Empowering Readers: Student-Centered Strategies for Literacy Success," highlights innovative methods and practical strategies that equip educators to enhance literacy outcomes. The articles here explore methods that blend research with pragmatism and directly address the needs of today's learners. From fostering critical thinking and decoding skills to boosting reading engagement through diverse text selections, this issue provides actionable insights to help teachers cultivate empowered, motivated readers. Contributors share teaching tips, practitioner reflections, and research-informed articles that are structured to support educators in shaping resilient, skillful readers.

KEYWORDS

literacy strategies; student-centered approaches; reading engagement; phonics; critical literacy

he Fall 2024 issue of the *Georgia Journal of Literacy*, themed "Empowering Readers: Student-Centered Strategies for Literacy Success," represents a shift toward actionable, research-informed practices that place the learner at the center of effective literacy instruction. Student empowerment through skill-specific instruction and responsive classroom strategies equips teachers to ignite student interest in reading as a lifelong pursuit (Davis, 2010; Tegmark et al., 2022). As literacy/reading educators and professionals, we often must balance time-tested practices with innovative, student-centered approaches. In this issue, our goal is to offer resources that are deeply rooted in research while also being adaptable to meet the varied needs of our students.

Bridging Research and Practice for Student-Centered Literacy

Two research and practitioner articles are at the core of this issue. Leading is Dr. Stephanie Grote-Garcia, Dr. Bethanie Pletcher, and Hannah Patton-Elliot's introduction of the Phonetic Continuum Matrix—a highly structured tool for decoding instruction that provides a sequenced approach for selecting decodable words. The authors draw on decades of phonemic awareness research to offer teachers a continuum for introducing increasingly complex words for students at different levels of decoding skills. By mapping word selection to phonetic difficulty, this resource helps teachers build word-level fluency that seamlessly feeds into broader literacy skills.

Next, Dr. William Bintz and Abbey Galeza's article on blended genres introduces an innovative means of promoting intertextuality through pairing picturebooks with poems. Their

genre-blending technique invites students to explore topics across different literary forms that enrich their comprehension and analytical skills. Students are encouraged to draw connections among themes, styles, and perspectives by engaging with paired texts, which fosters critical engagement and deepens appreciation of how diverse texts can inform each other. Bintz and Galeza's strategies provide educators with a practical framework for using blended genres in the classroom, empowering students to interpret and connect texts meaningfully.

Building a Foundation through Direct Strategies

Five teaching tips articles that give educators strategies designed to demystify complex literacy skills come next. Dr. Shannon Tovey presents the SSSLIDE strategy for decoding multisyllabic words—a cleverly crafted approach that aids intermediate readers in breaking down challenging vocabulary. The SSSLIDE method, in just a series of 12 concise lessons, offers students structured support to decode longer words independently. In a post-pandemic context, where gaps in foundational literacy persist, Tovey's timely strategy empowers students to read confidently without over-relying on teachers for word-level support.

Dr. Amy Davis's Brain Drain technique explores the social and cognitive benefits of prior knowledge activation. Davis's strategy, rooted in sociocultural learning theory, invites students to share, visualize, and discuss their understanding of content in small peer groups before diving into new material. Davis's technique is a refreshing reminder of how revisiting students' background knowledge scaffolds new learning and affirms their voices within the classroom (Hattan et al., 2024). Through simple prompts and collaborative engagement, the Brain Drain method encourages active participation and bolsters students' confidence as they see their ideas represented in collective learning.

Dr. Adam Whitaker's "Focus on Vocabulary" complements these strategies by demonstrating explicit methods to teach vocabulary that students can and will use. Whitaker's strategies, tailored to the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom, include methods for selecting tiered vocabulary that supports comprehension and expression (McKeown, 2019). Through structured repetition and contextualized use, Whitaker's work reminds us that vocabulary is more than a memorization task—it is an active tool for communication and engagement with the world. With the strategies Whitaker presents, students are learning to wield language to express themselves confidently and with nuance.

Empowering Critical Thought and Reading Motivation

The remaining two teaching tips focus on critical literacy and student motivation. Dr. Lina Soares and Ali Ameduri provide a framework for authoring counter-narratives by empowering students to assume a critical stance in response to stereotypical portrayals in texts. Through counternarrative exercises, students learn to challenge biases, reframe narratives, and author alternative perspectives. Soares and Ameduri's critical literacy approach enriches comprehension and gives students a voice—a key element in building empowered readers who recognize their role in interpreting and even reshaping the narratives they encounter. The counter-narrative strategy prompts students to think, question, and articulate, all of which embodies a depth of engagement that extends beyond text analysis into self-advocacy and agency.

Lastly, Dr. Lunetta Williams's piece on motivating boys to read, emphasizes the oftenoverlooked importance of text selection and representation in elementary reading materials (Ives et al., 2020). With a checklist for evaluating text diversity, Williams provides a roadmap for teachers to ensure classroom libraries include books that resonate with boys' interests, from Griffin & Scullin 3

adventure and sports to animal stories. Her focus on texts that foster autonomy and interest speaks to the broader aim of this issue: to empower students to see reading as a personal and fulfilling journey, not a prescribed task (Tegmark et al., 2022).

Final Reflections

This issue offers practical, student-focused resources that meet students where they are. From decoding multisyllabic words to building intertextual connections across genres, the strategies here share a common thread: they empower students to be active participants in their learning. By embracing these methods, readers will come away with a repertoire of skills for their "teacher toolbelts," from selecting culturally responsive texts to implementing scaffolded vocabulary instruction, that encourage a student-centered literacy experience. Each article is crafted to support teachers in teaching reading and motivating their students to read because they are engaged, empowered, and equipped to do so. Let this issue serve as a reminder that every classroom strategy, every thoughtfully selected text, every scaffolded skill is a step toward shaping students who are not only capable but passionate, resilient, and literate.

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Phonetic Continuum Matrix: A Research-Informed Approach to Selecting Decodable Words for Phonics Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a sequential system for selecting words for early decoding instruction. We have named our model the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* due to its intersection with the developmental continua of phonemic awareness and phonics. Our purpose for creating this model is to offer teachers an efficient and sequential method of selecting words for word making, word breaking, sorting, and other activities and games during phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. We begin this article with a literature review to explain "why" we teach explicit phonemic awareness and phonics skills during early literacy instruction. Following that discussion, we explore the research used to create our sequential system for selecting words. Next, we present the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* and share recommendations for using the model when designing early literacy instruction.

KEYWORDS

phonics; phonemic awareness; early literacy instruction; research-based instruction

It was early September at Lamar Elementary and first-grade teacher Mr. Reyes sat at the front of his inclusive classroom of 16 students. He knew through observations and universal screening data that seven students needed support in orally blending phonemes to form spoken single-syllable words, while nearly all of his students needed support in decoding consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words. During today's whole group gathering, he decided to combine these two skills by asking his students, "What word am I saying, /m/ /a/ /n/?" His students quickly replied with, "man". He then asked his students to help him spell the word *man*, and they did so without hesitation. He repeated this exercise with the words *sit*, *bat*, and *dig*. His students were once again successful with the word sit, but many of them struggled with the words *bat* and *dig*. How could this be? Mr. Reyes ended the exercise by asking his students to read the same four words. Once again, his students were successful with the words *man* and *sit*, but they demonstrated more difficulty with the words *bat* and *dig*—leaving Mr. Reyes wondering why his students experienced more difficulty with some words and less difficulty with others.

Although the opening vignette is fabricated, we have heard teachers share similar experiences and ask the same questions as Mr. Reyes. Perhaps the information that Mr. Reyes is missing in his teaching materials includes a word list that is more nuanced than those traditionally provided in phonological awareness and phonics lists – a word list that takes linguistic research into account. For example, the reason the children in Mr. Reyes's class may have experienced difficulty in blending the phonemes in man, but not bat is because the letter m makes a continuous vocal sound, and the letter b is a stop plosive. In this article, we present a sequential system for selecting words for early decoding instruction. We have named our model the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* due to its intersection with the developmental continua of phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge. Our purpose for creating this model is to offer teachers an efficient and sequential method of selecting words to use for word making, word breaking, sorting, and other activities and games during phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. We begin this article with a literature review to explain "why" we teach explicit phonemic awareness and phonics skills during early literacy instruction. Following that discussion, we explore the research that was used to create our sequential system for selecting words. Next, we present the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* and share recommendations for using the model when designing early literacy instruction. For the purpose of printing, the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* has been split into two Figures—those being Figures 1 and 2.

Literature Review

Recent publications that are focused on phonemic awareness and phonics are largely influenced by the current attention being given to the science of reading (Grote-Garcia & Ortlieb, 2023). That recent attention led us to initially set out to find within the available research a tiered system for evaluating the difficulty of decodable words. For this, we utilized our university database and an internet search engine, employing search terms such as *decodable word list*, *phonics word difficulty levels*, *decodable reading words by level*, and *word difficulty continuum for phonics*. Although we found various lists of decodable words, these resources did not provide the tiered structure or detailed progression we were seeking. This absence in the literature prompted us to develop the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix to* fill this gap.

The literature review that follows explores "why" we teach explicit phonemic awareness and phonics skills in elementary classrooms. Also explained is the research used to formulate our sequential system for selecting decodable words. The reviewed research spans a total of 66 years, with publications as early as Templin's 1957 publication detailing language development. We felt it to be important to revisit classic studies within our literature review because the relationship between phonemic awareness, phonics, and overall reading success has been established for several decades and many of those earlier studies contributed significant findings that guided the formation of our model.

The Why

Lindsey and colleagues (2020) remind us, that in order to read an alphabetic language, such as English, "students must possess secure knowledge of the alphabetic principle (i.e., speech sounds are represented by combinations of letters in the alphabet) as well as the ability to aurally separate the distinct sounds (phonemes) that make up words" (p. 159). The latter part of this statement refers to phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is "the ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes [or the smallest sounds] in spoken words" (Liberman et al., 1974). During phonemic awareness instruction, students might be asked to isolate, blend, segment, or manipulate phonemes

(Collet, 2021). In the opening vignette, we read that Mr. Reyes asked his students, "What word am I saying, /m/ /a/ /n/?" His students blended the stated phonemes together and said the word "man". In that exchange, Mr. Reyes's students demonstrated the phonemic awareness task of blending phonemes. No graphemes (i.e., letters or letter combinations used to represent the sounds) were used in that example—as is the case for phonemic awareness tasks (Lindsey et al., 2020; Kilpatrick, 2015, NRP, 2000).

Why do we teach phonemic awareness? Research has established that phonemic awareness skills can be a predictor of students' early reading skills because it provides a window into students' ability to learn sounds that can then be used for decoding (Boyer & Ehri, 2011; Kilpatrick, 2015; Share, 2004). In fact, Boyer and Ehri (2011) and Share (2004) emphasized that being able to segment words into phonemes when entering kindergarten is one of the strongest predictors of reading in kindergarten and first grade. Cassano (2018) explained this predictable relationship by stating, "although [phonemic awareness] does not involve print directly, there is a link between [phonemic awareness] and decoding in alphabetic writing systems, because letters represent phonemes in words" (p. 12). Cassano (2018) further explained that "without an awareness of the sound structure of words at the phoneme level, children do not understand how print works and thus can fail to deploy phonics instruction that teachers provide" (p. 12). Thus, one reason we teach phonemic awareness is that children must be aware of phonemes in order to map them to their associated graphemes (i.e., the letter or letter combinations that represent individual phonemes in print).

Additional research has established that many children who are struggling with decoding and spelling also have deficits in phonemic awareness (Spear-Swerling, 2016). In fact, phoneme blending impacts students' decoding abilities, while segmenting phonemes impacts students' spelling skills. Those two relationships are proven through a vast body of research that spreads across decades (Bond & Dykstra, 1967; Ehri et al., 2001; Fox & Routh, 1984; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2005; NRP, 2000). The opening vignette illustrates that finding. Mr. Reyes's students looked at the printed word sit and used their knowledge of grapheme/phoneme relationships to decode that word. This process required students to recognize the three graphemes s, i, t, and to map those graphemes to the phonemes $\frac{s}{i}, \frac{t}{i}$ and to map those graphemes to the phonemes $\frac{s}{i}, \frac{t}{i}$ and to map those graphemes to the phonemes $\frac{s}{i}, \frac{t}{i}$ and to map those graphemes to the phonemes $\frac{s}{i}, \frac{t}{i}$ and to map those graphemes to the phonemes $\frac{s}{i}, \frac{t}{i}$ and to map those graphemes to the phonemes $\frac{s}{i}, \frac{t}{i}$ and to map those graphemes to the phonemes $\frac{s}{i}, \frac{t}{i}$ and $\frac{s}{i}$ and their phonic knowledge. Once students identified the three phonemes connected to the printed letters, they then blended those phonemes together to pronounce the printed word. The students' successes in blending those phonemes to pronounce the printed word are dependent upon their skills in phoneme blending. Had Mr. Reyes's students only applied their phonetic knowledge and struggled with phoneme blending, they would not have been able to state the printed word. Instead, their response would have remained as the isolated phonemes of "/s/--/i/--/t/". In a reversed manner, phoneme segmenting impacts spelling because in order to spell a word that is not memorized, we must segment the phonemes of the spoken word and then map those phonemes to their associated graphemes (Ball & Blachman, 1991).

Not only do teachers of early reading need to teach phonemic awareness skills explicitly; they also need to teach explicit phonics skills—but, why? In addition to phonemic awareness being an important and necessary skill for reading an alphabetic language, decades of research have also established that phonetic knowledge is highly important (NRP, 2000; Stahl et al., 1998; Torgerson et al., 2018). Phonics is the method of teaching phoneme/grapheme relationships. Students' capacity to decode unfamiliar words is impacted by their ability to recognize graphemes, map those graphemes to phonemes, and then blend those phonemes together to identify the printed word (Lindsey et al., 2020). However, there is an even larger picture. Research has identified that

students' abilities to decode words (which is influenced by their phonemic awareness and phonic knowledge) have direct impacts on their abilities to read text fluently (Ecalle et al., 2020; NRP, 2000; Saha et al., 2021), and to comprehend them (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Kieffer & Christodoulou, 2020; Kim, 2015; Scarborough, 2001).

Continuum of Difficulty

Research has established that decoding skills are dependent upon the reader's phonetic knowledge as well as the reader's ability to blend phonemes into words (Bradley & Bryant,1983; Hulme et al., 2012; Share, 2011). When creating our sequential system for selecting words for early decoding instruction, we revisited the research establishing the continuum of difficulty for phoneme blending and phonetic knowledge; by doing so, we developed the sequence found in the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). That research is reviewed in this section—establishing the scientific foundation on which the model was built.

Phoneme Blending. The difficulty of phoneme blending tasks can vary from easy to more difficult depending upon the number of phonemes (i.e., fewer phonemes are easier, while more phonemes are harder) and the type of phonemes featured. The English language has 44 phonemes that are placed into two categories: consonants and vowels (Foorman, 2023). Freeman and Freeman (2014) remind us that consonant phonemes are closed (i.e., airflow is obstructed), can be stopped (i.e., cannot be elongated) or continuous (i.e., can be elongated), and can be voiced (i.e., require a vibration of the vocal cords) or voiceless (i.e., do not require vibration of the vocal cords). Furthermore, vowels are open (i.e., shaped by the mouth, but unobstructed), continuous, and voiced. Following a review of relevant literature, Mesmer (2019) summarized the continuum of difficulty for words used in phonemic awareness tasks and organized those findings based on twophoneme and three-phoneme words. First, two-phoneme words beginning with a vowel phoneme, such as "at" and "on", are the easiest to hear; followed by two-phoneme words beginning with a continuant consonant (e.g., knee, so, me), and then two-phoneme words beginning with another consonant (e.g., be, doe, tea,). For three-phoneme words, the pattern is similar with words beginning with continuant consonants being easiest (e.g., man, nap, sat) and words beginning with other consonants being more difficult (e.g., bag, dig, top). Next, children typically develop the ability to segment and blend four-phoneme words with initial blends (e.g., clap, stop, trap), followed by four-phoneme words with final blends (e.g., felt, last, jump), and lastly five-phoneme words with initial and final blends (e.g., blend, clasp, stomp). These research findings directly influenced the formation of the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* and are displayed in the columns, moving from left to right, of Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Phonetic Knowledge. Decoding requires phonemic awareness and phonetic knowledge because readers must "use phonics principles to break the word into small chunks and then blend those chunks back together into recognizable words" (Lindsey et al., 2020, p. 161). Research points to phonics instruction needing to be explicit (meaning the teacher tells students the skill they are learning) and systematic and sequential (meaning easier skills are taught and mastered first before moving on to more difficult skills; Mesmer & Griffith, 2005). This instruction may begin as early as prekindergarten. In this section, we explore the continuum of development for phonics skills. We have arranged the discussion to first explore the development of letter knowledge, which is then followed by a discussion of how word decoding develops.

Letter Knowledge. Decades of research have documented that preschoolers' letter knowledge (specifically their ability to name letters), is highly correlated to their later word-reading ability (Bond & Dykstra, 1967; Tunmer et al., 1988; Wagner et al., 1994). In light of this correlation, we use this section to review significant research findings that have provided insights into the development of letter knowledge—the reason being that these findings informed the development of the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix*.

