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Editorial Article

Beyond the Page: Reimagining Literacy Across Media, Cultures, and Classrooms

Robert A. Griffin
University of West Georgia, Carrollton, GA

Bethany L. Scullin
University of West Georgia, Carrollton, GA

ABSTRACT

The Spring 2025 issue of the *Georgia Journal of Literacy*, themed "Beyond the Page: Reimagining Literacy Across Media, Cultures, and Classrooms," challenges, expands, and reimagines what literacy means in modern classrooms. This issue explores a mix of literacy practices, from digital texts and AI tools to dialect use and blending across different genres and fields. The opening research articles invite readers to consider early literacy through the lens of multimodality, social-emotional development, and teacher identity. A bridging article explores how AI can personalize literacy instruction for students with autism, and the teaching-focused pieces offer classroom-ready strategies that celebrate linguistic diversity and integrate literature with science instruction through blended genres. These contributions together illustrate how literacy is not confined to the printed page but lived, embodied, and continuously reshaped by the media we use, the identities we affirm, and the worlds we seek to understand.

KEYWORDS

literacy innovation; multimodality; inclusive pedagogy; digital texts; interdisciplinary instruction

What if we stopped asking what literacy is and started asking what it could become? The Spring 2025 issue of the *Georgia Journal of Literacy*, "Beyond the Page: Reimagining Literacy Across Media, Cultures, and Classrooms," invites our readers to ask that very question. In this issue, the contributors treat literacy as a living, evolving practice, one that stretches across disciplines, takes shape through new media, honors diverse linguistic and cultural identities, and responds to the changing contours of classrooms and communities.

We publish this issue at a moment of disruption and possibility. The rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI), persistent debates over book access and language use, and the continued expansion of what counts as a "text" challenge us as educators to rethink how literacy is taught and why it matters (Grote-Garcia et al., 2025; Kalantzis & Cope, 2025). Each article in this issue redefines literacy from a different vantage point, whether through the lens of digital storytelling, socio-emotional learning (SEL), science integration, linguistic justice, or neurodiverse inclusion. The issue begins with research-based inquiries into emerging definitions and practices of literacy, moves into a research-practitioner bridge piece focused on AI and neurodiverse learners, and concludes with practical teaching tips grounded in culturally responsive, interdisciplinary instruction. Together, these pieces ask us not to abandon the page but to move beyond it. These contributions also remind us how we can continue to shape, question, and grow as literacy educators and advocates in a world that's constantly changing.

CONTACT **Dr. Robert A. Griffin**, Associate Professor and Assistant Department Chair, Department of Early Childhood through Secondary Education and Reading, University of West Georgia, Carrollton, GA; email rgriffin@westga.edu (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3128-7687). **Dr. Bethany L. Scullin**, Associate Professor, Department of Early Childhood through Secondary Education and Reading, University of West Georgia, Carrollton, GA; email bscullin@westga.edu.

Research Articles: Literacy as Digital, Emotional, and Personal Practice

The issue opens with three research articles that rethink the core of what literacy is and does, including its tools, its purposes, and its practitioners. In "Very Mindful, Very Multimodal: Digital Texts' Affordances for Emergent Readers," Emily Colleen Cobb examines how digital texts are reshaping early literacy. Drawing from current scholarship in new literacies and multiliteracies, Cobb challenges the assumption that today's children are digital natives naturally equipped to navigate digital content. She argues that digital texts require their own forms of strategic reading, interpretation, and meaning making and that these need to be taught explicitly. Instead of treating digital texts as extras, Cobb encourages educators to view them as active, engaging spaces where young readers can explore, create, and make sense of what they read in fresh ways.

In "Fostering Social-Emotional Learning in Children's Books," Dr. Forrest R. Parker III and Dr. Jodi Cronin turn to picturebooks as catalysts for developing social-emotional competencies. Using the widely recognized Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework, Parker and Cronin conduct a quantitative analysis of contemporary children's literature to assess both the presence and the quality of SEL themes. Their findings suggest that effective SEL integration depends not only on content but on how that content is delivered through compelling narratives, strong visuals, and thoughtfully designed characters that model empathy, regulation, and responsible decision-making.

Dr. Matt Sroka's "Teachers as Readers: Examining the Personal Reading Lives of English Educators" offers a more inward-looking perspective. Through a participatory action research design, Sroka follows four English teachers as they reflect on their personal reading habits, histories, and identities. The study reveals how these inner literate lives shape classroom practice in subtle but important ways, from the texts teachers choose to the culture of reading they create. Ultimately, Sroka suggests that fostering engaged student readers begins with teachers who themselves live as readers and who are willing to reflect on and share that identity.

Bridging Research and Practice: Personalized Possibilities with Technology

Next, Alexis Lawton's "Leveraging AI to Enhance Literacy in Students with ASD" offers an appropriate bridge between research and application, exploring how generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, Otter.AI, and image generators, can provide personalized literacy supports for neurodiverse learners. Drawing from her experiences as a speech-language pathologist, Lawton illustrates how these tools can scaffold vocabulary, comprehension, and writing development in ways that honor student strengths and needs. Instead of seeing AI as something that replaces human teaching, she presents it as a helpful, adaptable tool for inclusive learning and one that needs to be used thoughtfully and responsibly. Lawton's classroom-based insights echo the broader theoretical implications of scholars like Kalantzis and Cope (2025), who position generative AI as a new medium of literacy that invites educators to rethink reading and writing as dynamic, design-driven practices shaped by both human input and machine output.

Teaching in Action: Language, Science, and Story

The final section of the issue turns to classroom-ready practices that celebrate language diversity and expand the possibilities of interdisciplinary literacy instruction. In "Teaching with a Twist: Embracing Appalachian (and Other) Dialects—Y'all Ready for This?" Dr. Melissa Comer advocates for bringing marginalized dialects, particularly Appalachian English, into the heart of English language arts instruction. Calling on personal narrative and cultural linguistics, Comer makes a strong push for honoring students' "first voices" as legitimate and valuable. Activities

like student-created dialect glossaries and digital storytelling model an asset-based approach that affirms linguistic identity while deepening engagement with language, literature, and critical inquiry.

One of our biggest contributors, Dr. William Bintz, supplies two practical pieces to this issue that extend the reach of literacy into the sciences through the innovative use of blended genres. In "Combining Picturebooks and Poetry as Blended Genres to Teach Life Science," Bintz shares examples and strategies, such as the H-Map, for helping students connect poetic and narrative texts with life science concepts. In the companion piece, "Combining Picturebooks and Poetry as Blended Genres to Teach Earth and Space Science," he expands this approach to include earth and space content, introducing instructional tools like the Z-Map and interlocking spheres of intertextuality. These pieces provide K–8 educators with imaginative ways to integrate literacy into STEM as a bridge across disciplines.

Takeaways: Connection, Complexity, and Possibility

Together, these seven articles offer a rich and varied look at what teaching and promoting literacy means by highlighting the different ways literacy advocacy shows up in classrooms, communities, and everyday life. We see literacy reimagined:

- As emotional and interpersonal, through children's SEL texts, dialect affirmation, and teacher identity;
- As multimodal and digital, through screen-based reading, generative AI, and the layering of genres and tools;
- And as interdisciplinary, where literacy lives not just in novels and essays, but in science, culture, and new media landscapes.

The literacy scholars and educators who add their voices to this issue do not accept the status quo. Instead, they challenge us to blur the lines between genres, subjects, modes, and traditions to build more expansive, equitable, and imaginative literacy spaces. This issue adds layers to our evolving definition of literacy by expanding and reshaping the definition itself, and it calls on us to move beyond the page, not to leave it behind, but to let it lead us into new spaces of meaning. In doing so, this issue reframes literacy as a generative, connective act shaped as much by curiosity and design as by rules and convention.

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Research Article

Very Mindful, *Very* Multimodal: Digital Texts Affordances for Emergent Readers

Emily C. Cobb
Clemson University, Clemson, SC

ABSTRACT

The increasing presence of digital texts in early literacy education demands a deeper understanding of how they shape reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. This scoping review explores the most current research on digital literacy, emphasizing how early readers engage with digital texts and what this means for curriculum development. With the rise of one-to-one digital devices in classrooms, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, students are reading and interacting with texts in new ways, yet research on early literacy has often lagged behind these technological shifts. Digital texts are more than digitized print; they introduce multimodal features that require different cognitive processes and instructional approaches. Findings suggest that high-quality, narrative-driven digital texts with interactive affordances can enhance meaning-making, comprehension, and vocabulary learning, especially when paired with thoughtful instructional scaffolds. However, gaps remain in understanding how students transfer literacy skills between print and digital formats and how educators can best integrate digital literacy instruction into early reading curricula. This review underscores the need for continued research into the evolving role of digital texts in literacy development, ensuring that instructional practices keep pace with the realities of 21st-century reading environments.

KEYWORDS

digital literacy; digital texts; early literacy; reading comprehension; vocabulary acquisition

While there is pivotal research in the areas of digital literacies, digital texts and storytelling, with adolescent literacy (Boffone & Jerasa, 2021; Curwood, 2011; Green, 2021; Jerasa & Boffone, 2021; McBride, 2023; McDaniel, 2024; Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, 2019), there is a need for more understanding and research on these topics that can lead to pedagogical implications for early literacy. Specifically, how the rise of digital devices and digital texts, or their potential uses in early reading instruction, could shift reading instruction for emergent readers beyond print-dominant traditions. If contextualized by the COVID-19 pandemic that widely caused instructional shifts to e-learning with digital devices, tools, and texts (Yan et al., 2021), digital texts in the classroom since the pandemic shift may vary from simply once- printed or traditional texts that have been digitized, to an entirely new and developing category of text in its own right (Paran & Stadler-Heer, 2022). When looking at the current research, what defines digital texts, how the components of those texts influence early reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, it is necessary to understand what these studies offer as far as implications or recommendations for practice. Further analysis of research to practice is crucial when considering the magnitude these digital elements hold in modern life regarding reading and consuming information.