According to research, children have more difficulties learning letters with hard-to-hear sounds and letters that are connected to more than one sound (Treiman et al., 1998). Researchers have identified that the sounds of *acrophonic* printed letters, or letters whose names carry information about their sound (e.g., the name of letter m ending with /m/), are easier to learn than non-acrophonic letters (e.g., h, w, x; Cardoso-Martins et al., 2011; Piasta & Wagner, 2010; Share, 2004; Treiman & Rodriguez, 1999; Treiman et al., 1998). Also, Huang et al. (2014), McBride-Chang (1999), and Treiman et al. (1998) presented evidence that children learn the sounds of letters whose names are pronounced in consonant-vowel order (e.g., b, d) easier than those pronounced in vowel-consonant order (e.g., s, f).

Although research has largely identified sounds of acrophonic printed letters to be easier to learn, Castles and colleagues (2009) remind us that this relationship "may be confounded to some degree with phonemic awareness ability because benefiting from the sound information provided by the letter name presumably requires that children are sufficiently phonologically aware to be able to successfully segment the relevant phoneme" (p. 69). This highlights the importance of considering individual differences in phonemic awareness when developing effective literacy instruction. Therefore, educational strategies should be tailored to address both the phonological and phonemic awareness skills of learners.

Word Reading. Similar to phonemic awareness instruction, there is a general sequence for teaching phonics to increase word reading skills. Following a review of relevant literature, Lindsey and colleagues (2020) summarized that general sequence. Most phonics curricula "move from teaching students patterns with one-to-one correspondences in single-syllable words (e.g., big, hat, and tin) to teaching two-to-one (e.g., bath, see, she) and three-to-one correspondences in single-syllable words (e.g., eat, eight, and shoot)" (Lindsey et al., 2020, p. 169). Overall, the literature review provided by Lindsey et al. (2020) supports the following to be a suggested order for phonics instruction (from easy to difficult): short vowel word families (e.g., -at, -am, -it), initial consonant digraphs (e.g., ph-, sh-, th-), final consonant digraphs (e.g., -ch, -ck, -sh), initial consonant blends (e.g., bl-, fr-, st-), and final consonant blends (e.g., -st, -mp, -nd). After reading words with short vowels, students typically learn words with long vowels (e.g., the silent e), vowel digraphs (e.g., ai, oa, ee), vowel diphthongs (e.g., oy, oi, ow as in cow), complex consonants (e.g. silent letters such as kn, soft/hard c, soft/hard g, and trigraphs), syllable division rules (e.g., VC|CV, V|CV), and morphemic analysis (e.g., prefix "un" means "not").

Many speech and language researchers have purported that there is an order in which children master consonant clusters/blends (Higgs, 1968; McLeod et al., 2001; Smit et al., 1990; Templin, 1957). Dodd (1995), Dyson (1988), Paul and Jennings (1992), and Watson and Scukanec (1997) found, in their studies of young children, that word-final consonant blends (e.g., -mp, -nd, -ps) appear in language before word-initial clusters do (e.g., st-, tw-, pl-); however, Werfel and Schuele (2012) and Lindsay (2020) recommend the opposite. Also, children usually acquire consonant blends that consist of stop and liquid sounds (e.g., br-, pl)

before they acquire blends with fricative and liquid sounds (e.g., fr-, sl-Ingram, 1976; Powell, 1993; Smit et al., 1990; Smith, 1973; Templin, 1957; Watson & Scukanec, 1997). More specifically, Barlow (2004) contended that, because sounds range on a continuum from least sonorous to most sonorous (in order from least to most sonorous: stops, fricatives, nasals, liquids, glides), consonant clusters whose sounds are further apart on this continuum (e.g. wr) are easier than those whose sounds are closer together (e.g., sc-, sp-). Another way of explaining this is that clusters whose sounds are formed in the same place of articulation are more difficult to pronounce than those whose sounds occur in different parts of the mouth. This is partly because during pronunciation, the child can feel their mouth move and see it when looking in a mirror. It seems the most difficult blends to hear and pronounce are final blends that contain a nasal (/n/) right before a voiceless phoneme (e.g., -mp, -nt) or a voiced phoneme (e.g., -nd, -ng; Treiman et al., 1995). Considering which clusters occur with the most frequency is important in forming a recommended sequence of instruction (Groff, 1971-72). We have utilized these findings to inform our model in terms of when these clusters/blends might be taught. This information is illustrated in the rows of Figure 1 and Figure 2, with the simplest skills at the top and increasing in complexity moving downward.

Theoretical Framework

The *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* is designed to be utilized with children at specific stages of word reading development. When crafting the matrix, we drew insights from Ehri's (2005) word reading stages and Bear et al.'s (2020) *Words Their Way* framework. In this section, we explore these two staging frameworks to explain the "how" and "when" of employing the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* in the design of early literacy instruction. By aligning instructional practices with these frameworks, educators can better tailor their approaches to the individual needs of students at various stages of reading development. This ensures that instruction is both developmentally appropriate and research-based, enhancing the overall effectiveness of literacy education.

According to Ehri's (2005) four stages of word reading, word knowledge evolves through distinct phases. Those stages are the pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic, and consolidated alphabetic stages. Each phase operates on a continuum determined by the mastery of specific word knowledge skills. In the pre-alphabetic stage, children rely on visual cues and specific contexts to derive meaning, emphasizing visual input over letter sounds and drawing connections to environmental print. Notably, the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* does not address the pre-alphabetic stage, as it commences with Ehri's subsequent stage, the partial alphabetic stage.

The partial alphabetic stage incorporates letter names and sounds, enabling children to use phonetic cues for comprehension. The *Phonetic Continuum* Matrix initiates at this stage, featuring acrophonic printed letters and one to two phoneme words in the top left corner of the model (refer to Figure 1). Moving to Ehri's third stage, the full alphabetic stage, children utilize all letter sounds in reading and engage with graphemic knowledge. As the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* progresses downward and across (from the top-left toward the bottom-right), it closely aligns with Ehri's full alphabetic stage, encompassing consonant digraphs, consonant blends, vowel digraphs, and vowel diphthongs.

In the consolidated alphabetic stage, Ehri's fourth stage, children strategically incorporate morphological and syllabic elements into their reading, utilizing chunks or clusters within words and word families to enhance fluency (e.g., the child recognizes that "happiness" consists of the rood word "happy" and the suffix "-ness"). The *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* does not include Ehri's consolidated alphabetic stage since the matrix is centered on the intersection of phonetic

knowledge and phonemic awareness. Readers in this advanced stage analyze "chunks" of words rather than individual phonemes and graphemes. Consequently, the matrix focuses on earlier stages of reading development where phonetic and phonemic skills are foundational, providing a structured approach to building these essential skills before students reach the more advanced stages of analyzing word patterns and morphemes.

Bear et al.'s Words Their Way framework (2020) expands upon Ehri's stages and offers developmental timelines for each stage of reading—therefore, it was also consulted as the Phonetic Continuum Matrix was being designed. The initial stage, the emergent stage, typically occurs between the ages of two and five years old. During this stage, children make prephonetic attempts at reading and writing as they synthesize experiences with six crucial concepts. These concepts encompass language concepts and vocabulary, which provide foundational experiences with language and accumulated background knowledge. Alphabetic awareness leads children to an understanding of print and the literacy input derived from their environment. Phonological awareness increases a child's ability to blend, segment, and delete sounds when creating new words, and rhythmic activities contribute to mastery of syllabication. Finally, children must have an automaticity with familiar words, creating sight words in context through COW-T, or Concepts of Words in Text. Similar to the connections made between Ehri's (2005) stages and the Phonetic Continuum Matrix, the top left corner of Figure 1 relates to Bear et al.'s early stage.

The remainder of the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* relates to Bear et al.'s next two stages—the letter-name stage and the within word pattern stage. The letter-name stage, which is typically when formal reading instruction begins, ranges from kindergarten to the middle of second grade. At this stage, pronunciation of letter names can influence children's reading and writing ability, while they also attend to realizations of how mouth shape and intonation affect words read. Common areas of focus during Bear and colleagues' second stage often include short vowel families and CVC words. Children must understand phonemes to progress to the next stage, referred to as the within word pattern stage, which typically involves children in second and third grade. The within word pattern stage involves exploring concepts in word study, including single syllable patterns such as CVCe, CVVC, and CVV, with attention to diphthongs. Additionally, students grapple with words that have multiple meanings and similar pronunciations, such as "steak" and "stake" or "pair" and "pear". This stage emphasizes a deeper understanding of spelling patterns and the ability to decode and spell words with more complex structures, paving the way for more advanced literacy skills.

Bear et al.'s syllables and affixes stage and derivational stage are not depicted in the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix*, mirroring the omission of Ehri's (2005) final stage. In these advanced stages, readers analyze word "chunks" rather than individual graphemes and phonemes. The syllables and affixes stage spans third grade through eighth grade, involving morphology, etymology, and inflection. The derivational stage, starting in middle elementary and extending through college, emphasizes continuous learning by exploring connections between word meanings and applications, including the study of word roots, prefixes, and suffixes to understand and generate complex words. This progression highlights the evolution from foundational phonetic skills to sophisticated word analysis and application, building a comprehensive understanding of language.

Mastering the "how" and "when" to employ the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* in literacy instruction is contingent on a thorough understanding of Ehri's and Bear et al.'s stages. The matrix commences its journey at the partial alphabetic stage, aligning with Ehri's model, and then aligns closely with the full alphabetic stage, emphasizing the importance of sound recognition and

graphemic knowledge. It proceeds through consonant digraphs, blends, vowel digraphs, and diphthongs, reflecting transition within Ehri's full alphabetic stages. Additionally, the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* corresponds largely with the letter-name stage and the within word pattern stage in Bear and colleagues' framework, establishing that the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* is a comprehensive tool for facilitating tailored literacy instruction throughout different stages of word reading development, particularly in grades kindergarten through second grade.

The Phonetic Continuum Matrix

The *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* offers a structured and sequential approach for the selection of decodable words for use during literacy instruction, incorporating research findings from phonemic awareness development, decoding development, and various word reading frameworks (i.e., Bear et al., 2020; Ehri, 2005). Examining Figures 1 and 2, the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* is designed to align with the progression of phonemic awareness development, transitioning from less complex to more complex concepts as one moves from left to right across the two figures. Simultaneously, the continuum of phonics instruction development is depicted by moving from the top to bottom of the two figures. Within the individual boxes present in the model, we have integrated points where the research on phonemic awareness and decoding development intersects, offering example words that reflect both the findings in phonemic awareness research and decoding research. Our objective is not for teachers to adopt these particular words but rather to employ the alignment of research as a guide when choosing words for instruction or assessment. For example, Figure 1 demonstrates that children generally find it easier to decode words like "rash" and "much" compared to "bake" and "poke". This is because children generally master the phonetic rules for single-syllable words with final consonant digraphs and blend three-phoneme words with initial continuant sounds (e.g., 'rash' and 'much') before they become proficient with silent-e words and those with initial stop consonants (e.g., 'bake' and 'poke'). By following this structured approach, teachers of grades K-2 can more effectively match instructional materials to the developmental needs of their students, ensuring a more targeted and efficient literacy instruction process.

Figure 1: Phonetic Continuum Matrix for Acrophonic Letters and Short Vowels

				Phone	emic Awareness	Continuum: Mo	oving from Easiest	(left) to Hardest (rig	ght) —	→	
Phonics Sequence:		•	One-	Tv	vo-Phoneme Wo	ords	Three-Pho	neme Words	Four-Phone	eme Words	Five-Phoneme
Moving from Easiest (top) to Hardest (bottom)		Phoneme Words	with initial with initial continuant consonant phoneme		with initial stopped consonant phoneme	with initial continuant phoneme	with stopped initial phoneme	with *initial blends	with +final blends	Words with Initial* and +Final Blends	
(bottom)	Letters	Acrophonic Printed Letters	a, I	_	_	-	_	-	-	-	_
		ending in consonant	-	at if am it an on in us up	-	-	man red sit lap not net men van set zip sat sip let ran run log	bat has pet him but big can cut did put get got had dog pig	-	-	-
		with initial consonant digraphs	-	-	-	-	ship then this them shop this than shut	chip chin chat chug chop chap	-	-	-
\		with final consonant digraphs	-	ash ick	-	-	moth sick much math fish lash such rash lack lick	cash rock dish bath push hush with wish back path	flash flash sloth trick trash swish black clash stick stash	-	-
	Short Vowels	with initial and final consonant digraphs	-	-	_	-	shuck shack thick shush	chick which whack check when	-	-	-
	VOWEIS	with *initial consonant blends	-	-	-	-	-	-	stop plan swim clash drop brush frog swish flip clap twig grip	-	-
		with +final consonant blends	_	-	_	-	ant ask ink end elk	-	-	jump must link thing sent think long last hand left just song land best	-
		with *initial and +final consonant blends	-	-	_	-	-	-	-	-	blend stand clump bring stomp frost plant blink

Note. "—" denotes the feasibility of providing an example for overlapping phonics and phonemic awareness tasks, either due to one task being developed later or being inherently impossible. *Suggested order for beginning blends is the following: tw, kw, fw, pl, bl, cl, gl, fl, pr, br, cr, gr, fr, dr, tr, st, sp, sc, sn, sm, sl, sw, str, squ, spl, scr, spr. +Suggested order for final blends is the following: st, ps, ts, nt, ns, mp, nd, nk (Barlow, 2004; Dodd, 1995; Dyson, 1988; Groff, 1971-72; Higgs, 1968; Ingram, 1976; Lindsay, 2020; McLeod et al., 2002; Paul & Jennings, 1992; Powell, 1993; Smit et al., 1990; Smith, 1973; Templin, 1957; Treiman, 1995; Watson & Scukanec; 1997; Werfel and Schuele; 2012).

Figure 2: Phonetic Continuum Matrix for Long Vowels, Vowel Combinations, and Complex Consonants

					PI	nonemic /	Awaren	ess Con	tinuum: I	Moving fro	om Easies	st (left) to	Hardest	(right) —		→	
Phonics			One-						TI	ree-Phon	eme Wor	ds	Four-Phoneme Words			Five-Phoneme	
Sequence: Moving from Easiest (top) to Hardest		Phoneme Words	VO	initial wel neme	cont	initial inuant sonant neme	sto	initial pped sonant neme	conti	initial nuant neme	with st initial ph			*initial ends	with +final blends	Words with initial* and +final blends	
(right)		single long vowel	-		-	me so no	my the	be go he	by we		_	po to bo	oll		_	bold went cold hold find told kind pint most	grind
	Long Vowels	with silent e	-		-		-		-	made make rope like land line name	same late life mile side fine shine	bake poke time came home page take	white wave base game gave date gate	brave smile write state plane drive stove	frame slime crime plate crate flame globe	_	-
↓ ·	Vowel Combinations	vowel digraphs	-	oak eek	each eat	see sea may they mow sew fee	say show saw low though row	hay day tow way tea toe	bay bow bee key due	seek leap look that mean need read rain	feet real seem soon feel shown seat meet	boat been book head keep coat	took wood deep heat beat	sleep green bread great fried cream grain	stood queen float train braid brain great	toast coast paint	quaint
		vowel diphthongs	_	oil owl out	our own ouch	now vow few	chow new	cow toy how	boy high chew	soil fowl shout	south noun	tov co dov	in	crown brown cloud	frown clown fruit	sound point round found	-
	Complex Consonants (with short and long vowels)	silent letters, hard/soft and trigraphs	-		-		nee now		-	knit lamb right face light	might night voice known knob	cor hei		crumb stitch place close	school space brought climb	cent ghost	-

Note. "—" denotes the feasibility of providing an example for overlapping phonics and phonemic awareness tasks, either due to one task being developed later or being inherently impossible. *Suggested order for beginning blends is the following: tw, kw, fw, pl, bl, cl, gl, fl, pr, br, cr, gr, fr, dr, tr, st, sp, sc, sn, sm, sl, sw, str, squ, spl, scr, spr. +Suggested order for final blends is the following: st, ps, ts, nt, ns, mp, nd, nk (Barlow, 2004; Dodd, 1995; Dyson, 1988; Groff, 1971–72; Higgs, 1968; Ingram, 1976; Lindsay, 2020; McLeod et al., 2002; Paul & Jennings, 1992; Powell, 1993; Smit et al., 1990; Smith, 1973; Templin, 1957; Treiman, 1995; Watson & Scukanec; 1997; Werfel and Schuele; 2012).

Instructional Recommendations

Within this section, we explore the use of the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* to elevate and synchronize the instruction of phonemic awareness and decoding. Furthermore, we reexamine crucial research findings and optimal approaches for teaching phonemic awareness and decoding skills. We also explore how consulting the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* can reinforce and enhance this instructional process. By aligning instructional practices with the matrix, teachers can ensure a cohesive approach that integrates research-based strategies with practical application, thereby supporting students' progress through the various stages of reading development. This alignment not only enhances the effectiveness of phonemic awareness and decoding instruction but also provides a structured framework for monitoring and adapting teaching strategies to meet individual student needs.

Phonemic awareness tasks intentionally avoid incorporating printed letters for several crucial reasons. A primary consideration is the necessity for students to initially cultivate the ability to distinguish distinct sounds before linking them to written language, as emphasized by Lindsey and colleagues (2020). Additionally, the use of printed letters could inadvertently act as "clues," potentially leading to an inaccurate assessment of a child's genuine phonemic awareness, as noted by Kilpatrick (2015). This situation arises when children rely on visual cues rather than authentic phonemic awareness. Kilpatrick (2015) also addresses a common misinterpretation of the National Reading Panel's (NRP, 2000) original findings. NRP's suggestion was not that phonemic awareness should be taught with letters; instead, the NRP recommended moving swiftly into integrating phonemic awareness with letter recognition and the decoding process. After completing a phonemic awareness task without the use of letters, students should promptly map those same phonemes to their associated graphemes. Kipatrick argues that this practice helps students establish a robust foundation in phonemic awareness, phonetic knowledge, and a deeper understanding of the alphabetic principle. Given these considerations, Kilpatrick advises educators to use non-letter symbols or tokens when teaching phonemic awareness skills. Subsequently, students are encouraged to establish connections between the featured phonemes and printed letters by then replacing those tokens with the associated graphemes.