From infancy, children are much more likely to be in front of screens interacting with digital material than they were ten to twenty years ago (Konca, 2021; Mannell et al., 2024), which

CONTACT **Emily Cobb**, Doctoral Student, Literacy, Language and Culture Program, Clemson University, Clemson, SC; email eccob@g.cleemson.edu.

would show a critical need to include digital literacy components that respond to the growing need for understanding and engagement with digital texts and screen reading (Coulanges et al., 2024). We must also consider the "digital native" fallacy that may posit young children as such but does not consider the layers of context that define a child's familiarity with digital devices or tools (Bittman et al., 2011; Kirschner & Bruyckere, 2017). This paper argues that while some students may be comfortable, familiar, and adept with digital technology, this may not translate to reading and learning with digital texts, as these texts require specific skills to help students monitor and be strategic with the content they are engaging with. Exploring the most current research regarding digital texts and literacy components in early literacy, the goals here are to glean what affordances digital texts may have for early readers and what this means for early reading instruction.

Digital Literacy and Digital Texts in Literacy Theories

To frame these goals, digital literacy will refer to the skills and ways of thinking needed to read, write, and communicate with digital components, tools, and texts and in digital spaces (Gilster, 1997; Secker, 2018; Spires et al., 2019), and this definition is constantly developing as technology does and can encompass other literacy subsets (Nichols & Stornaiuolo, 2019). Here, digital literacy is both how young children engage with and use the technology, but also how to make meaning with the content with technology. Spires et al. (2019) view digital literacy through three buckets of locating and digesting content, creating content, and sharing content. These practices go beyond just skill-based learning with digital texts, but call for young readers to make complex, individualized decisions with texts that go beyond what may occur with print-based texts or in-school literacies (Marsh, 2016; Marsh et al., 2018; Neumann et al., 2017). With the continued rise and evolution of technology, the need for pedagogical decisions that support digital literacy components is momentous to address the growing number of ways that children interact with information on screens and online. With the ever-changing nature of what is digital, young readers need additional support to engage with technology, how to engage with it for different purposes, and how to make use of the tools that digital texts afford.

Digital literacy falls into the new mediums and new approaches called for by multiliteracies and new literacies (New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; 2009; Gee, 2002). Multiliteracies asks educators to consider what the digital world will demand of students as they read, write, and communicate through multiple modes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Kress, 2000b; Curiel, 2023) and across multimedia technologies that push traditional notions or definitions of literacy (Swift, 2023). New literacies build upon the multiliteracies by arguing that literacy is not just encapsulated by in-school practices as students are making meaning, sharing language, and communicating for many purposes (Alvermann & Moore, 2011; McCarthey et al., 2020); the name itself implies literacies are multiple and renewing (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Leu, 2017). As a facet of these theories, digital literacy calls for literacy education in the age of globalization, multimedia, and technology to equip students with literacy tools and skills to engage in digital spaces critically and pragmatically (Alvermann, 2002; Gainer, 2012; Flewitt et al., 2015; Harrison, 2017). Digital literacy also requires explicit instruction and pedagogical decisions that frame digital learning that does not equate prevalence of the technology with equal access or understanding as digital devices and tools are not equally accessible to all students (Ng, 2012; Rowsell et al., 2017; Hadad et al., 2023). In digital environments, where students would be engaging with texts, students will interact with an amazing amount of content. Content that is inherently multimodal and requires alternative approaches for reading, writing, and communicating (Kress & Jewitt, 2003; Yellend, 2016). Students have to be equipped to know

how to engage pragmatically and effectively for their own goals and to make meaning in those spaces. Beyond those technicalities of engaging with digital content, digital literacy encompasses students engaging with content and tools that allows them to take more ownership of their learning (Li, 2017), and the sociocultural aspects of digital literacy includes this authenticity and ownership versus what is afforded by printed or offline texts or ways of creating (New London Group, 1996; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Gee, 2012; Neumann et al., 2017; Meoded Karabanov & Aram, 2024). With these theoretical framings in mind, it is important to define digital texts in their current reiterations to better understand their potentialities in early literacy instruction.

What are Digital Texts *Now*

Digital literacy can encompass all the means of action with digital tools, devices, components, etc., but when considering the research of digital literacy and digital texts, early literacy may lack the depth of scholarship found with the lens of adolescent literacy. Also, what a digital text is continues to evolve. From CD-ROMs to educational media on television, then the dawn of accessible internet in schools, which brought ebooks, websites, video sites, and apps, digital texts shifted alongside their technology. Digital texts may also include texts that were once print and are static screen reading. The evolution of these texts is perpetual, and the following review of literature aims to look at what scholarship says about what digital texts are right *now* while also considering reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

Digital Texts are Different

Digital literacy engages students in spaces that are inherently multimodal. This inherent nature of multimodal reading can be an opportunity for educators to reconfigure early reading instruction, one that acknowledges the growing presence of multimodal texts students engage with in the 21st century and also maintaining a strong focus on foundational print-based skills (Crane-Deklerk, 2020; McKee & Heydon, 2015; Yellend, 2016). While the teaching of reading with print texts is not behind us, there is still a great need for instruction of digital reading skills to interact with and make meaning of digital texts For early readers, digital skills depend on the medium; just because young readers may be considered "digital natives" this does not mean that they automatically possess the digital skills necessary to comprehend digital texts (Bittman et al., 2011; Florit et al., 2022; Kirschner & Bruyckere, 2017). Many more texts are now available to children with the availability of tablets and phones, where there is text on websites, apps, videos, streaming services, and social media. Therefore, the need for early literacy to encompass the teaching of digital texts is pertinent. One perspective is that multimodal, digital texts in early literacy could be approached from a storytelling lens (Kim & Hachey, 2021) where young children can both engage with and create stories simultaneously as they read and retell stories (Kelly, 2017, 2018; Kim, 2019). Similarly to the approach educators may take with print-text, such as picturebooks or other literature, this perspective extends to include the multimodality that pulls young readers into the storytelling to include more opportunities for students to make meaning.

Digital texts, such as videos, storybook apps, and others pull in communication as an element of digital literacy. Multimodality in digital texts has the potential to deemphasize print text and language features for other modes of communication (Wang et al., 2019) which would expand opportunities for students to engage in storytelling that is important for emergent readers (Early et al., 2015). For example, while print picturebooks obviously are an integral part of early reading instruction, the affordances of multimodal texts, digital texts can extend imagery to video and even be malleable to the user so that young readers can make their own images to demonstrate

meaning (Marsh et al., 2018; Oakley et al., 2020; Undheim, 2023). Considering the digital affordances of digital texts such as automatic animations of illustration, hotspots, navigation options, animation hotspots, further research is needed to connect these affordances to literacy outcomes for emergent readers (Wang et al., 2019). The affordances of digital texts, even just through the lens of storytelling, give educators options to consider how digital texts can be included in early literacy instruction and for what purposes.

Focusing In on Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Acquisition

Digital texts include visual, auditory, and action modes and have multiple pathways for reading, which means more decision making while reading (Wang et al., 2019). Possibly complicating instruction use of digital texts is an ongoing battle of what underpins reading comprehension, how best to teach reading, and with what tools or texts. In the Simple View of Reading (SVR), Gough and Tunmer (1986), as cited by Kim (2023), suggest "reading comprehension is the product of decoding and language comprehension, in which both skills are necessary and not alone sufficient for readers to understand what they read" (p. 196). When engaging with digital texts, educators may consider how the multimodality of those texts may require instruction that engages young readers beyond phonics and decoding, like that of print-based texts, therefore placing different purposes on these texts. With the Active View of Reading (AVR), Duke and Cartwright (2021) expand SVR and incorporate more evidence on the development of reading comprehension. The AVR approach emphasizes decoding and language comprehension, but gives more context with the difficulties relating to comprehension. AVR acknowledges that difficulties with reading comprehension can extend beyond the inability to decode, as content knowledge plays a key role in comprehension alongside vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, the AVR suggests that decoding and comprehension skills cannot be completely siloed; they often overlap. With this framing, the multimodal nature of digital texts may necessitate additional or specialized instruction as digital texts include multimedia components, intertextuality, and hypertextuality, which means students are reading beyond just what is on the page, top to bottom. To avoid a limiting perspective on how digital texts can be used in early reading instruction, it is worth exploring how digital texts may aid in the complexities facing educators as they guide students through language learning and reading comprehension.

With this in mind, because of the variance and complexity of digital texts, a perspective to approach reading comprehension with digital texts may align with Moje (2018): "[R]eading is a complex, multidimensional cognitive process in and mediated by social and cultural practices" (p. 2). Also, Compton-Lily et al. (2020) argue that reading comprehension is complex and, therefore, requires complex solutions. Scarborough (2001) suggests that the skills that underlie word recognition and language comprehension are a braided rope that tightens as young readers develop. Zooming in on each of those strands and elevating pedagogical decisions around texts that elevate meaning conversation and engagement with texts (Cabell & Zucker, 2024), opens the possibility that digital texts could aid in instructional decisions that help strengthen those strands for students as there can be more individualized instruction, text selection, and digital tools as aids.