The importance of following phonemic awareness tasks with connections to decoding is further explained by Ehri (2020). Ehri clarifies that readers connect the spellings of words to their pronunciations. Therefore, in addition to using tokens like pennies or Bingo chips when perceiving sounds in words (e.g., Elkonin boxes), it is also beneficial to establish links between phonemes and letters, assisting children in connecting letters to their corresponding sounds (Ehri, 2020). Ehri asserts that this process helps children transition from the pre-alphabetic phrase to the partial alphabetic phrase and "facilitate[s] learning because the [letters] provide visible, concrete representations of phonemes that are transient and disappear as soon as they are spoken or heard" (Boyer & Ehri, 2011, p. 441). These research findings highlight the intricate relationship between phonemic awareness, decoding, and spelling.

The shift from phonemic awareness instruction to phonics instruction should be seamless, as recommended by Mesmer (2022). The effectiveness of this approach is well-illustrated in the opening vignette featuring Mr. Reyes, where he guided his students to orally segment phonemes in spoken words and then immediately applied that knowledge by spelling the same words. In the vignette, Mr. Reyes' students successfully read and spelled the words "man" and "sit" but encountered difficulty with the words "bat" and "dig". This challenge aligns with the principles of the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix*, where the initial continuant phonemes of /m/ in the word "man" and /s/ in the word "sit" appear earlier on the matrix when compared to the stopped sounds of the

/b/ and /d/ phonemes found in the words "bat" and "dig". As Mr. Reyes' students' progress in their phonics instruction, mastering the stopped initial sounds, they will likely advance to continuant initial consonant digraphs like "sh" in the word "ship" and "th" in the word "this", broadening their understanding of more complex phonetic patterns. Subsequently, they will further navigate through the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix*, encountering stopped initial consonant digraphs such as "ch" in the words "chat" and "chip" before moving further up and toward the right on the matrix into more complex consonant blends appearing at the beginnings and ends of words (e.g., "stop" and "ink"). This sequential development illustrates the importance of a systematic and targeted phonics curriculum, ensuring students acquire a comprehensive set of skills that progressively build upon each other, ultimately enhancing their reading and spelling abilities across a diverse range of words.

Final Thoughts

The *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* is a valuable tool for educators seeking a systematic and sequential approach to selecting words for early decoding instruction. Drawing from a comprehensive literature review, the matrix tackles the essential connection between phonemic awareness and phonics skills. Through its structured framework, the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* helps teachers navigate from simpler to more complex phonemic and phonics concepts. The reviewed research, spanning over six decades, emphasizes the enduring importance of explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics for successful reading outcomes.

Guided by theoretical frameworks from Ehri (2005) and Bear et al. (2020), the development and application of the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* ensures alignment with stages of word reading development. Beginning at the partial alphabetic stage and progressing through consonant digraphs, blends, and beyond, this model offers a comprehensive approach tailored to different stages of emergent and early literacy. It is important to note, however, that these stages are a guide for how children might work with sounds and print. Thus, teachers should keep in mind that different children may progress through these stages differently. The integration of evidence-based practices, as advocated by Ehri (2005) and Kilpatrick (2015), highlights the significance of separating phonemic awareness tasks from printed letters initially and later connecting them seamlessly during decoding instruction.

The instructional recommendations stress the importance of a smooth transition from phonemic awareness to phonics, as demonstrated in the vignette featuring Mr. Reyes. The sequential development outlined by the *Phonetic Continuum Matix* emphasizes the importance of helping teachers understand that some individual sounds and sound combinations are harder for children to hear than others. This approach ensures students progressively build a strong foundation, leading to improved reading and spelling across a diverse range of words in increasingly complex texts. In essence, the *Phonetic Continuum Matrix* not only addresses the challenges faced by educators, as exemplified by Mr. Reyes; it also offers a practical solution grounded in research-based principles. By incorporating this model into early literacy instruction, educators can cultivate an effective and tailored approach, ultimately contributing to improved reading outcomes and literacy success for students.

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From Paired Text to Blended Genres: Pairing Picturebooks with Poems

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces the concept of blended genres and describes a rationale for using blended genres to teach important topics in the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. It begins with a vignette that sparked curiosity about, and the motivation to develop, a variety of blended genres. It describes blended genres as rooted in traditional notions of paired text, provides theoretical background on the benefits of paired text, and highlights intertextuality as one important benefit, among others. It shares examples of blended genres and illustrates samples of instructional strategies used with blended genres to support intertextuality and student learning on important topics in English Language Arts (ELA). It ends with concluding thoughts.

KEYWORDS

paired text; blended genres; picturebooks; poetry; ELA instruction; intertextuality

ecently, one of us (Bill Bintz, the first author) read aloud *Mr. Archimede's Bath* (Allen, 1994) to students enrolled in a graduate class entitled Reading Across the Content Areas. Here is a precis:

Mr. Archimedes likes to take baths with his friends, Kangaroo, Wombat and Goat. The problem is that the water in the tub always overflows and makes a mess in the bathroom. He suspects the problem is one of his friends. Mr. Archimedes conducts an experiment by filling the bathtub with water and measuring the height of the water with a yardstick. He orders each of his friends to individually get in and get out of the bathtub, watching the behavior of the water. Mr. Archimedes includes himself in his experiment and finds the surprising and unexpected solution to the problem.

Bintz read aloud *Mr. Archimede's Bath* for three reasons: (a) promote the use of picturebooks for teaching content area material across the curriculum, (b) demonstrate the use of picturebooks to teach about important science and scientists, and (c) introduce or reintroduce, students to the life, times, and discoveries of Archimedes, and how he used the scientific method to solve real problems throughout his life.

After reading, Bintz invited students to share their understandings of the text and write reflections on the whole experience. All students responded positively about *Mr. Archimede's Bath*, especially about using picturebooks to teach content area material across the curriculum. One response was particularly interesting.

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I never liked science very much and was always confused about the scientific method. However, I love this picturebook because it makes the scientific method understandable. It is also a good introduction to Archimedes. This picturebook reminded me of a poem, "Bring Back Archimedes." It would be great to read the book and the poem together to students.

Bintz shared this response with a colleague (Abbey Galeza, the second author), and the response caught her attention. We recognized *Mr. Archimede's Bath* and "Bring Back Archimedes" (Smith, 2016) was a paired text. At the same time, however, we realized that this combination of a picturebook and a poem introduced us to a new way to develop a paired text, one that blends two different genres. She and I started to develop blended genres of picturebooks and poems based on important topics related to reading and writing, including libraries and librarians; letters, words, and wordplay; parts of speech; school; books; and stories. We also created instructional strategies that teachers can use with blended genres to help students make intertextual connections across texts.

This article introduces the concept of blended genres and provides a rationale for using this curricular resource to teach key topics in the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. A vignette, presented earlier, sparked the curiosity and motivation to explore various blended genres. The article defines blended genres, building on traditional ideas of paired texts, and offers a theoretical background on their benefits, particularly emphasizing intertextuality. It includes examples of blended genres; alongside instructional strategies designed to foster intertextuality and enhance student learning. The article concludes with final reflections on the use of blended genres in the classroom.

Paired Text

A blended genre is rooted in the traditional concept of a paired text. Conceptually, a paired text consists of two texts that are interrelated in some way, e.g. topic, theme, concept, etc. (Bintz, 2015). It is based on the notion that "reading is making connections between the books readers are currently reading and their past experiences" (Short et al., 1995, p. 358). Paired texts help readers "develop both an expectation for connections and strategies for making the search for connections more productive and wide ranging" (Short et al., 1995, p. 537). The next section identifies several benefits of paired texts.

Benefits of Paired Text

There are many benefits to paired text for students and teachers. For students, benefits, among others, include: (a) 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), (b) 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., 1995, p. 537), (c) they help students to read one text and in the process build background knowledge for reading a second, related text (Soalt, 2005, p. 680), (d) they provide experiences with multiple genres and content areas, (e) 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), (f) they highlight different text structures, specialized vocabulary, captions, diagrams, subheadings, maps, etc., (g) they increase vocabulary by seeing same words in different contexts, and (h) they increase motivation to explore topics students are not initially interested in (Soalt, 2005, p. 681).

In addition, paired have many benefits for teachers. Perhaps most importantly, paired text is a curricular resource that is based on a multiple-text, not a single-text (textbook), 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.

Paired text is also reflective of and consistent with Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2010). For example, while CCSS does not explicitly use the term intertextuality, the CCSS does provide a rationale for developing and using paired text in the classroom. One ELA 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, p. 10). 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.

Intertextuality

The process of intertextuality is one of the most important benefits of paired text. This term was first coined in the 1960s by Julia Kristeva (Allen, 2019) and essentially means "to weave together" (King-Shaver, 2005, p. 1). Since then, much professional literature continues to focus on the importance of intertextuality, 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., 1995, p. 358). Instructionally, paired text is one way to put intertextuality into action in the classroom. It invites and supports students in making of connections across texts. In the process, students develop both an expectation for connections and strategies for making the search for connections more productive and wideranging (Short et al., 1995, p. 537). The next section describes different ways to pair text.

Ways to Pair Text

There are many ways to develop a paired text (Bintz, 2015). One is to pair contradictory texts, two texts that tell the same story in contradictory ways. One example of a contradictory paired text is Rosa (Giovanni, 2005) and Claudette Colvin Refuses to Move (Wilkins, 2020). Another is to pair corresponding texts, two texts that address the same theme. One example of a corresponding paired text is The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage (Alko, 2015) and The Hello, Goodbye Window (Juster, 2005). Still another way is to pair companion texts, two texts that complement each other by addressing the same topic in a content area. One example of a companion paired text is Cycling: Lance Armstrong's Impossible Ride (Sandler, 2006) and Major Taylor: Champion Cyclist (Cline-Ransome, 2004). These ways of pairing text are traditional in the sense that they consist of two texts from the same or similar genres, e.g. two narrative texts, two informational texts, two short stories, etc.

Recently, however, much research has advanced the idea of the development of text sets using expanded, not traditional, formats of texts (Lupo et al., 2020; Tracy et al., 2017). For example, in addition to traditional texts like picturebooks, expanded ideas of formats include newspapers, cartoons, field guides, websites, tweets, blogs, songs, podcasts, poems, etc. Similarly, Cappiello and Dawes (2021) provide examples of linked text sets (NWESD Communications, 2019; see also Cummins, 2017; Pytash et al., 2014). These text sets consist of non-traditional texts like multimodal and multi-genre texts, including, among others, digital texts, YouTube videos, news articles, podcasts. These kinds of non-traditional texts offer students different formats to

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read, different voices to hear, and different perspectives to consider. Here, we share paired texts that consist of picturebooks and poetry and refer to these paired texts as blended genres.

Blended Genres

The concept of blended genres is rooted in traditional notions of paired text. Like paired text, blended genres consist of two texts and are used to support the process of intertextuality and enhance student learning. Unlike traditional paired text, blended genres consist of two texts from two different genres. Here, we share examples of blended genres. Because we are literacy educators, we developed these blended genres around several major categories associated with literacy. These categories include librarians and libraries; letters, words, wordplay, punctuation; parts of speech; school; books; and stories. We see these blended genres as a curricular resource that English/Language Arts teachers can use to actively engage students in learning, creating, and representing intertextual connections across two different genres.

We developed these blended genres with several considerations in mind. These considerations included highlighting the important role of librarians and libraries; selecting popular topics in reading and writing like wordplay, punctuation, parts of speech; highlighting high-quality literature in the form of narratives and biographies and poetry for its content, rhyme, and rhythm; noting the power and potential to actively engage readers in the reading process and enable them to create intertextual connections and support new learning on a specific topic. We also created several instructional strategies teachers can use with these and other blended genres.

Blended Genres and Instructional Strategies

In this section, we share examples of blended genres about certain topics (Librarians and Libraries; Letters, Words, Wordplay, and Punctuation; Parts of Speech; Life at School; Books; and Stories) along with illustrated samples of instructional strategies (refer to Figures 1–6) used with blended genres.

Blended Genres about Librarians and Libraries. *The Storyteller's Candle* (González, 2013) is a narrative, and "Librarian" (Hopkins, 2018) is a poem. Each text focuses on the importance of librarians and together represent a blended genre. *The Storyteller's Candle* is a dual language book (English and Spanish) that tells the story of Pura Belpre, a talented storyteller who became the first Puerto Rican librarian in the New York Public Library system. During the time of the Depression (1929–1935), many Puerto Rican people left their homeland and moved to New York City.

One morning, on the way to school, three Puerto Rican children passed a library and wanted to enter. Mother explained the problem: they do not speak English, and the people inside do not speak Spanish. However, that afternoon, a woman named Pura Belpre came and read to their class in both English and Spanish. Afterward, she invited all the children to visit the public library; the children couldn't wait to go! Inside, Pura Belpre lit a candle and read stories to the children. Afterward, she invited the children to make a wish and blow out the candle. The wish was to decorate the reading room to celebrate Five Kings Day, involving the community, all of whom heard people speaking English and Spanish at the library.

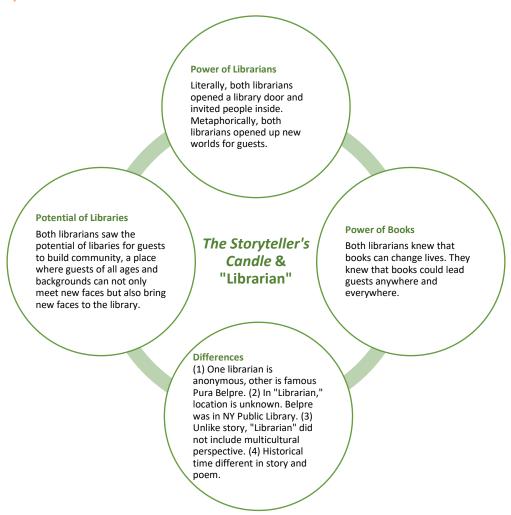
"Librarian" is a poem about a man who opened a door and the world to those who stepped through it. The man was a librarian.

Spheres of Intertextual Connections is an instructional strategy that can be used with any blended genre. One way to teach this strategy, along with the other strategies illustrated in this

article, can include a two-stage process: teacher demonstration and student engagement. For demonstration, teachers can do the following: (a) organize students in pairs or small groups of 3–4 to support collaboration and discussion, (b) prepare and distribute a blank copy of the strategy to each student, (c) display a selected blended genre to students and introduce each text with a picturewalk or book chat, (d) demonstrate the strategy by reading aloud both texts, pausing at strategic times to identify and record some intertextual connections between the texts on an illustrated class strategy, and (e) as a culminating experience, invite student discussions on the paired text, reflections on the intertextual connections, questions about completing the strategy on their own. For engagement, teachers can follow the same procedure with a different blended genre but this time inviting students to identify, discuss, and record intertextual connections between the two texts.

Here, we used this strategy with *The Storyteller's Candle* and "The Librarian" (see Figure 1). Similar to a Venn Diagram, this strategy illustrates three major intertextual connections: Power of Libraries, Potential of Libraries, and Power of Books. A fourth circle illustrates important differences between the texts. Table 1 in the appendix illustrates additional blended genres on a variety of topics and concepts about libraries and librarians.

Figure 1: Spheres of Intertextual Connections



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Blended Genres about Letters, Words, Wordplay, and Punctuation. Intertextual Connections Chart is an instructional strategy that can be used with any blended genre. Here, we used it with *Noah Webster & His Words* (Ferris, 2015) and "Dictionary" (Àmọó, 2019). Figure 2 illustrates four intertextual connections: Main Character, Need for Dictionary, Power of Dictionary, Dictionary Today. Short descriptions of how texts address each connection appear below. Table 2 after the article illustrates additional blended genre on a variety of topics and concepts about letters, words, wordplay, and punctuation.

Figure 2: Intertextual Connections Chart

	Main Character	Need for Dictionary	Need for Dictionary	Dictionary Today
Text Noah Webster & His Words (Ferris, 2015)	The main character is Noah Webster. The Webster family wanted Noah to be a farmer just like his father and continue the family tradition. Noah Webster, however, did not love farming, but loved learning and words throughout his life.	At the time of the Revolutionary War in the United States, no such thing as a dictionary existed. Noah Webster created the first dictionary, the first of many to come. Webster forecasted that the dictionary would be a friend to all Americans.	Noah Webster saw power in a dictionary. He saw it as a tool for people to learn, not just individual words, but also pronunciation and spelling of words, as well as words that have similar meanings.	Noah Webster predicted that people would value a dictionary for generations to come. People will always search for the meaning of a word, as well as different meanings for the same word. Today, the American Dictionary is the 2 nd most popular book printed in English.
Poem "Dictionary" (Àmọó, 2019)	The main character is an unnamed person who is also a reader, writer, and lover of words.	The main character sees the dictionary as a friend and "helper to all." It is a friend now and will be a friend with future editions.	The main character realizes the power of a dictionary as a library in and of itself, and a helper to all throughout life, especially in finding and using words that add richness to the English Language.	The main character also recognizes that a dictionary is universal and will be valued forever because individuals, especially readers and writers, will also need and want to search for the meaning of a word.