Reading comprehension requires dynamic thinking and critical, active engagement in the text (Shanahan, 2005), which digital texts may afford with their multimodal features that can be leveraged for early readers. While reading difficulties for young readers goes beyond word recognition and comprehension, reading comprehension, being able to understand, retell, and make critical meaning of what is being read, is paramount as students progress through reading development with more and more complex texts. New Literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011)

gives further perspective on the affordances of digital texts as digital tools allow for meaning-making pathways through interactivity, more choice with the text, and ways to transact between texts. All alluding to the hope that digital texts and reading comprehension can actually be a hopeful piece to the digital age, considering the breadth of choices, tools, and availability to students.

A Note About Vocabulary Acquisition

The more vocabulary students know and can recognize, the more complicated texts they can read and understand. Educators know, as research has found, explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction is important and that students need in-depth and repeated interactions with word lists or crucial words in order to cement them into meaning as vocabulary instruction should also be focused on engaging students with analytic thinking about word meaning and teaching an emphasis on the relationship between word means (Shanahan, 2005). In early literacy, as children are cognitively gathering and soaking up as many words as they are surrounded with, and building off the focus on comprehension, building sight vocabulary is an essential skill for recalling words and text-reading (Ehri, 2013). As students are engaged with, even playing with, digital texts or apps, they may be naturally exposed to more vocabulary (Masters et al., 2023), whereas many digital texts have vocabulary tools embedded in them.

However, vocabulary is not just learned by hearing it but also by reading it in print. With digital texts with additional tools for young readers, there needs to be a broader understanding if these tools aid in vocabulary acquisition. One consideration is the availability of digital texts or storybook apps that include narration, since read-alouds are important for vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation (Ehri, 2013). From an instructional perspective, vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension should not be in isolation as teaching the meaning of words in text supports comprehension, but the most important thing is teaching students how to approach a word they do not know on their own. This could be an area where digital texts are superior to print text considering the tools that those texts may have to aid with students working to discover word meanings. With digital texts, students may be engaged in more active processing of vocabulary (Orcutt et al., 2023), and digital texts may have more affordability to aid students in working with unknown words. Considering that vocabulary acquisition and fluency are the bridge makers between word recognition and comprehension (Cartwright, 2021), there are exciting pedagogical possibilities regarding how digital texts could shift students' scope and breadth of textual availability.

Locating Current Research on Digital Texts, Early Literacy, and Practice

To locate the most relevant research and identify gaps in research regarding digital texts in early literacy, this paper draws on a synthesis of research collected through a scoping review. The purpose of the scoping review is to locate the most recent research on a topic, the key themes from a synthesis of that research, and what gaps in research remain on the topic (Peters et al., 2020). To guide the search, the following question grounded this review: *How are emergent readers' engagement with digital texts shaping or changing what we know about practice regarding reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition?*

Scoping Review Searches and Results

To begin the search, an inclusion/exclusion criterion was determined to generate and narrow the most relevant research, and search terms were generated to conduct a thorough search of at least

one database (Peters et al., 2020) (see Tables 1 and 2). These results were then narrowed through screenings to ensure that each article met the review's requirements and goals before a thematic analysis was conducted to extract data using inductive coding (Peters et al., 2020; Saldana, 2016) (see Figure 1).

Table 1: Inclusion Criterion for Scoping Review

Date of publication	January 2019 – May 2024
Language	English
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, empirical research articles, and practitioner articles
Location context	U.S. public schools
Grade level context	Early literacy education, preschool, elementary education
Digital literacy	Must contain research/data regarding digital texts in regards to reading comprehension and/or vocabulary acquisition
Quality	Must be a peer-reviewed publication in a reputable journal and provide recommendations for practice or curriculum implications

The inclusion criteria above helped guide the search during the review as these limited the selected studies to only include the most recent, relevant research regarding the topic. Articles were only selected if they fell within the outlined "date of publication" period above. This was important to the review as part of the purpose hinges on looking at how the COVID-19 pandemic digital shift may have influenced or been influenced by the increased use of digital devices, tools, and texts. Another important criteria was the selection of U.S.-only studies that further narrows possible instructional implications for educators. The results using these aforementioned criteria are outlined below.

Table 2: Search Terms and Results from Scoping Review

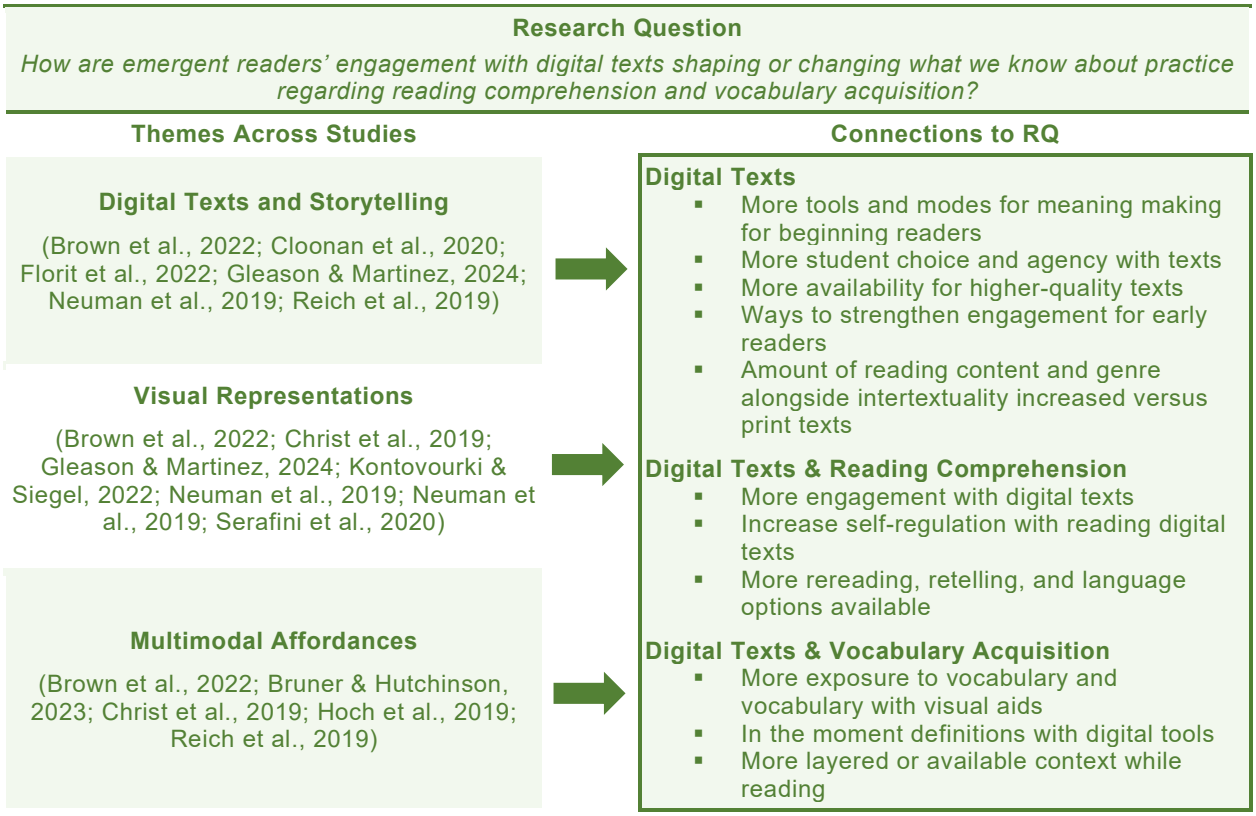
Searches	Total Results
By Search Term	**96**
▪ Digital texts + comprehension + early literacy	**57**
▪ Digital texts + vocabulary + early literacy	**39**
Screening Results	
Abstract Screening	**45**
Full Screening	**11**

The search terms above initially yielded 96 results. After further screening, utilizing the inclusion criteria, eleven studies were selected that gave insight on digital texts, reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition in an early literacy context with curriculum implications. Most studies were excluded because of the publication date criteria and location context being set to only U.S. public, K–12 schools, outlined in Table 1.

Scoping Review Findings

From the literature reviewed, several themes emerged. These themes all strongly correlated to the importance of multimodality and transferring modalities across texts with digital texts in the early grades. As research studies were only included in this review if explicit recommendations or implications for practice grounded their work, outlined below are the major themes from the research and approaches for educators to consider with digital texts in the classroom (see Figure 1). These themes are expanded upon in the following section.

Figure 1: Results from Scoping Review



Digital Texts and the Affordances for Emergent Readers

To return to the purpose of this paper, below the studies are examined to see what their research indicates about how current forms of digital texts may shape or transform early literacy components such as reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Provided below is that research, extracted from the scoping review, paired with some instructional approaches for educators to consider when incorporating digital texts into their classroom.

Storytelling Goes Digital

What was clear across the results was the connection between narrative structures, narratives, or storytelling aspects on digital apps. This paired with collaboration between peers either in buddy reading or creating their own retellings of a text using digital tools helped students make meaning through connections with others and by students becoming creative communicators (Gleason & Martinez, 2024). When using digital texts or tools to read or create

stories in the classroom, storytelling may take visual forms, through images created with digital tools, that is an important early literacy skill for emergent readers as they make meaning and examine context (Gleason & Martinez, 2024). This is also clear in Brown et al.'s (2022) work where they found students took up different digital tools, manipulating them, to show their understanding of the stories in deep contextual ways such as making connections to real-world experiences alongside emotion, language, and culture. Digital texts, because of their intertextuality and hypertextuality, may give students more opportunities to explore stories through more perspectives or build upon perspective through their own retellings. The tools present in digital texts can be used as scaffolds for meaning making, and this is especially important for emergent multilingual students who may need more support beyond print-text (Gleason & Martinex, 2024).