Blended Genres about Parts of Speech. H-Map is an instructional strategy that we used with *Alfie the Apostrophe* (Donohue, 2006) and "Apostrophe" (VanDerwater, 2021). Figure 3 illustrates the letter H with short summaries of each text in the left and right columns and intertextual connections in the middle of the letter. Table 3 illustrates additional blended genres on various topics and concepts about parts of speech.

Figure 3: H-Map

Text

Alfie is an apostrophe who does not want to audition for the punctuation mark talent show, even though he has perfected his work with possessives and contractions. Mommy and daddy apostrophes convince him otherwise. At the show. Bud Asterisk, master of ceremonies, starts the show. Alfie competes against Hiram the Hyphen, question marks, exclamation marks dressed in cheerleader costumes and pompoms, parentheses, commas, and a group of periods and hyphens (the "Dots & Dashes." Alfie shows a magic trick, making one word from two (won't vs. will not). He was the star of the show.

- 1. Both texts portray an apostrophe as a person and main character.
- Both are cautionary tales saying the apostrophe is very popular but often misunderstood and misused.
- Both texts stress the importance of the apostrophe for readers and writers.
- Both texts use academic vocabulary for uses of an apostrophe, e.g. possessive, omission of letters.
- 5. Both texts use wordplay.

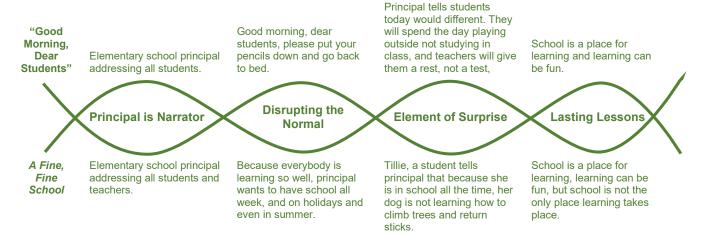
Poem

An unnamed apostrophe speaks to other letters, words, and punctuation marks, thanking them for his popularity but feels the need to set the record straight. The record is that he is a sign of ownership, like when he hangs around with the letter s. He also joins little words, like when he makes couldn't from could not. He also talks to readers and writers, warning them to be careful when they use him.

Otherwise, he'll create distractions.

Blended Genres about Life at School. Interwoven Connections is an instructional strategy that we used with *A Fine, Fine School* (Creech, 2003) and "Good Morning, Dear Students" (Nesbitt, 2005). Figure 4 illustrates four interwoven connections: Principal is Narrator, Disrupting the Normal, Element of Surprise, Lasting Lessons. Short descriptions of how texts address each connection appear above and below, respectively. Table 4 illustrates additional blended genre on a variety of topics and concepts about life at school.

Figure 4: Interwoven Connections



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Blended Genres about Books. Identifying & Describing Intertextual Connections is an instructional strategy that can we used with *Book* (Lyon & Catalanotto, 1999) and "Adventures with Books" (Blumhagen, 2015). Figure 5 illustrates intertextual connections in the middle and short descriptions of how texts address these connections in the left and right columns, respectively. Table 5 illustrates additional blended genre on a variety of topics and concepts about books.

Figure 5: Identifying & Describing Intertextual Connections

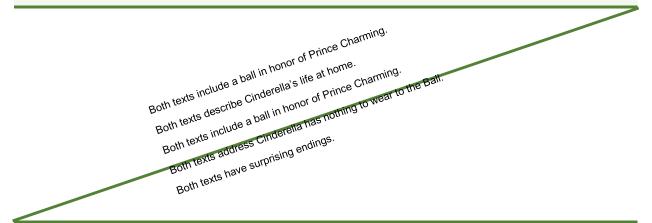
Book	Intertextual Connection	Adventures with Books
The word <i>book</i> appears on every page and is illustrated in innovative ways.	Both texts focus on the importance of reading books	And I can find with one good look, Just what I want inside a book.
A book is a house that is all windows and doors.	Both texts use metaphors on the	Books are ships that sail the seas, To lands of snow or jungle trees
A book is a chest that keeps the heart's treasure.	power and potential of books	Books are trains in many lands, Crossing hills or desert sands
Learn the secret passages. Turn pages, corners, holding your breath.	Both texts provide perceptions of books as a companion, one that is enjoyable adventurous and providing a	Books are gardens, fairies, elves, Cowboys, and people like ourselves
Book, Boon, Companion	sense of wonderment for readers.	Carocivee
Dear Friend, Dear Reader, look at the book you have just opened. What is it you hold in your hand?	Both texts use 3 rd person narration to	Come, let us read! For reading's
A book is a farm, its fields sown with words. Reader, you are its weather. Now you meet.	talk directly to the reader	fun.

Blended Genres about Stories. Z-Map is an instructional strategy that we used with *James Marshall's Cinderella* (Karlin, 2001) and "Poor Cinderella" (Nesbitt, 2009). This strategy, like the H-Map used the letter H, uses the letter Z to illustrates intertextual connections. Figure 6 illustrates intertextual connections in the middle of the letter Z and short summaries of each text above and below, respectively. Table 6 illustrates additional blended genre on a variety of topics and concepts about stories.

Figure 6: Z-Map

Cinderella

Cinderella has a mean stepmother who treats her differently than her two stepsisters. She was forced to work from morning to night. She started the fire and made meals every day, while others rested. One day, the King and Queen announced a ball for the prince. Cinderella was forced to make beautiful gowns for her stepsisters but was not allowed to go to the ball. On the night of the ball, Cinderella's Fairy Godmother appeared and tapped Cinderella on her head with a magic wand. Cinderella now wore a beautiful gown, glass slippers, and a carriage waited to take her to the ball. She danced through the night and met the prince. In her haste to return home by midnight, Cinderella accidentally left one slipper at the ball. The prince found the shoe and looked for the beautiful girl who wore it to the ball. In the end, he found Cinderella, and they married happily ever after.



"Poor Cinderella"

Cinderella has a mean stepmother and does not allow her to see films rated PG-13, have a cell phone, notebook computer, and play video games. She has unfashionable clothes, no chauffeur to drive her to school, and no time limit for bedtime. Prince Charming announces a ball, but Cinderella has nothing to wear. She surfs the Internet to find things to wear. No fairy Godmother contacts her to help. Cinderella's sister married the prince, and Cinderella still complains her stepmother is so mean.

Concluding Thoughts

We started this article with a vignette about a student who made intertextual connections between the picturebook *Mr. Archimede's Bath*, and the poem "Bring Back Archimedes." These connections sparked our curiosity and prompted new conversations about moving beyond traditional notions of paired text and towards developing and using blended genres in the classroom. We hope this article will spark some new curiosities, start some new conversations, and generate some new inquiry questions about the power and potential blended genres.

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Table 1: Libraries and Librarians

Title	Author	Copyright	Genre
Schomburg: The Man Who Built a Library	Carole Boston Weatherford	2019	Biography
"The Prologue"	Carole Boston Weatherford	2019	Poem
Library on Wheels: Mary Lemist Titcomb and America's First Bookmobile	Sharlee Glenn	2018	Biography
"The Bookmobile"	Kay Umland	1952	Poem
The Librarian of Basra: A True Story from Iraq	Jeanette Winter	2006	Biography
"Hearing of Alia Muhammed Baker's Stroke"	Philip Metres	2014	Poem
Planting Stories: The Life of Librarian and Storyteller Pura Belpre	Anika Denise	2019	Biography
"Librarian"	Lee Bennett Hopkins	2018	Poem
The Book Woman	Heather Henson	2008	Historical fiction
"Portrait of a Pack Horse Librarian"	Allison C. Rollins	2020	Poem
Library Lil	Suzanne Williams	1997	Fiction
"In the Library"	Charles Simic	2008	Poem
Waiting for the Biblioburro	Monica Brown	2011	Fiction
"Poem-Mobiles"	J. Patrick Lewis	2014	Poem
The Boy Who Was Raised by Librarians	Carla Morris	2007	Fiction
"Branch Library"	Edward Hirsch	2003	Poem
Bats at the Library	Brain Lies	2008	Fiction
'Don't Go into the Library"	Alberto Rios	2017	Poem
Tomas and the Library Lady	Pat Mora	1997	Fiction
"My First Memory (Of Librarians)"	Nikki Giovanni	2007	Poem
Library Lion	Michelle Knudsen	2006	Fiction
"Don't Go Into the Library"	Alberto Rios	2017	Poem
The Library	Sarah Stewart	1995	Fiction
"Because of Libraries We Can Say These Things"	Naomi Shihab Nye	1998	Poem
Splat the Cat and the Late Library Book	Rob Scotton	2016	Fiction
"OVERDUES"	Shel Silverstein	2002	Poem
Richard Wright and the Library Card	William Miller	1997	Fiction
"Library Card"	Olivia D Michaels	2003	Poem
Poetree	Shauna LaVoy Reynolds	2019	Fiction
"The Buffalo in the Library"	Brod Bagert	2002	Poem
A Library	Nikki Giovanni	2022	Fiction
"Library Poem"	Julia Donaldson	2015	Poem

The Library Book	Michael L. Mark	2017	Fiction
"Books! Books!"	Jordan Hetrick	2015	Poem

Table 2: Letters, Words, and Wordplay

Title	Author	Copyright	Genre
A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams	Jennifer Bryant	2008	Biography
"Words"	Gunadevi Rajaratnam	2022	Poem
Noah Webster: Weaver of Words	Pegi Deitz Shea	2021	Biography
"My Dictionary"	Carl D'Souza	2021	Poem
Enormous Smallness: A Story of E.E. Cummings	Matthew Burgess	2015	Biography
"To E.E. Cummings"	Brian P. Cleary	2004	Poem
The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus	Jenn and Jennifer Bryant	2014	Biography
"Thesaurus-saurus"	Charlie Brown	2023	Poem
Stacey's Extraordinary Words	Stacy Abrams	2021	Autobiography
"The Power of Words"	Omkar Atale	2014	Poem
Ann and Nan Are Anagrams: A Mixed-Up Word Dilemma	Mark Shulman	2013	Fiction
"The Tot and the Elder"	Olin & Billy Foblioso	2014	Poem
The Keeper of Wild Words	Brooke Smith	2020	Fiction
"Reflections"	Lynne C. Fadden	2002	Poem
Eating the Alphabet	Lois Ehlert	1989	Fiction
"Eating Alphabet Soup"	J. Patrick Lewis	2014	Poem
Tongue Twisters for Kids	Riley Weber	2016	Humor; fiction
"Toucan Can-Can"	Kenn Nesbitt	2022	Poem
Word Play	Adam Lehrhaupt	2017	Humor; fiction
"The Parts of Speech"	Unknown	2017	Poem

Table 3: Parts of Speech

Title	Author	Copyright	Genre
Twenty-Odd Ducks: Why Every Punctuation Mark Counts	Lynne Truss	2008	Informational
"In a World of Punctuation"	Lucy H.	2014	Poem
Punctuation Takes a Vacation	Robin Pulver	2004	Fiction
"It'sFunToLeaveTheSpacesOut"	Kenn Nesbitt	2012	Poem
If You Were a Period	Nick Healy	2009	Informational
"Period" (In A Bunch of Punctuation)	Jane Yolen	2021	Poem

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Exclamation Mark	Amy Krouse Rosenthal	2013	Fiction
"!!!!!!!-SUPERHERO KABOOM-!!!!!!!!!" (In	•		
A Bunch of Punctuation)	Julie Larios	2021	Poem
Question Marks Say "What?"	Michael Dahl	2019	Informational
"Questions Marks" (In A Bunch of Punctuation)	Lee Bennett Hopkins	2021	Poem
Eats, Shoots & Leaves: Why Commas Really Do Make a Difference	Lynne Truss	2006	Informational
"Stop Awhile"	Brian P. Cleary	2004	Poem
Greedy Apostrophe: A Cautionary Tale	Jan Carr	2009	Fiction
"Apostrophe"	Amy Ludwig Vanderwater	2021	Poem
The Girl's Like Spaghetti: Why You Can't Manage Without Apostrophes!	Lynne Truss	2007	Humor; fiction
"Apostrophe" (In A Bunch of Punctuation)	Amy Ludwig VanDerwater	2021	Poem
Code Blue - Calling All Capitals!	Pamela Hall	2009	Fiction
"Sisters"	Lucille Clifton	2003	Poem
Silent Letters Loud and Clear	Robin Pulver	2008	Fiction
"Silent Letters"	Magiclight	2016	Poem
Parts of Speech for Kids	Erin Jacobs	2014	Informational
"Parts of Speech"	Mark Hurlin Shelton	2017	Poem
Pre- and Re-, Mis- and Dis-: What is a Prefix?	Brian P. Cleary	2015	Informational
"POEMSICLE"	Shel Silverstein	1981	Poem
There Is a Tribe of Kids	Lane Smith	2016	Fiction
"Collective Nouns"	Gregory H. Wlodarski	2021	Poem
Nouns and Verbs Have a Field Day	Robin Pulver	2006	Fiction
"Signs"	John Frank	2015	Poem
Merry-Go-Round: A Book about Nouns	Ruth Heller	1990	Informational
"The Grammar Lesson"	Steve Kowit	2003	Poem
Fantastic! Wow! And Unreal! A Book about Interjections and Conjunctions	Ruth Heller	1998	Informational
"Sentenced"	Vionet	2020	Poem
Find Your Function at Conjunction Junction	Pamela Hall	2009	Fiction
"Conjunction"	Justin Reamer	2013	Poem
Under, Over, By the Clover: What is a Preposition?	Brian P. Cleary	2002	Informational
"Tire Attire"	Hannah Borke	2017	Poem
Many Luscious Lollipops: A Book about Adjectives	Ruth Heller	1989	Informational; nonfiction
"Life's About The Adjectives"	Michael Benton	2007	Poem
Up, Up and Away: A Book about Adverbs	Ruth Heller	1991	Informational

"Silently"	Josie Whitehead		Poem
Kites Sail High: A Book about Verbs	Ruth Heller	1988	Informational
"At the Seaside"	Robert Louis Stevenson	1947	Poem
Things that are most in the world	Judi Barrett	1998	Fiction
"Superlatives"	Nae Ayson	2015	Poem
Chips and Cheese and Nana's Knees: What is Alliteration	Brian P. Cleary	2017	Informational
"Zzzzz"	Kenn Nesbitt	2001	Poem
Dear Deer: A Book of Homophones	Gene Baretta	2007	Informational
"Here Me Write"	Babu	2016	Poem

Table 4: School

Title	Author	Copyright	Genre
First Grade Takes a Test	Miriam Cohen	2006	Fiction
"The Test"	Harrison	1993	Poem
The King of Kindergarten	Derrick Barnes	2019	Fiction
"A Kindergarten Song" (in Muse)	Carrie Williams Clifford	2006	Poem
Miss Malarkey's Field Trip	Judy Finchler	2006	Fiction
"We Had a Field Trip Yesterday"	Jack Prelutsky	2012	Poem
I Didn't Do My Homework Because	Davide Cali	2014	Fiction
"I Tried to Do My Homework"	Kenn Nesbitt	2018	Poem
Field-Trip Fiasco	Julie Danneberg	2015	Fiction
And then a Flaming Pterodactyl Ate "My Homework"	Evelyn Swartz	2021	Poem
PECAN'S Spelling Bee Championship	Roger James	2021	Fiction
"The Spelling Bee"	Rowe	2016	Poem
First Day Jitters	Julie Danneberg	2000	Fiction
"Jitter Glitters"	Krissy Miner		Poem
Last Day Blues	Julie Danneberg	2000	Fiction
"Teacher Blues"	LYSS	2019	Poem
Angela Anachonda: School is a Necessary Evil	Kent Redeker	2001	Fiction
"Sick"	Shel Silverstein	1970	Poem
Little Yellow Bus	Erin Guendelsberger	2022	Fiction
"The Yellow School Bus"	Betty Hermelee	2019	Poem
Walking to School	Ethel Turner	1989	Fiction
"Let's Walk to School"	Wigan Council	No date	Poem
Big Test Jitters	Julie Danneberg	2020	Fiction

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"Exam Stress"	Lovewell	No date	Poem
Thank you, Mr. Falker	Patricia Polacco	1998	Fiction
"Hero in the Classroom"	Susan T. Apaarejo	2009	Poem
The Recess Queen	Alexis O' Neill	2002	Fiction
"All I Ask"	Caitlyn Dwyer	2015	Poem
A Day at Damp Camp	George Ella Lyon	1996	Fiction
"Summer Camp Souvenirs"	Richard Thomas	2019	Poem
Rondo in C	Paul Fleischman	1988	Fiction
"Audition"	Hope Anita Smith	2016	Poem

Table 5: Books

Title	Author	Copyright	Genre
Wild About Books	Judy Sierra	2004	Fiction
"Books to the Ceiling"	Arnold Lobel	2015	Poem
Bookie the Book Loving Bear	Sonica Ellis	2021	Fiction
"I Love to Read the Books"	Mohit Chahal	2013	Poem
The Incredible Book Eating Boy	Oliver Jeffers	2006	Fiction
"How to Eat a Poem"	Eve Merriam	1990	Poem
A Child of Books	Oliver Jeffers	2016	Fiction
"Invitation"	Shel Silverstein	1974	Poem
Miss Brooks Loves Books!	Barbara Bottner	2010	Fiction
"Adventures with Books"	Velda Blumhgaen	No date	Poem
The World That Loved Books	Stephen Parlato	2008	Fiction
"There is a Land"	Leland B. Jacobs	1990	Poem
The Important Book	Margaret Wise Brown	1977	Fiction
"The Secret Song"	Margaret Wise Brown	1952	Poem
A Story for Bear	Dennis Haseley	2002	Fiction
"Good Books"	Guest	2014	Poem
You Read to Me and I'll Read to You	Mary Ann Hoberman	2006	Fiction
"Read to Me"	Jane Yolen	1987	Poem
Read for Me, Mama	Vashanti Rahaman	1997	Fiction
"Read to Me"	Jane Yolen	1987	Poem
The Magic Bookmark	Iraklis Lampadariou	2016	Fiction
"I Am a Bookmark"	Ryan O'Rourke	2017	Poem
Look, a Book!	Libby Gleeson	2017	Fiction
"Adventure"	Anonymous	No date	Poem

The Reader	Amy Hest	2012	Fiction
"Storyboat"	Bobbi Katz	2013	Poem

Table 6: Stories

Title	Author	Copyright	Genre
Finding Winnie: The True Story of the World's Famous Bear	Lindsay Mattick	2015	Nonfiction
"Pooh Bear"	Elisabeth	2018	Poem
Earmuffs for Everyone: How Chester Greenwood Became Known as the Inventor of Earmuffs	Meghan McCarthy	2015	Biography
"I Sing the Earmuff Electric"	Mary Fons	2013	Poem
The Marvelous Thing That Came from a Spring	Gilbert Ford	2016	Biography
"Slinky"	Ima Ryma	2013	Poem
The Boy Who Thought Outside the Box: The Story of Video Game Inventor Ralph Baer	Marcie Wessels	2020	Biography
"The Games in My Room"	Kenn Nesbitt	2018	Poem
Mighty Jackie: The Strike-Out Queen	Marissa Moss	2004	Biography
"Take Me Out To The Ballgame"	Jack Norworth	1993	Poem
Bill, the Boy Wonder: The Secret Co- Creator of Batman	Marc Tyler Nobleman	2012	Biography
"Batman"	Jan Allison	2015	Poem
Silver Packages: An Appalachian Christmas Story	Cynthia Rylant	1987	Fiction
"Appalachia with Love"	Andrew Welsh	2020	Poem
Kate and the Beanstalk	Mary Pope Osborne	2005	Fiction
"Jack and the Beanstalk"	Summer Song	2006	Poem
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: A Tale from the Brothers Grimm	Grimm & Grimm	1987	Fiction
"Snow White: The Anti-Fairytale"	Emily Reid	2013	Poem
Little Red Writing	Joan Holub	2016	Fiction
"Little Red Riding Hood & the Wolf"	Roald Dahl	2009	Poem
Goodnight iPAD: a Parody for the Next Generation	Ann Droyd	2011	Fiction
"The Dragon of Death"	Jack Prelutsky	1993	Poem
The Wretched Stone	Chris Van Allsburg	1991	Fiction
"Too Much TV!"	Roann Mendriq	2015	Poem
The Widow's Broom	Chris Van Allsburg	2018	Fiction
"The Witch Who Lost Her Broom!!!"	Prarthana Gururaj	2023	Poem

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Playing Right Field	Willy Welch	1995	Fiction
"The Right Fielder"	Tom Lakin	2021	Poem

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SSSLIDE into Reading Big Words! A Strategy for **Decoding Multisyllabic Words**

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ABSTRACT

The ability to decode multisyllabic words significantly impacts fluency, automaticity, vocabulary, and comprehension ability. As students advance to the intermediate grades, this skill becomes increasingly critical as they are exposed to a greater volume of informational text containing a higher frequency of multisyllabic and unfamiliar words. Given the rising number of older children reading below grade level, it is essential for intermediate-grade teachers to employ effective and efficient strategies to teach multisyllabic word decoding. This article introduces SSSLIDE, a straightforward strategy that can be taught in just twelve 30-minute lessons, empowering students to decode most multisyllabic words and ultimately to make sense of what they read.

KEYWORDS

svllables: syllabication; structural analysis; phonics; struggling readers; wordsolving strategies; science of reading; COVID-

eading tutors in Georgia are seldom short of work these days: Only 61% of Georgia fourth graders demonstrated reading ability at above the basic level in 2022. This was 2% lower than in 2019 (National Assessment of Educational Progress, n.d.), most likely due to the interruption in early grades education during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gray et al., 2023). With 39% of fourth-graders unable to read words well enough to identify simple, literal details in text, illiteracy is at a crisis level in our state.

Chall et al. (1990) used the term fourth-grade slump to explain the critical transition in reading skills as children progressed through school. She pointed to the greater number of multisyllabic words in non-fiction text, particularly as a possible reason for this trend. Other researchers have validated the importance of multisyllabic word reading in student success in the upper elementary grades (Ehri, 2005; Nagy et al., 2006). One reason students may struggle to read multisyllabic words well is that they have not been systematically taught to do so. This is not surprising, given that the guidelines on teaching syllabication are more general than structured series of steps (see Bear et al., 2015; Fountas & Pinnell, 2017; Juel, 1988; Pressley, 2006). A recent EBSO search of peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed articles within the last five years containing "syllabication" or "multisyllabic words" in the title yielded no results in the first case and only rationale for teaching the skill, but with no specific methods for doing so, in the latter.

Caleb (pseudonym) represented a typical striving reader. His parents explained that Caleb had spent his entire first-grade year and part of second grade online, with inconsistent instruction in reading, and that he was now struggling to read at grade level.

Like many fourth- and fifth-grade struggling readers with whom I've worked in the past, an assessment of Caleb's oral reading ability quickly revealed the problem: although he could decode most single-syllable words, he had few strategies for decoding multisyllabic words. As is Tovey 39

common with children facing this challenge, Caleb would skip unfamiliar words or read the first part of the word and guess at the rest.

What Science Tells Us About Learning to Read

The ability to make meaning from text—to elicit information and make personal connections (Rosenblatt, 1978)—underlies success in every subject area. However, to make meaning from text, the reader must possess the ability to decode text and read with automaticity (Adams, 1990; Ehri, 1995). For word reading to become automatic, children need to know not only how to map graphemes (letter patterns) to phonemes (letter sounds) but also how to break larger words into the smaller parts to facilitate reading. Instruction on how to do this is crucial for struggling readers (Bhattacharya & Ehri, 2004; Moats, 2004; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Shelfelbine, 1990), including English language learners (Vaughn et al., 2005).

In this article, I will explain a strategy I developed to help Caleb decode multisyllabic words quickly and accurately in just a few weeks. For Caleb and other students experiencing the fourth-grade slump (Chall et al., 1990), such strategies may be key to advancing their reading abilities and future academic success.

The SSSLIDE Strategy

Like many post-pandemic teachers currently teaching the intermediate grades, I had limited time to help Caleb catch up to grade level. It made sense, then, to develop an approach that was not only sequenced from simplest to more difficult word-solving skills (Moats, 2004) but also focused on the grapheme patterns that would help him solve the most words as quickly as possible.

In each 30-minute lesson, I used explicit instructional methods (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Mesmer & Griffith, 2005/2006). I explained and modeled, then had Caleb work with my assistance, and finally had him demonstrate independently what he had learned. To make the task of dividing words easier, I provided lists of words in large font and with spaces between each letter. I set mastery at the ability to decode 80% of multisyllabic words within each category (Black & Wiliam, 1996). The sequence of my lessons, all which built upon each other, formed the acronym of SSSLIDE:

Search for word parts that you already know.

Search for VC-e, CV-r, and C-le syllables.

Swoop together common consonant digraphs, diphthongs, and vowel teams.

Label vowels and consonants beginning with the first vowel.

Identify if the pattern is VCCV or VCV.

Divide the word according to the most common pattern: VC/CV or V/CV.

Evaluate the word.

Step 1: Search for Word Parts That You Already Know

These word parts may be compound or derivational. Compound words like *hotdog* or *mailbox* are easy to divide without needing knowledge of syllable rules. According to McGregor et al. (2010), these words make up as much as 30% of the English language. The same study found that 28% of words are derivational, containing recognizable roots flanked by affixes on one or both sides, such as *uncomfortable*, *swimming*, and *playful*. Generally, these words can be easy solved by separating

the prefixes and suffixes from the base word. Just 20 prefixes make up 97% of English words with prefixes, and 20 suffixes account for 93% of words with suffixes (White et al., 1989). It made sense to review or teach on the spot, if necessary, the most common prefixes and suffixes, as they often indicate where a word can be divided at the beginning (prefixes) or the end (suffixes). I provided Caleb with a list of some of the most common prefixes and suffixes (Lane et al., 2009; see Figure 1) to scaffold this process and, in our first lesson, had him draw a box around the small words, prefixes, and suffixes that he saw. Recognizing compound words and derivative prefixes or suffixes became the first step of the SSSLIDE strategy: Search for word parts you already know.

Common Prefixes	Common Suffixes
in	al
re	tion
de	sion
dis	ate
en	ly
ex	able
un	ment
pre	er
non	ent

Figure 1: Common Prefixes and Suffixes (Lane et al., 2009)

Step 2: Search for VC-e, CV-r, and C-le Patterns

I found that Step 1 alone seemed to help Caleb to solve most long words. However, there are other rule-governed ways of dividing syllables, and some students need to understand these patterns to decode multisyllabic words (Blevins, 2017; Moats & Tolman, 2009; Yampolky & Waters, 2002). Teaching Caleb to spot VC-e, CV-r, and C-le patterns made up the next three lessons.

If searching for compound and derivational words does not solve the word, the next step for a student is to identify the syllable type and follow its most common division pattern. There are six syllable types: vowel-consonant-e (VC-e), consonant-vowel-r (CVr), and consonant-le (C-le), closed, open, and vowel teams. Each syllable type should be taught separately until mastery before going on to the next type (Bhattacharya & Ehri, 2004).

VC-e, CVr, and C-le are all syllable types that mostly follow regular pronunciation and division rules (Gates & Yale, 2011). Multisyllabic words that end with the VC-e syllables are divided before the consonant preceding the vowel sound, such as in the word *alive*. If the VC-e syllable is in the middle of the word, then it is divided after the e, as in the word *ab/so/lute/ly*. I told Caleb to think of VC-e words as mini silent e words that he could search for and draw boxes around to divide the word.

CVr syllables, also called r-controlled vowels, are divided before the consonant, such as in the word *con/duc/tor*, and, when the pattern occurs in the middle, after the r, such as in the word *mi/ser/ly*. Like with VC-e words, I told Caleb to look for mini r-controlled words to box.

In C-le syllables, such as the final syllable in *can/dle*, the division pattern is before the first consonant. This pattern occurs only at the end of words, and I taught Caleb to draw boxes around them as well. The second step in the SSSLIDE strategy became to search for VC-e, CVr, and C-le word parts.

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Step 3: Swoop Together Common Consonant Digraphs, Diphthongs, and Vowel Teams

Closed syllables are the most common orthographic unit in English, making up about 43% of words (Stanback, 1992). Closed syllables have one vowel sound, pronounced as a short vowel, followed by a consonant sound, and most closed syllable words are divided after the consonant following the first vowel (VC/CV), such as in the word *plas/tic*. Open-syllable words also follow a regular division pattern. These syllables end with a vowel and can be recognized by a pattern of VCV sounds. About seventy-five percent of the time, these syllables are divided after the first vowel (V/CV), such as in the word *to/ma/to* (Stanback, 1992). Both closed and open syllable patterns work by coding the vowel and consonant sounds, starting with the first vowel sound in the word.

Whether open or closed, children need to understand that syllable rules are based on vowel and consonant *sounds* not on vowel or consonant letters. Therefore, I teach them to "swoop" together two or more graphemes that represent one phoneme before applying the syllable rule. This applies to sounds that are made by consonant digraphs, diphthongs, and vowel teams. For example, in the word *mushroom*, the *sh* is a digraph which counts as one consonant sound and must be swooped together for the closed syllable pattern (VC/CV) to work in dividing the word. In the word *season*, the *ea* needs to be swooped together for the most common open syllable pattern to work (V/CV). In the word *allowance*, the *ow* diphthong needs to be swooped together for the V/CV open syllable division to work in the second syllable. Given our limited time and the need for efficient word-solving, I provided Caleb with a list of all the consonant digraphs and diphthongs and only the most common vowel teams (Fry, 2004; see Figure 2). This served as a scaffold as he implemented this step.

Figure 2: Common Consonant Digraphs, Diphthongs, and Vowel Teams (Fry. 2004)

Consonant Digraphs	Diphthongs	Vowel Teams
ch	ow	ai
sh	00	ay
th	ou	ee
wh	oi	ea
ph	oy	oa

When considering vowel team syllables, I realized there was no need to teach these separately from the other syllable types. Nor was there any reason to teach complicated patterns like VCCCV patterns and the like. If Caleb remembered to swoop consonant digraphs, diphthongs, and vowel teams together, the division patterns of VC/CV and V/CV almost always worked. Thus, "S" for "swoop" became the third step in the SSSLIDE strategy: Swoop together consonant digraphs, diphthongs, and vowel teams. Swooping common digraphs, diphthongs, and vowel teams made up three more lessons.

After nine thirty-minute lessons (one each on identifying words inside of words, common prefixes, common suffixes, VC-e, CV-r, C-le patterns, and swooping common digraphs, diphthongs, and vowel teams), Caleb was quickly gaining confidence in his ability to tackle big words. However, there were still a few more strategies needed to ensure his ability to solve every multisyllabic word he might encounter.

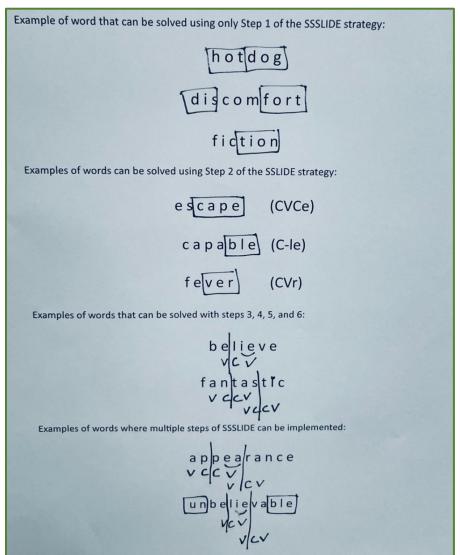
Step 4: Label Vowels and Consonant Sounds Beginning with the First Vowel Sound and Step 5: Identify if the Pattern is VCCV or VCV

I began by teaching Caleb to label vowels and consonants by writing a V or a C under each grapheme beginning with the first vowel and note which of the two patterns he saw. Both steps were taught in the same lesson.

Step 6: Divide the Word According to the Most Common Pattern: VC/CV or V/CV

To complete the word-solving process, I taught Caleb that if the pattern is VCCV, it generally divides after the first consonant. If it is VCV, it will generally divide after the first vowel, and, if not, after the first consonant. If other syllables need to continue to be divided to solve the word, the student can repeat these steps beginning with the second vowel. This step made up another lesson. I followed this with one last lesson in which he practiced solving several examples of multisyllabic words by employing all the strategies he had learned. See examples of the SSSLIDE strategy in action in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Examples of SSSLIDE in Action



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Step 7: Evaluate the Word

No matter what strategy is employed, the student will "evaluate" the word by putting each part of the word together in one whole word aloud and noting if it makes sense. This step is important as the whole purpose of the SSSLIDE strategy is not to solve a word, per se, but to make meaning of print.

Conclusion

Reading researcher Linnea Erhi (2005) said, "Given that there are multiple ways to read words, consider which way makes text reading most efficient" (p. 170). I similarly explain to children that they have many tools available to them to solve a word and that it really doesn't matter how they divide it as long as they can read the word. For example, whether the word *capable* is divided *cap/a/ble* or *cap/able*, the word will still be recognizable. I also reminded Caleb that he did not have to divide syllables from the beginning of the word to the end. Rather he could start at the end of the word or even in the middle.

While the process of SSSLIDE may seem daunting at first, children need to understand that they do not need to go through every step of SSSLIDE every time. If they find word parts they know (Step 1) or the simple VC-e, Cvr, or C-le patterns (Step 2) those steps are usually sufficient. Children also need to understand that they will not have do SSSLIDE every time they try to decode a long word, because once they do it a few times, those words, and others like them, will become part of their sight word vocabulary.

If I had had more time with Caleb, I might have taught him to recognize some of the less common vowel teams and to use less common syllable division patterns. However, I predict that his increased time spent reading will provide more opportunities to practice decoding long words and that, through practice, those words will eventually become automatic and part of his sight word vocabulary (Ehri, 2005).

Teachers of struggling readers like Caleb need practical and efficient solutions for catching children up to grade level. Strategies like SSSLIDE have the potential to pull Caleb and other struggling readers out of the "slump" and set them on their way to academic success.

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It's Time for a "Brain Drain!"

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ABSTRACT

In their classrooms, teachers create learning environments that foster knowledge acquisition through the strategies they choose to implement. This article highlights a strategy called Brain Drain, which teachers can set up as an activity that will help students access their prior knowledge, connect new learning, and have an opportunity to discuss and build upon this learning with peers. The Schema, Cognitive Load, and Sociocultural Learning Theories are mentioned, briefly highlighted, and connected to this strategy.

KEYWORDS

schema theory; collaborative learning environment; social interaction; long-term memory integration

eachers have the formidable task of planning strategies that will foster a collaborative learning environment and help students acquire, retain, and recall information. Each student comes to the learning space with prior knowledge based on their personal experiences. While learning is a social process, allowing students to discuss their learning deepens those existing connections.

The Brain Drain strategy is one that allows students time to access their prior knowledge, connect new learning, and express their understanding with peers. As students acquire, recall, and share their learning with others, they can feel their contributions are heard and valued. The learning space becomes an expressive, collaborative, and rich experience for students.