Narrative structure appears to be important for early literacy and digital texts. Narrative structure capitalizes aids in comprehension (Brown et al., 2019; Neuman et al., 2019) and as young readers recreate or retell stories as a means of storytelling, students may expand beyond the "traditional repertoires of print-based text to include visual media and popular digital images" (Gleason & Martinez, 2024, p. 58). These studies showed that with digital texts, when selected from options that are narrative in style and give students multiple ways to respond to the text, students are both reading and writing through retelling. As retelling is a seminal assessment of reading comprehension, it is important to consider how digital texts or tools can be used for students to retell what they read using different modalities, and as Brown et al. (2022) found, it could have positive benefits for students such as multilingual students. As educators are considering how to use digital texts around storytelling, narrative retelling with imagery could be a strategy that piques interest with young readers, gives them agency, and supports their reading comprehension through deeper contextual narration where young readers can infuse responses to text with their own identity and pull from various aspects of their language repertoire.

The types or genres of digital texts seem to differ regarding students' engagement with the text and this affects comprehension (Florit et al., 2022). As described here, narrative stories had the most positive correlation between reading the digital story and improved reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Children may prefer reading narrative or descriptive texts on screen (visual; Florit et al., 2022). This may not be surprising considering how much digital content is consumed by young and old alike in our current digital age. But, it is important to remember that it is not just the visual as narration plays a vital role (Reich et al., 2019). Narration is a key component of digital texts and could be an important pedagogical tool in the classroom when considering how it may be used beyond the typical teacher-whole group read-aloud. Digital texts that are narrative in genre, and include narration options, could provide teachers with increased opportunities for small-group or individualized read-aloud time that is more tailored to students' needs. To approach small group instruction around a text, a renewed approach to literature circles could help educators approach literature with multimodal texts and multimodal responses to text (Cloonan et al., 2019). Combined with the multimodal features of quality digital texts, and the extended ways young readers can making meaning or show understanding, literature circles where students can discuss texts, collaborate to explore the text, and take on roles within their groups to create digital representations of their reading could further support students' comprehension and vocabulary acquisition with digital texts rather than just focusing on individual reading with the text.

The Importance of Visual Aids

Digital texts' affordances regarding visual aids and representations may help emergent readers' reading comprehension (Foritt et al., 2022; Neuman et al., 2019). As early readers are engaging with text, with listening, visual aids as part of the storytelling or options for visuals could lead to increased understanding of a text. It is important to note, however, that early readers may process digital texts superficially without teacher scaffolding or mediation and digital reading may require a higher cognitive load (Florit et al., 2022). Digital texts may also aid in listening comprehension and vocabulary learning: "when stories were accompanied by visual or other nonverbal information, the vocabulary words were retained better than if conveyed alone" (Neuman et al., 2019, p. 33) Neuman et al. (2019) refers to the process of dual coding as early readers process information in tandem but on different channels, one verbal and one nonverbal (such as images). Digital texts and media like in videos would be an example of this process and is important as more and more text is tied to video imagery. While picturebooks include visuals, Gleason and Martinez (2024) argue that digital texts can go beyond the static print-based text and visual text. Cloonan et al. (2020) suggest a step further for educators to have students also engage in responding to texts multimodally using the digital tools that may accompany the texts to pull in various modes of communication to represent meaning like language tools, digital imagery, and collaborative retellings.

As referenced, the amount of time that children are in front of screens has increased significantly (because of mobile devices and other digital devices), meaning that children are engaging with digital content and texts outside of school, and educators could lean into this new reality (Neuman et al., 2019). Looking at educational media on streaming services, Neuman et al. (2019) found that quality educational media could be important to promote oral vocabulary knowledge in the early stages of language growth, and a large majority of that education media includes vocabulary scenes to support students in-the-moment vocabulary work. The visual component of this educational media is part of the appeal and may be part of the way forward when thinking about how young children may gain vocabulary skills alongside other literacy skills. Connecting back to school settings, Neuman et al. (2019) found that in order for the educational media to be the most effective, it had to be engaging enough to hold the child's attention, which may inform educators in their selection of digital texts for the classroom. The higher quality of images or visuals paired with the more engaging story, could lead to higher reading comprehension results.