Background Knowledge and Social Learning Theories

Creating learning environments that foster the recall and sharing of knowledge are ones where students are actively engaged in the learning process. There are two theories that support the Brain Drain strategy. The Schema Theory introduced by British psychologist, Frederic Bartlett in 1932, states that acquiring knowledge is a two-step process. The first process is that individuals build mental representations of the world around them. When acquiring new knowledge, they integrate information stored in long-term memory, referred to as *schemata*. Schemata will be different for every reader, and mental structures will slowly change over time as new knowledge is assimilated (Bartlett, 1932).

The likelihood of information being encoded to long-term memory is dependent on the ability of working memory to process and integrate new information into existing schema. According to Smith et al. (2021), knowledge stored in long-term memory can be categorized into two types: *availability* and *accessibility*. *Availability* refers to that relevant knowledge that is held in one's long-term memory, while *accessibility* is the time and ease in which this knowledge can be retrieved.

Students learn from their interactions with others. Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1962) examined how social interactions influenced the learning process. He concluded that learning cannot be separated from a social context. Through these interactions with others,

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individuals learn the rules, skills, and abilities that are shaped by one's culture. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) concluded that language is the tool that promotes thinking and reasoning and supports reading and writing.

When teachers utilize strategies that promote and celebrate individuality and the collective expression of all those participating, the reading and learning experience is enhanced.

Brain Drain Strategy

The Brain Drain strategy can be used with students of varying ages and abilities. The purpose is to allow time for "draining" the brain of previously read content and background knowledge, then allowing time for peer-to-peer discussion. There are two steps in implementing this strategy.

Step 1: Preparation. To prepare, post self-adhesive chart paper around the classroom. Give each student a marker, then ask students to find a partner and a piece of paper.

Step 2: Implementation. Set the timer between two to five minutes; time will vary depending on students' ages and abilities. Pose a question to the group and ask students to quietly use words or pictures to represent their understanding of the text.

Step 3: Discussion and Wrap-Up. When the timer goes off, allow two to five minutes for them to discuss with their partner what they've drawn or written and allow them to add to their initial explanation or drawings. Ask each group to share their posters with the group.

Step	Directions		
Preparation	 Post self-adhesive chart paper around the classroom Pass out markers to students 		
Implementation	 Ask students to find a partner and paper Pose question Ask students to respond to the question in words or pictures individually Set a timer for 2-5 minutes 		
Discussion & Wrap Up	 After the timer goes off, allow students to discuss their interpretations Allow students to add to their interpretations Ask each partnership to share their posters with the group 		

Table 1: Directions for Brain Drain Strategy Implementation

Brain Drain Example

Figure 1 is an example of the strategy I implemented with my undergraduate preservice teachers in an English as a second language methods course. They had read, and we discussed the stages of language acquisition, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, and Dr. Jim Cummin's Iceberg theory. I found it interesting how the discussion with their partner helped them remember additional details. For example, in Figure 1, the time periods of language acquisition stages were added after the discussion.

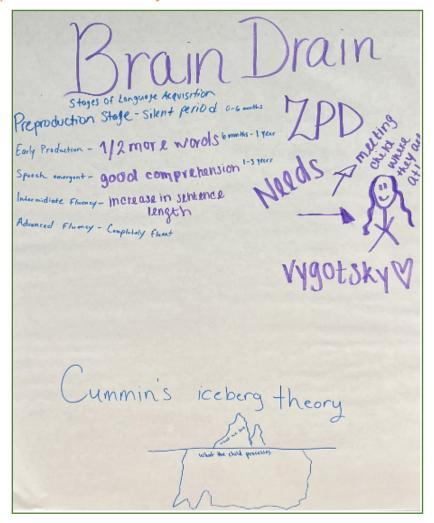
As a group, we discussed modifications and variations for this strategy. I used it as an informal summative assessment and a way to incorporate language for English learners through

the discussion piece. My students suggested that you could use it as a way to assess students' background knowledge of particular content and then assess what they learned. Teachers would follow the same format, with students individually adding to the poster and discussion, and then additional details could be added. One thing I thought was particularly interesting was that one student said to color code these additions. For example, background knowledge is one color, then new learning is another, so students can see how much they learned.

For small group modifications, teachers could ask students to individually write or draw everything they know about a particular topic and then share their drawings or explanations with a partner. After a guided reading experience with text, students could add more detail and then again discuss their drawings or writing with a partner.

The Brain Drain strategy enhances the learning experience for students because they must recall existing knowledge from their long-term memories and display it with words or drawings. Students are given time to access this knowledge, and there is individual accountability in that each participant completes their own work before the peer-to-peer discussion. In addition, this strategy raises students' awareness of what they already know and what they learned and how talking with their peers can both enhance and increase their learning.

Figure 1: Example of Brain Drain Activity



Note. Timeframes were added after discussion with a partner.

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Conclusion

Teachers are responsible for designing and implementing instructional strategies that will ultimately assist their students to learn and remember content. The strategy, Brain Drain, allows for individual thinking and expression as well as peer-to-peer interaction. Most importantly, students make connections to previous and new knowledge and discuss with peers, which will enhance and increase their learning experience and create a collaborative, rigorous learning environment. This strategy can be implemented at various ages and skill levels and either with a whole or small group of students. Teachers should observe and adjust based on student responses and learning outcomes.

The Brain Drain strategy does require some teacher preparation such as question generation and gathering supplies. If students are experiencing difficulty either responding to the question or working with a specific peer, the teacher can walk around and monitor the partnerships closely, offer suggestions, or strategically partner students before implementation. Ultimately, it is the teacher's planning for a successful learning experience, and I encourage you to try the Brain Drain strategy with students and share it with colleagues. It's always a good time for a Brain Drain!

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Teaching Vocabulary in Meaningful and Memorable Ways: Explicit Instruction in the English Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the importance of facilitating explicit vocabulary instruction in the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. Vocabulary research on best practices suggests that explicit instruction can potentially increase student learning outcomes. The discussion begins with research on effective instruction, identifying words to teach, and ends by providing practical strategies that can be used in the ELA classroom.

KEYWORDS

direct vocabulary instruction; explicit vocabulary instruction; vocabulary pedagogy

As a storyteller, words are my endless supply of inspiration, my palette of splendid colors, my toolbox filled with everything I need. Words are . . . the shyness of a fawn's breath, the sobbing at a pet's death, the last cracker in the box, the gloriously tailed fox, the sweet fullness of cantaloupe, the faith it takes to have hope, the bridge that crosses every sea, the steppingstones to you from me. (Fresch & Harrison, 2020, pp. x–xi)

resch and Harrison (2020) assert that words are a powerful tool used by storytellers. Words can inspire. Words can illustrate ideas. Words can articulate complex emotions and dispositions. But, most of all, words can serve as connectors between people. During my time as an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher at the middle and high school levels, my students struggled with academic vocabulary. I wanted, better yet, I needed to devise a plan to support students in learning academic vocabulary in meaningful and memorable (Allen, 2007) ways. Like the storyteller mentioned above, I wanted my students to realize the dynamic and eloquent potential that words possess. More importantly, I wanted to: (a) build my students' academic vocabulary, and (b) engage them in explicit vocabulary instruction to develop their vocabulary knowledge.

During my secondary school experiences, vocabulary instruction was facilitated in the following fashion: On Mondays, we read and copied definitions of vocabulary words on notebook paper. On Tuesdays, we were to use each word in a sentence. On Wednesdays and Thursdays, the words lingered awkwardly on the outskirts of the chalkboard. And on Fridays, we completed an oral spelling test of all the words. Then, something odd happened; the words returned to the dictionary from whence they came. To a great degree, these mundane and low-engagement instructional approaches enabled me to become adept at copying words from scuffed dictionaries. However, to deliver rich, meaningful, and effective vocabulary instruction, teachers must adopt

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multiple dynamic activities. Students will benefit more from rigorous and repetitious instruction than from haphazardly studying hundreds of words from simple lists and definition charts.

In this article, I describe intentional, meaningful, and explicit strategies for teaching vocabulary that can catalyze effective instruction. This article discusses the classroom context of my work, defines memorable and meaningful vocabulary instruction, explains how to identify vocabulary words, and provides a depiction of explicit vocabulary instruction in action.

Classroom Context

One of the primary considerations in developing a process for vocabulary instruction required me to consider the students in my classroom. As an 18-year educator, I have worked in some challenging Title 1 schools in Texas. Most of the students I served were multiple years below grade level, they struggled with academic vocabulary, they were culturally and linguistically diverse, and, on average, at least 40% of my students each year were considered multilingual learners. Because of the diverse composition of my classroom, I wanted to provide *meaningful* and *memorable* (Allen, 2007) vocabulary instruction that pushed students to do more than copy words and definitions from dictionaries. Throughout my teaching career, I developed research-based assignments to build students' vocabulary knowledge and skills. In this paper, I discuss a few of these strategies and how they can be leveraged in the ELA classroom.

Meaning and Memorable Vocabulary Instruction

According to Allen (2007), current vocabulary instruction practices are ineffective. She maintained that in some classrooms, vocabulary instruction consists of students copying words from the dictionary and writing sentences with selected words. Allen further explained that students need *memorable* and *meaningful* approaches to vocabulary instruction that involve more than just giving students word lists. Additionally, Scott et al. (2008) explain that students' ability to use vocabulary in their writing does not happen without intentional vocabulary instruction.

Lane and Allen (2010) postulate that direct vocabulary instruction is needed as an everyday literacy practice. The authors maintain that students do not come to school with adequate vocabulary knowledge and for students from diverse backgrounds, there is a difference in vocabulary knowledge. Lane and Allen further explain that the vocabulary knowledge gap will continue to expand for students who lack adequate vocabulary knowledge. Ford-Connors and Paratore (2015) agreed with the claim that vocabulary knowledge is an important part of literacy development. They stated,

If young people are to succeed in a world that is dominated by ever-changing digital technologies, and accordingly new literacies, and ever-growing competition in a global economy, they will need to acquire and maintain high levels of literacy skill and analytical ability. (p. 50)

Some scholars articulated the importance of vocabulary instruction for reading comprehension and writing development (e.g., Elleman et al., 2019; Harmon & Wood, 2018). Harmon and Wood (2018) discussed that vocabulary instruction is vital for reading comprehension. To build students' vocabulary, the authors suggest pre-teaching key academic words before reading a text and providing assignments where students use new vocabulary in writing activities. Alternatively, Elleman et al. (2019) stated that vocabulary instruction is significant for overall language development, and there is a positive relationship between vocabulary instruction and building students writing capacity. When teachers provide students

with the opportunity to use new vocabulary in writing essays and persuasive paragraphs, these practices have the potential to increase reading comprehension and writing skills. They further reported that when children better understand oral and written discourse, they can better express their experiences and thoughts in conversations and writing. Conversely, Fresch and Harrison (2020) argue that vocabulary development is important for both reading and writing. The researchers suggest that teachers must face the challenge of teaching students vocabulary words they will need to be effective readers and writers. They advocate for using vocabulary instruction to empower students' knowledge of words in different and engaging ways.

Identifying Words to Teach

Other researchers (Fisher & Frey, 2014; McKeown et al., 2012; Quigley & Coleman, 2019) documented the significance of teaching tiers of vocabulary, and they submit that this intentional approach can potentially increase learning outcomes. McKeown et al. (2012) reported that tier 1 words are words used in everyday speech (i.e., book, girl, sad, talk), tier 2 words are general academic words that appear in informational, technical, and literary texts (i.e. exacerbate, uproarious, exotic, robust), and tier 3 words are domain-specific words and are specific to a domain or field of study (i.e. quadratic formula, waning crescent, linear plot, colonialism). The authors further claim that tier 2 words have a wider application for reading a variety of texts. Thus, tier 2 words should be a primary target for vocabulary instruction.

Fisher and Frey (2014) acknowledge the benefit of providing direct instruction of tier 2 vocabulary words. In their paper, the authors reviewed the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in Reading and Language Arts and suggested that for students to meet the cognitive level of these standards, students will need extensive practice with words. They stated, "Clearly, the architects of the standards wanted to ensure that students learn a lot of words and phrases and know how to mobilize this knowledge as they read and write" (p. 595). Even though Texas has not adopted the CCSS, there is an explicit focus on building students' vocabulary knowledge and skills as indicated by the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Similarly, Quigley and Coleman (2019) assert that students should receive instruction for both tier 2 and tier 3 words as students will be unfamiliar with academic and domain-specific vocabulary. They also advance that these tiers of words should be carefully selected and aligned to vocabulary instructional strategies across all content disciplines.

Explicit Vocabulary Instruction in Action

The initial step in developing vocabulary instruction for my classroom involved selecting tier 2 vocabulary from Levine's (1994) *Vocabulary for the High School Student*. The words featured in this text are words my students would encounter on the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR). Additionally, Levine's work is considered a seminal resource in vocabulary instruction, and the words selected from the book continue to appear on district, state, and national tests (i.e., NWEA, Accuplacer, Advance Placement).

Equally important, I leveraged the TEKS to identify vocabulary standards students must master as they matriculate through high school. Table 1 provides the TEKS aligned to my explicit instruction process.

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Table 1: Vocabulary Standards

Grade-Level	Focus	Standard
9 th Grade	Dictionary Skills	Use print or digital resources such as glossaries or technical dictionaries to clarify and validate understanding of the precise and appropriate meaning of technical or discipline-based vocabulary.
9 th Grade	Context Clues	Analyze context to distinguish between the denotative and connotative meanings of words.

Note. Most of my experience has been at the middle and high school levels. I have used this instructional process for grades eighth through tenth. I used ninth-grade standards to show how the strategies I will describe align to one of the grade levels I have taught.

After the standards were identified, the following components were unpacked for each standard: (1) standard content vocabulary (tier 3 vocabulary) and (2) verbs. The standard vocabulary was identified because it was important to understand the content terms that students needed to know to master the standard. Meanwhile, identifying the verbs in the standard was essential to ensure that the vocabulary activities were aligned with the cognitive level of the TEKS.

Next, mastery objectives or learning targets were created for each standard to capture the vocabulary skills and knowledge students were expected to master. Laidlaw-Almaguer (2012) and Moore et al. (2015) insist that beginning with academic standards is one of the first steps to planning assignments for students. Moore et al. (2015) described that "Learning targets drive what is taught, to include all activities, assignments, and assessments that occur during lessons and units" (p. 9). In this vein, unpacking standards was vital for developing instruction for vocabulary standards students needed to master on formative and summative assessments.

The Vocabulary Process

Day 1: Working with Context Clues. For 36 weeks, 18 weeks per semester, students engaged with explicit vocabulary instruction. Five words were selected each week, with one bonus word per week. On day one, students were introduced to five vocabulary words through a *Do Now* (Lemov et al., 2016) entitled, *Working with Context Clues*. Research scholars advised that building both definitional and contextual information about words is an efficient strategy for building student vocabulary knowledge (McKeown, 2019; Wright & Cervetti, 2017). According to Lemov et al. (2016), a *Do Now* can be used to review content from a recent lesson or for students to practice with standards they have mastered. Using a *Do Now* to develop vocabulary skills provided students an opportunity for repetitive practice by using context clues to determine the meaning of unknown words.

The Working with Context Clues assignment required students to read each sentence and put a box around the context clues. Then, students determined the definition and wrote it in their own words (see Figure 1). Students were given five minutes to complete the Do Now and the answers were reviewed using whole class instruction. If the class did not identify the correct definition of the word, they were given the option to use the dictionary to determine the meaning. It was required for students to answer at least four of the context clues questions. The bonus word was not covered in class. Instead, students were required to identify the context clues and determine the word's meaning on their own in preparation for the assessment at the end of the week.

Figure 1: Working with Context Clues

Objective:
I will use context clues to determine the meaning of a word in a sentence.
Instructions:
1) Read the sentences below.
2) Use context clues to determine the meaning of the vocabulary word.
 Put a box around the words in the sentence that gives you a clue about the meaning of the vocabulary word.
4) Write the meaning of the word in the blank provided.
5) If you cannot determine the meaning of the word by the context; make an educated guess.
Example:
Sedentary individuals, people who are not very active, often have diminished health.
sedentary means: not active
1. Tom was very squeamish and would pass out at the site of blood.
squeamish means:
2. To be a fireman, one needs to be <i>robust</i> because fighting fires is a difficult job.
robust means:
3. The basketball announcer's <i>uproarious</i> voice filled the packed arena.
uproarious means:
4. The siren was able to <i>captivate</i> the sailors with her amazing voice.
captivate means:

After the *Do Now* was reviewed with the class, students wrote the vocabulary words on index cards. On the front side of the index card, students wrote the words, and then on the back side of the card, students wrote the definition in their own words. In some cases, students provided a visual representation connected to the vocabulary word (see Figure 2). Each student was issued a 2-inch binder ring to attach their vocabulary words. The purpose of this strategy was for students to build a study tool to support them in learning the vocabulary words of the week. Alternatively, if students had access to technology, programs like Quizlet or Padlet were used to create note cards as well.

Research on best practices in vocabulary instruction suggests that providing students opportunities to analyze context clues, discuss the meaning of words, engage with new words in different contexts, and assess student word learning are efficient routines to build students' vocabulary knowledge (Pennsylvania Training and Technical Network, 2021). Interestingly, Ford-Connors and Paratore (2015) synthesized qualitative research on increasing the vocabulary knowledge of young adolescents. One of the strategies discussed in their work was using context clues to build students' word knowledge. The authors emphasized that teaching students how to use context clues can support students at various levels in learning new words.

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Figure 2: Vocabulary Note Cards



Day 2: Working with Synonyms and Antonyms. On day two, students completed the assignment entitled, *Working with Synonyms and Antonyms*. Students identified both synonyms and antonyms for the vocabulary words and created an original sentence with the synonym for each word of the week (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Working with Synonyms and Antonyms

Instructions:			
Using a thesaurus, find a synonym and antonym for all this week's vocabulary words. Write the synonym and antonym in each box and create a sentence with the synonym for the vocabulary word. Make sure you underline the synonym in the sentence you create.			
Example:			
Word: sed	entary		
	Synonym	Antonym	
	inactive	active	
Synonym S	Sentence: The football player wa	as <i>inactive</i> because of his elboy	v injury.
1. Word: squ	eamish		
	Synonym	Antonym	
Synonym S	Sentence:		
0 \\/	4		
2. Word: rob	ust		1
	Synonym	Antonym	
Synonym S	Sentence:		
0			
3. Word: upr	oarious		1
	Synonym	Antonym	
Synonym Sentence:			
4. Word: cap	tivate		1
	Synonym	Antonym	
Synonym S	Sentence:		,

The instructional approach of connecting vocabulary words to synonyms and antonyms is aligned with the work of Dorothy Frayer. Frayer and colleagues (1969) developed the Frayer Model to support students in learning about key concepts. The model consists of defining a term, identifying the characteristics of the term, and providing examples and non-examples. Examples or synonyms of the word support students in using words with the same definition. In contrast, antonyms or non-examples support students in understanding what the word is not.

In the same way, other researchers (Crosson & Lesaux, 2013; Phillips et al., 2008) advanced the notion that using synonyms is an effective approach for building student word knowledge. Beach et al. (2015) described the various methods a U.S. History teacher used to enact vocabulary instruction in his self—contained special education class. The authors suggest that providing instruction that challenges students to identify synonyms and use them in sentences can serve as a scaffold to build students' vocabulary knowledge. Blachowicz and Fisher (2004)

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explained that synonym webs, feature analysis, and teaching students' antonyms help them set clear parameters in meaning and understanding how the dimensions or features of words differ.

Day 3: Work with Personal Connections. On day three, students were required to make personal connections with the words of the week. Students identified an object, person, or profession connected to the vocabulary word (see Figure 4). Then, students wrote a sentence with the word using one of the previously mentioned connections. Shanahan (2005) described that integrating real-life examples connected to vocabulary words supports students in making connections with words. Bromley (2007) found that one way for students to learn new words is to make associations. He further explains that students can learn new words because of the connections made with their schema. Comparably, Faulkner (2010) reported the benefits of increasing students' usability of vocabulary words in persuasive writing. The authors discovered that "when students' brains are actively engaged in discussion, discovering, and demonstrating, then the words and their representative meanings become more permanent, visible, and understandable" (p. 114).

Figure 4: Working with Personal Connections

Instructions:			
Reflect on this week's vocabulary words. When you make a personal connection with new vocabulary, it helps you to remember the word for lifelong learning. For each word, write an object , person , or profession that reminds you of the vocabulary word. Then, use the personal connection you made with the word in a sentence. Make sure you use correct grammar when creating your original sentences.			
Example:			
Sedentary reminds me of a man in a wheelchair.			
object / person / profession			
Sentence: The sedentary man in the wheelchair gave me an odd look when I skipped him in line.			
1. Squeamish reminds me of			
object / person / profession			
Sentence:			
2. <i>Robust</i> reminds me of			
object / person / profession			
, ' '			
Sentence:			
3. <i>Uproarious</i> reminds me of			
object / person / profession			
Sentence:			
4. Captivate reminds me of			
object / person / profession			
Sentence:			

Kelley et al. (2010) also reiterated the value of making personal connections to target vocabulary words. The researchers stated that to "maximize student attachment and vocabulary growth, students need to be personally connected" (p. 12). They further insisted that for students to build personal connections with vocabulary words, they need to engage with topics and texts that reflect their world. Overall, research shows that connecting vocabulary instruction to students' schema through real-life examples (Shanahan, 2005), personal association and connections (Bromley, 2007), and persuasive writing (Kelley et al., 2010) has the potential to build students' word knowledge.

Independent Practice

After students were exposed to the instruction during class time, it was essential for students to practice with vocabulary for homework to further cement their word learning. Wilson (2017) expressed that after students appear to understand the new material they should be allowed to apply or practice using the new information. Therefore, students were given the option to choose an assignment from a vocabulary menu (see Figure 5) to practice with the new vocabulary words they were learning in class. Vocabulary assignments were assigned based on ability and interest. The assignments provided for students included but were not limited to the Vocabulary Comic Strip (see Figure 6), Vocabulary Cinquain (see Figure 7), and Vocabulary Padlet (see Figure 8).

To complete the Vocabulary Comic Strip, students created a fictional story with the vocabulary words for the week. Then, students created the original comic strip on construction or white paper 8.5 by 11 inches. The Vocabulary Cinquain assignment required students to create a five-line poem. At the top of the poem, students wrote the vocabulary word. On line one, students wrote a synonym for the vocabulary word. On line two, students wrote two words that described the word with the word in the center. On line three, students identified three professions that connected with the word. On line four, students wrote a sentence with the word, and on line five, students wrote an antonym for the word. To complete the Vocabulary Padlet, students created four cards. One card for each word of the week. On the first card, students created a voice note pronouncing and spelling a word. Secondly, students created a card with a visual representation and sentence connected to a word. On the third card, students wrote the etymology, past tense, and synonym of a word. On the last card, students wrote the meaning, antonym, and sentence for a word.

Shostak (2002) and Bromley (2007) stated that students need multiple exposures to a word to build their word knowledge. Harmon et al. (2010) echoed this sentiment and asserted that "it takes meaningful encounters with word meanings in a variety of contexts for students to internalize word knowledge" (p. 106). As a result, the vocabulary instruction in my class converged around providing students multiple exposures to practice with new vocabulary and meaningful encounters that aligned with their schema.

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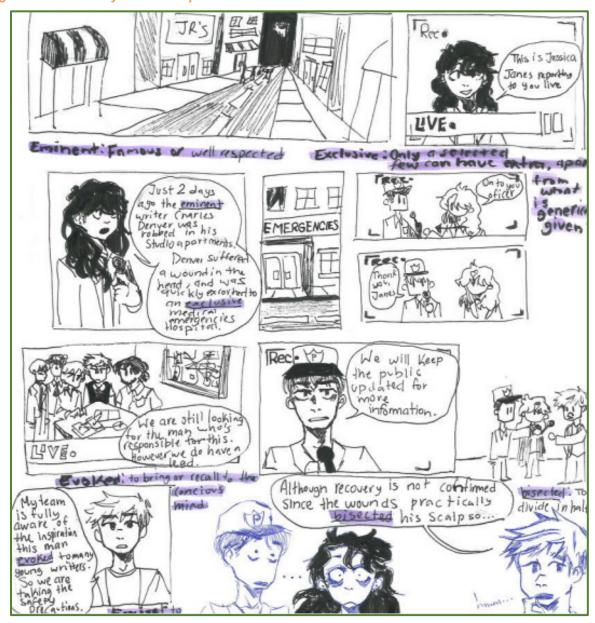
Figure 5: Vocabulary Assignment Menu

Instructions:

Choose one of the vocabulary assignments as your independent practice to learn your vocabulary words of the week. You must receive approval from Dr. Whitaker to complete the Create-Your-Own Assignment. Once you have selected your assignment, take this handout to Dr. Whitaker to receive the instructions for the assignment you selected.

Vocabulary Comic Strip	Interrogative Vocabulary	Vocabulary Cinquain
Description: Using the week's vocabulary words, create a vocabulary comic strip.	Description: Using the week's vocabulary words, create interrogative sentences.	Description: Using the week's vocabulary words, create a vocabulary cinquain poem.
Padlet	Journal	Origami
Description: Using the week's vocabulary words, create a Padlet with figurative language, visual representation, and pronunciation that includes the vocabulary words.	Description: Using the week's vocabulary words, create a vocabulary journal with visual images and sentences with the words in context.	Description: Using the week's vocabulary words, create a mind flayer.
Vocabulary Word Box	Create-Your Own	Personal Dictionary
Description: Using the week's vocabulary words, create a vocabulary word box with synonyms, and visual images.	Description: Using the week's vocabulary words, create your own assignment to practice with the vocabulary words. (*You need approval from Dr. Whitaker for this assignment so that you can be assigned to a group.)	Description: Using the week's vocabulary words, create a personal dictionary with the part of speech, sentences, and language of origin, where applicable.
Freestyle Vocabulary Poem	Who's Got Jokes?	Short Story Vocabulary
Description: Using the week's vocabulary words, create a freestyle poem using a metaphor, simile, and personification.	Description: Using the week's vocabulary words, create jokes for your debut on the show Who Got Jokes?	Description: Using the week's vocabulary words, create a short story.

Figure 6: Vocabulary Comic Strip



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Figure 7: Vocabulary Cinquain Strategy

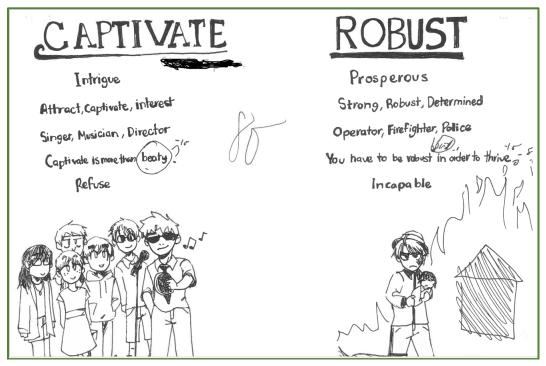
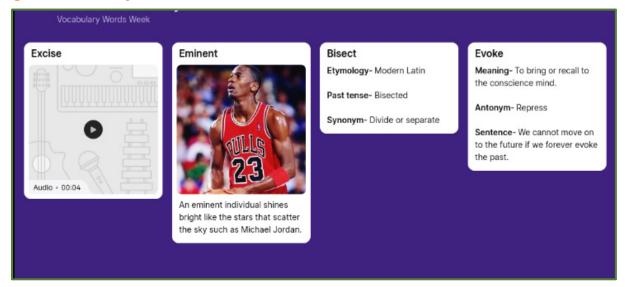


Figure 8: Vocabulary Padlet

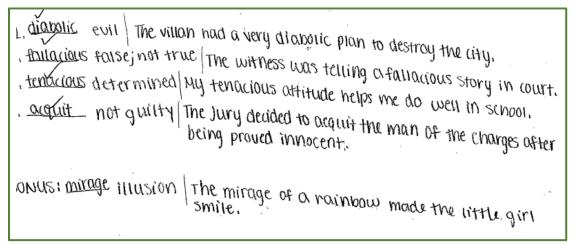


Assessment

Throughout the week, the context clues (Day 1), synonyms and antonyms (Day 2), and personal connections (Day 3) served as formative assessments to monitor students' vocabulary learning. Moreover, the independent practice activities were designed to prepare students for the vocabulary test at the end of the week. On Friday, students were given a vocabulary assessment. Students were required to spell and use the words in a sentence in the correct context. Meanwhile, if students wanted to earn extra credit on the assessment, they were required to spell the bonus word correctly and use it in a sentence (see Figure 9). The purpose of the assessment was for students to use the

words in a sentence in the correct context and demonstrate a deeper level of thinking and understanding about the words of the week that extended beyond memorization and matching (Moore, 2014).

Figure 9: Vocabulary Assessment



Conclusion

Ultimately, this article does not cover the countless possibilities for facilitating explicit vocabulary instruction. Many of our students come to school and do not have the academic vocabulary needed to read and comprehend complex texts. Our students need vocabulary instruction that is meaningful and memorable (Allen, 2007). When teachers engage in explicit instruction, students will begin to use words to articulate complex emotions. They will begin to express critical thoughts and reflections filled with language that befits their ideas. But, most of all, students will begin to understand that they can use words: to inspire others, to inspire themselves, and to express their dreams for today and the future.

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Authoring Counter-Narratives: Showcasing Student Voice through Critical Stance

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ABSTRACT

In this teaching tip, we provide a method for teaching middle and secondary English language arts (ELA) students to assume a critical stance while reading and responding to diverse literature and media. Specifically, we address the infusion of critical literacy as a pedagogy to enable students to engage in criticality by identifying negative stereotypes and harmful biases, and then take action by offering counter perspectives. We begin with a brief discussion on critical literacy as a means to promote critical stance, followed by the learning activities for classroom instruction and a student example to illustrate the power of critical stance to promote student agency. Our method for critical stance instruction draws upon Rosenblatt's (1978) seminal work on literature-based instruction that reading is a transaction between the reader and the text and Leland et al. (2018) who explicated that readers need to engage in critical transactions—a dimension of critical literacy.

KEYWORDS

critical literacy; literature-based instruction; critical transactions; middle and secondary ELA

all strive to engage students in English language arts (ELA) share a common goal—we all strive to engage students in critical discussions of texts. We further share an understanding that today's literature instruction involves more than simply reading and responding to texts. Our readers from diverse backgrounds need a forum to analyze multiple perspectives on social justice issues, interrogate texts, and try out new reading identities as they create counter-perspectives (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2010). From this stance, we recognize Rosenblatt's (1978) seminal work on literature-based instruction that reading is a transaction between the reader and the text, both emotionally and intellectually. In other words, a transaction occurs because meaning is created; the meaning made requires the interaction between the text and the reader. Additionally, we agree with Leland et al. (2018) who explicated that readers need to engage in critical transactions—a dimension of critical literacy. Specifically, readers assume a critical stance as they learn to challenge the author's words, talk back to the text, and provide alternative perspectives by rewriting texts to correct the social injustices encountered while reading. As Bean and Moni (2003) so aptly stated, "critical literacy takes the reader beyond the bounds of reader response" (p. 643).

The purpose of this teaching tip is to share an ELA lesson that centers on critical literacy practices to develop critical stance. We begin with a brief discussion on critical literacy as a means to promote a critical stance, followed by the learning activities for classroom instruction and a student example to illustrate the power of a critical stance to promote student agency. The basis

for our method to teach critical stance began in 2022 when the second author, Ali Ameduri, was a graduate student in the first author's (Dr. Lina Soares') course titled *Young Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. The course provides an in-depth study of early adolescent and young adult literature, coupled with pedagogical theory and practices for helping students develop both oral and written personal responses. Based on her experiences in the course, Ameduri subsequently developed a two-day lesson for her seventh-grade ELA grade students to assume a critical stance while reading young adult literature. The two-day lesson is featured in this teaching tip.

Critical Stance to Promote Student Agency

Incorporating critical literacy pedagogy involves creating opportunities for students to experience ownership, empowerment, agency, and heightened awareness in their communication (Craddock & Pettit, 2023). Through critical literacy practices, teachers will find that students develop a heightened awareness of the world around them, enabling them to analyze texts, media, and events with a more critical eye (Craddock & Pettit, 2023; Gavell, 2021). Agency plays a crucial role in critical literacy, empowering students to act as agents of change in their lives and communities (Craddock & Pettit, 2023). As a result, we encourage teachers to design activities that prompt students to actively question and analyze texts, fostering a classroom ethos where they feel empowered to express their perspectives. Teachers can offer thought-provoking prompts, encouraging students to connect a concept or lesson with a current, relevant event and use that knowledge to envision alternate perspectives. In doing so, students learn to take a critical stance when reading and responding to the ideas presented in a text (Craddock & Pettit, 2023; Gavell, 2021). Giving students the opportunity to think differently or critically about an issue further gives students a voice and, in turn, promotes student agency (Craddock & Pettit, 2023). According to Benner et al. (2018), voice is important for student agency because it is a manifestation that a student is willing to self-advocate, to be heard, and to speak-up for the rights of others.

Instructional Activities

To engage students in a critical stance, we implement an approach to have students confront the author's implicit messages that are inherent in texts—stereotypes and author biases. The approach requires students to read with a critical lens to dispel the negative stereotypes and author's biases and challenge them when responding to diverse texts and media. Correspondingly, the approach further requires students to take action by presenting alternative perspectives through counternarratives. The ultimate purpose is to provide an instructional context for students to become agents of change through their voices and pens.

Pre-reading. We recommend giving students time to brainstorm their understanding of stereotypes and biases, and thus, a two-day lesson may be appropriate depending on the time allocated for ELA. Knowing the importance of activating students' prior knowledge (Reichardt et al., 2023), we begin with a series of minilessons on day one. It is important to keep in mind that students may have some knowledge of stereotypes and biases, but many students may have yet to explore the relationship between the two words in-depth.

Minilesson one features the stereotypical stepmother in Cinderella. Because Cinderella is a well-known fairytale, we begin with a whole class discussion on stereotyping. We ask students to analyze the stepmother's behavior and describe her characteristics. Specifically, we ask them to describe what they know about the stepmother in the story and how she fits the role of the "ugly stepmother." As students respond, we talk about how the "ugly stepmother" is generalized, and

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we point out that as a group, we have instantly formed our assumptions about another group of people; we have stereotyped them.

For minilesson two, we split students into groups of 4–6, give them chart paper and markers, and encourage them to think about stereotypes related to different groups, such as racial, gender, religious, ethnic, or cultural stereotypes. It is important to note that students may have diverse perspectives, and this group discussion time will help amplify students' voices, which is a protocol for student agency. As students work in groups, we pose the following questions for them to brainstorm:

- Do you think stereotypes are accurate?
- How can stereotypes influence our perceptions of others?
- What assumptions do you make about groups of people or individuals?

As a concluding activity for minilesson two, we allow each group to share their thoughts on the questions posed during the minilesson. After group responses, it is important to end with a whole class discussion, emphasizing that when there are assumptions about a group of people due to differences in norms of behavior, culture, and even appearance, the assumptions can become stereotypes. Stereotyping individuals can lead to discriminatory practices, prejudice, and the potential for bias to form (Bourke & Titus, 2020).

For the final minilesson, we allow time for students' reflections. We ask them to address: Have you ever experienced or witnessed someone being treated unfairly because of a stereotype? Students anonymously write one stereotype they have encountered personally or witnessed on a sticky note, drop it in a box, and if time permits, the teacher reads a few aloud. We have found this final minilesson significant because when students share that they have been stereotyped or know someone who has, they become more aware and sensitive to the unwanted consequences that can result from stereotyping.

The Reading Lesson. With a focus on critical literacy practices to develop critical stance, the ELA lesson offered in this teaching tip is an actual lesson that Ameduri taught to her seventh-grade students over a two-day period (Figure 1). On day one, Ameduri introduced her students to the concept of critical stance by engaging her students in the three minilessons to develop an awareness of the relationship that can exists between stereotype and bias. On day two, Ameduri continued the lesson by having the seventh-grade students read Rona Maynard's "The Fan Club." While reading, the students engaged in a literacy activity to view the text from a critical stance by responding to the questions posed on the graphic organizer. The final step enabled student agency by permitting the students to actualize their voices and pens through counter-narratives. The work of one seventh-grade student who participated in the lesson on critical stance is shared (Figure 2). For purposes of this teaching tip, the following is a brief synopsis of "The Fan Club":

The main character, Laura, is a high school student who is alienated by her popular classmates. They mock Laura for being different. Despite this, Rachel who is another marginalized student shows kindness to Laura. In an English class, the students have been asked to present a speech on a topic of their choice. Laura speaks about civil rights, but her message is met with laughter. Rachel also struggles with her speech about shells and faces ridicule. As the story continues, Laura reluctantly joins in the mocking applause directed at Rachel, highlighting the harsh realities of

discrimination and prejudice in high school when students are perceived to be different.

This story can foster discussions around peer pressure, conformity, and the internal conflicts young people face when navigating social acceptance. Through examining Laura's choices, students are encouraged to reflect on how societal pressures can influence personal values and actions, ultimately shaping one's sense of identity and integrity.

Figure 1: Assignment Instructions

Directions

- You will read the short story, "The Fan Club" by Rona Maynard, to analyze the text's portrayal of characters and events, to identify stereotypes or biases present in the story, and to write a counter-narrative that challenges these stereotypes or biases. A copy of the reading selection is provided. While reading, you will use the graphic organizer given to you to record your responses in the blank spaces under each prompt. After reading, you will write a counter-narrative to offer an alternative perspective to the text's portrayal of characters and/or events.
- For this lesson, you have been given options on the type of counter-narrative you develop. You will post your counter-narrative to present to the class on Google Classroom. Include a written explanation that includes the choices you made and helps the class understand your approach to your counter-narrative. You should also state why you chose the character you did and the importance of this decision.

Materials Needed

- 1. The short story, "The Fan Club," by Rona Maynard
- 2. Paper and pens or pencils
- 3. Fan Club Graphic Organizer
- 4. Digital Tools

The Fan Club Graphic Organizer

Perspective: How does the character's point of view influence the way the story is told?	Bias: Are there any unfair opinions or prejudices affecting the characters' actions or thoughts?	Stereotypes: Do the characters or situations fit into common stereotypes? How does this affect the story?
My Devene etimes How door	Challenging Dies: How sould	Alternative Devenoative
My Perspective: How does reading this make me feel or think about the characters and their situations?	Challenging Bias: How could the story be different if certain biases were not present?	Alternative Perspective: How might the story change if told from a different character's point of view?

Options for Counter-Narrative

- Pick a counter-narrative medium.
 - Letter: Write a letter from one character to another, expressing their feelings and thoughts about the events of the story.

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• **Poetry:** Write a poem from a character's point of view, expressing their inner thoughts that highlights the biases and stereotypes present.

- Newspaper Article: Write a newspaper article reporting on the events of the story, but from a perspective that challenges the original narrative.
- **Essay:** Write an essay that analyzes the story from a critical perspective, highlighting the biases and stereotypes present and proposing a new interpretation.
- Play Script: Write a scene or short play that reimagines a key moment from the story, challenging stereotypes and biases.
- Fairy Tale Retelling: Retell the story as a fairy tale, incorporating elements of magic and fantasy to explore stereotyping.
- Storyboard: Create a storyboard that visually outlines a scene or series of scenes from the story, reimagined from a different perspective.
- Written Story: Write a new version of the story from a different character's perspective, challenging stereotypes or biases.
- Comic Strip or Graphic Novel: Create a comic strip or graphic novel that tells the story from a different angle, using visuals to support the new narrative.

Figure 2: One Seventh-Grader's Responses to "The Fan Club"

"The Fan Club" Graphic Organizer			
Perspective: How does the character's point of view influence the way the story is told?	Bias: Are there any unfair opinions or prejudices affecting the characters' actions or thoughts?	Stereotypes: Do the characters or situations fit into common stereotypes? How does this affect the story?	
Popular Girl Diane: Diane's point of view influences the story by showing both sides of the bully and the victim (the grey area). Example: spewing ill of Laura and seeing the popular kids as antagonists.	The characters speaking ill about Laura and her background when they aren't truly aware and fully informed about her father's job or "greasy little shop," and Rachel's thoughts about the popular kids that they're all the same and aren't unique as individuals when she doesn't even know them.	Yes, it affects the story by creating the whole plot and conflict essentially. To add on, the stereotypes of the popular kids bullying, and the stereotypes of "weird kid," all build up the plot of prejudices and biases.	
My Perspective: How does reading this make me feel or think about the characters and their situations?	Challenging Bias: How could the story be different if certain biases were not present?	Alternative Perspective: How might the story change if told from a different character's point of view?	
I feel pity for all of the characters and their situations. I feel pity because all the bullies are likely to be pressured of fitting in, while Rachel is struggling with being left out (and the "in"	If no biases were present, it would be likely that there would be no negative aspects in the story. Example: If Rachel wasn't seen as the "weird kid," she wouldn't be teased and the "in"	It could show a character's thoughts and reasoning behind their actions or toward other people's actions. Example: From Rachel's point of view, she	

crowd most likely bully to fit	crowd wouldn't exist or be the	could view Laura as the same
in and not be teased).	same.	as Laura views the "in" crowd.

Counter-Narrative Option: Apology Letter for Harassment

I approached the counter-narrative, using an apology letter to convey my message because I wanted to find a realistic format, where the bully could speak to the victim on their decisions and views on society. In addition, I chose Diane so that it would show how she was not just a soulless bully, but a sympathetic character who had to realize what's wrong with both her choices and the choices of society (Diane's friends, Laura, and the counselor, who wasn't in the original story):

Drip. Drip. Tears stained my paper, smudging my insincere words of "sorry." My face felt hot of anger and sadness. I don't regret what I did, I tell myself. Even when such a claim is just as untrue as my "sorry."

This empty classroom felt so suffocating, I felt like I was drowning in guilt. Was this letter enough to atone for what I did? I already apologized to you in front of that dopey counselor and Terri, Carol, Steve, Bill, Nancy, even Laura... and you, who deserved more than an apology of just guilt. Suddenly, I felt a throng of tears, cooling down my burning face.

"Diane Goddard," I suddenly remembered Ms. Harris, saying my name. I looked up from my shiny, new shoes to see Terri, Carol, Steve, Bill, and Nancy, sitting across from me, and then, the little, gaudy duo: you and Laura. "I have been concerned with the matter of persecution at our school," Ms. Harris said, firmly.

"Wait, me?" I asked, scoffing.

"Yes, you, Diane. We had observed bullying in our school; look at this card. Many students also reported to me as witnesses." Ms. Harris said, glancing calmly at my group of "friends," while I felt betrayed with anger.

I could feel tears, crawling out of my eyes; I felt so sad and betrayed. "Terri, don't act innocent! You bullied Rachel too! Those cards, you also made them!" I shrieked, pulling out the crumpled cards from my plastic purse.

"No, I didn't! You started it! I just wanted to be friends with you, so I did what you told me to do!" Tears started to fall on Terri's candy-pink sweater.

"Yeah, it was all your idea, Diane!" Bill suddenly chimed in. I could feel my hot face, when I caressed my soft skin with cold, guilty hands. I wonder if Terri's hands were just as cold, and if any of them in that forsaken room felt an ounce of guilt.

"Diane, don't try to blame it on us!" Carol shouted.

Steve started shouting at me too, even Nancy, and Laura, whose stringy hair that covered her eyes, couldn't cover her tears and anger, while you just sat there, quietly, with pitiful eyes.

"I'm sorry," I managed to spit out, with tears that should have just hanged from my eyes, but eventually, started to creep down towards my chin in an absurd path. Still, you sat there, quietly.

I don't know how you were just sitting there quietly. I admit I did something—no, I admit everything I did was wrong. But, Rachel, you knew they bullied you, you knew! I'm not angry that you didn't defend me, I know I deserved it, but no one defended you, they didn't apologize to you, they didn't realize what they did wrong. Your "friend" too, all she did was watch your embarrassment, and deep inside you, you always knew that she was always ashamed of you and your gaudy sweater. Even, Ms. Harris knew about everything, but she didn't think much of it. That's just what kids do, is what she thought. She only cared about you when the school's image was in jeopardy. It's cruel.

After the day when we were all grouped together in such a suffocating room with such shameless people, I understood how you felt. They laughed and giggled at me when I had a speech, they talked behind my back, my "friends" didn't care about me, and they made cards of me too. I finally felt what it's like to be in your shoes, not my shiny, new shoes, but the shoes that were deemed peculiar by society, and the shoes that everyone judged and didn't want to wear, or even be near.

I wonder if you can even call this an apology, if this is what it takes for me to apologize. I wouldn't say so. This isn't a satisfying apology that heals all your wounds, but even if it's a feeble, little bandaid that you want to cover your scars with, then, I'm sorry.

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Concluding Thoughts

The infusion of critical literacy in an ELA classroom for middle and secondary students can be a powerful mechanism to promote a critical stance. Teaching students to dispel negative stereotypes, identify the biases in texts, and create alternate texts through alternate points of view (Lewison et al., 2015) are strategic classroom practices that embrace a critical stance. The fact that the seventh-grade student whose work is shared in this teaching tip took a critical stance was evidenced in her written counter-narrative. The response demonstrated not only her social consciousness but also her need to speak out against the unwanted and harmful consequences when students are stereotyped and then bullied for being different. Subsequently, the student's responses may offer a compelling reason for critical stance instruction. A critical stance puts power in the hands of students to change the realities they read by using their agency to write alternative perspectives.

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Text Considerations to Motivate Boys to Want to Read

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ABSTRACT

Increasing motivation to read among elementary boys is an important consideration in closing the gender achievement gap in reading as students who are motivated to read typically increase their reading volume which can positively impact reading achievement. This article discusses the following text considerations that can impact boys' motivation to read: (a) topic; (b) genre; (c) series, and (d) text layout. It is critical that books with these text considerations are accessible in classroom libraries, as male students in previous studies have not found texts of interest at school. The article provides a checklist for teachers to self-evaluate the types of texts that are needed in classroom libraries that can appeal to male students.

KEYWORDS

boys reading; reading achievement gap; motivation; interests; texts

he most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2022) reading achievement levels reveal that girls outperform boys. While this occurred at all grade levels that were assessed: fourth, eighth, and twelfth, this article focuses on the elementary grades. Sixty-six percent of fourth-grade girls performed at or above the NAEP Basic Level, while 60 percent of boys performed at this level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Further, in one study, a higher percentage of female students engaged in leisure reading and stated spending money on buying books for pleasure than male students (Griva et al., 2012). Mitigating the gender reading achievement gap is an important topic for educators to address.

Motivation is a critical consideration in closing the gender reading achievement gap as students who are motivated to read tend to increase their reading volume (Stutz et al., 2016), and Allington and McGill-Franzen (2021) cite numerous studies that demonstrate that reading volume positively affects reading achievement. Further, in one study, students not originally identified as remedial readers and who did not engage in reading during their free time eventually lost academic ground (Anderson et al., 1988). In a study conducted by Marinak and Gambrell (2010), findings revealed that third-grade boys who were average readers were less motivated to read than third-grade girls, and they indicated that many boys valued reading less than girls who were also average readers.

While there are numerous strategies to contemplate when motivating boys to read, this article focuses on text considerations that include the following: (a) topic; (b) genre; (c) series, and (d) text layout. As some studies found that texts that boys want to read are not readily available in classrooms (Husband, 2012; Scholes et al., 2021), the information in this article can help educators become more informed about the types of books to provide to help mitigate the gender achievement gap in reading. A checklist is provided so that teachers can self-evaluate their libraries in order to ensure variation in texts to increase boys' motivation.

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Topic

It is helpful to know what research reveals regarding topics of interest to boys so that this information can provide guidance in making these texts easily accessible. Books with animals such as sharks and reptiles were of interest to many elementary aged boys in some studies (Cervetti et al., 2009; Correia, 2011; Scott & Williams, 2016; Sturm, 2003). Sports, specifically football and basketball, were preferences of many male participants (Griva et al., 2012; Scott & Williams, 2016; Sturm, 2003; Williams, 2008), and cars were also of interest in one study's findings (Boltz, 2007). Further, some studies revealed that boys were interested in reading books about favorite movies (Scholes et al, 2021) and other popular culture topics such as superheroes and singers (Williams, 2008).

Genre

Fiction or nonfiction, what do boys prefer? In some studies, fiction was more popular among boys (Williams, 2008, 2016) while in other studies, nonfiction was of more interest (Husband, 2012; Repaskey et al, 2017; Senn, 2012). Perhaps educators should ask students what types of books they like to read within the fiction genre as well as within the nonfiction genre, comparable to Bonto and colleagues (2016), as opposed to asking which genre they prefer to read most. It is critical that both genres are represented in libraries, particularly as most teachers expose students to more fiction texts in the classroom (Senn, 2012). Some studies mentioned specific types of fiction that boys preferred, including fantasy (Bonto et al., 2016; Dillon et al., 2017), comics (Bonto et al, 2016; Dillon et al., 2017; Griva et al., 2012; Senn, 2012), realistic fiction (Bonto et al., 2016), and humor (Bonto et al., 2016). Others noted that how-to manuals and newspapers (Husband, 2012), reference books such as almanacs and history books (Bonto et al, 2016), and sports magazines (Bonto et al, 2016; Griva et al., 2012) were forms of nonfiction that boys enjoyed.

Series

Numerous studies indicated boys' desire to read books in a series (Bonto et al., 2016; Dillon et al., 2017; Farris et al., 2009; Scholes et al., 2021; Senn, 2012; Thomas, 2018; Williams, 2008). Farris and colleagues (2009) noted, "By reading a series book, he'd cut down on his 'getting to know the book's setup' because he'd already been introduced to the setting, plot structure, and usual characters in previous books in the series" (p. 180). Similarly, Senn (2012) stated that series books can be of interest to boys as they have a preexisting connection to the characters. Examples of popular book series among elementary boys included *Miami Jackson* (Thomas, 2018), *Horrible Harry* (Thomas, 2018), *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Scholes et al, 2021), and *Big Nate* (Scholes et al, 2021).

Text Layout

While two studies found that boys prefer short, succinct texts (Husband, 2012; Senn, 2012), one study's male participants preferred longer books that were more than 32 pages, the typical page length of picture books (Williams, 2016). Perhaps the types of books (e.g. topics, series) provided should be considered as someone might be more apt to read a longer book about a topic of high interest or that is a part of a familiar series. Also, Farris et al. (2009) discovered that striving male readers were interested in wide margins, easy-to-read fonts, large print, and ample white space such as *Who Is LeBron James* (Hubbard, 2023). Their data revealed that boys who were not struggling readers enjoyed unusual fonts and books with unique textual features such as *Ben*

Yokoyama and the Cookie of Doom (Swanson & Behr, 2021) and ChupCarter (Lopez & Calejo, 2023). Figure 1 can be used to self-evaluate texts that are in classroom libraries to note the amount of representation of the text considerations that are mentioned in this article.

Figure 1: Self-Evaluation Checklist for Text Considerations in a Library

Text Consideration	Adequate Representation	Minimal Representation	Need Representation
Sharks			
Reptiles			
Football			
Basketball			
Cars			
Popular Culture			
Fiction			
Nonfiction			
Series books			
Various text lengths			
Various text features (e.g. white space, unique font)			

Conclusion

Educators must attend to the data that reveals elementary boys tend to achieve at lower levels in reading than elementary girls (NAEP, 2022). In addressing this issue, motivation should be considered as students who are motivated to read tend to read more (Stutz et al., 2016), and reading volume positively affects reading achievement (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2021; Anderson et al., 1988). One strategy that can enhance reading motivation among boys is providing access to books with particular text considerations that are mentioned in this article: a) topic, b) genre, c) series, and d) text layout. It is critical to evaluate if books in classroom libraries have these text considerations as male participants in one study (Scholes et al., 2021) indicated that they did not often find books that they desired at school, which negatively impacted their motivation to read. A self-evaluation checklist provided in the article serves as a quick way to assess texts that are provided in classrooms. While offering access to books with these text considerations is important, it is also critical to recommend these texts during reading conferences and read them aloud for exposure. Our role as educators is crucial in mitigating the gender reading achievement gap.

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