Also, considering how students may use digital tools, such as images and visuals, to make meaning and build vocabulary, Brown et al. (2022)'s work with visual-text composition relates to Bruner and Hutchinson's (2023) work with teaching the actual navigation of digital texts and tools alongside the comprehension of those texts. They echo the importance of engagement with digital texts and books. Eutsler and Trotter (2020) found that children who read the digital books were more likely to want to read another book and children showed slightly more attention while reading the digital text (more engaged and read for longer; Eutsler & Trotter, 2020) which may be attributed to the visual nature of digital text.

Digital texts include visual modes and auditory and action modes, and have multiple pathways for reading, which means more decision making while reading (Christ et al., 2019) which research from above indicates more engagement with the text. So, when considering how to select digital texts and digital books, high interactivity, affordances that transform children's meaning making as compared to paper books, intuitive developmental appropriateness, and good narrative/illustrative quality are all elements to consider (Christ et

al., 2019). Also, alongside the narrative/illustrative qualities, the digital tools or elements of digital texts or books can also aid in comprehension when pre-taught as word hotspots led to better inference/critical thinking outcomes which could lead to higher vocabulary acquisition (Christ et al., 2019).

Educators also need ways to assess early readers' use of the multimodal resources available with digital texts. While the research indicates that visual aids are an important aspect of digital texts in aiding with reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, understanding how individual students respond to those resources is important as students will be engaging with texts that go beyond language-dominant texts. In their work studying young learners' multimodal sign-making, Kontovourki and Siegel (2022) found that print-dominant, fixed concepts of understanding texts, and who or what guides that understanding, is complicated by the multimodal responses students can make around and with digital texts. As good, quality digital texts may go beyond the capacities of print-based texts, it is important to consider that emergent readers meaning making of those texts may not fit into text-centered or print-based meaning making (Kontovourki & Siegel, 2022), and that opens the door for more opportunities for young readers to express their understanding of a digital text through simultaneously engaging with and making texts.

Also, just as digital texts may be used and approached in different ways than print-texts, neither abandoned for the other, students' engagement with these texts deserves a different type of assessment. Serafini et al. (2020) provide such a protocol for assessment to assist educators in analyzing students' reading decisions with multimodal texts. This protocol includes specific categories of assessment that are specific to multimodal texts, such as digital texts, like whether students are focusing on written text, visual images, or design features (Serafini et al., 2020, p. 290). As previous studies have indicated the need for educators to shift their monitoring of students engaged with digital texts, this may give them a protocol to help guide students as they make decisions with digital tools embedded in digital texts.

Multimodality is Key

Multimodality really is the heartbeat of quality digital texts, and the multimodal affordances of digital texts must be harnessed for different purposes than how educators may approach instruction print texts. Reich et al. (2019) looked at how electronic reading compares to print reading and found that it depends on the text and with the students' understanding of using the digital device or app. As previously discussed, the multimodality of interactive digital texts may support emergent readers' comprehension outcomes (Christ et al., 2019). Finding that students had a layered use of modalities, each child had a different approach to which multimodal features they used or did not use (Reich et al., 2019). While print-text features may be pre-taught, this further suggests that educators should scaffold the learning of an app or a digital text with its modalities as without these scaffolds students' reading comprehension may actually be hindered (Christ et al., 2019). With so many more texts now available to children, text on websites, videos, and other apps, how to navigate those multimodal texts has to be part of the pedagogical approach with digital texts. Digital devices with storybook apps allow for books that can be read without a mediator, but that does not erase the need for a teacher mediator or scaffolding, and while the "Read-to-Me" feature or similar is important, and a great aspect of digital text, Reich et al. (2019) found that there needs to be a greater discussion about why teacher mediator is still key even for digital texts that include teaching elements. With such features, students can engage with apps or digital texts that may not be

relevant to the story without proper scaffolding with how to engage with the text and utilize its multimodal tools pragmatically (Reich et al., 2019). While digital texts may include more ways for early readers to engage with a text, with many great tools available, there is still the need for educators to scaffold the text and help students navigate it while they read. This may give educators an opportunity to consider when digital texts may be more appropriate or not for instruction. Educators can consider the need for individualized reading opportunities, and the affordances digital texts can have for students in this capacity, versus times of whole-group, direct instruction with print-texts.

Brown et al.'s (2022) work with emergent multilingual students and digital texts and tools shows, again, how digital texts can be used as part of good-accommodation practice in the classroom. As the U.S. has a growing multilingual population, Brown et al.'s (2022) suggest that educators consider how translanguaging as a multimodal practice could be relevant with digital texts. Multilingual students' reading comprehension is often assessed in ways that does not account for their full linguistic repertoire whereas digital texts and tools can allow for a wider breadth of multimodal reading and composition. Considering reading comprehension affordances of digital tools, multimodal interactions promoted stronger meaning-making experiences, and digital tools help with independent decision making. Tools such as text editor functions, speech bubbles, and even emojis as a semiotic resource all supported emergent bilingual students in the study (Brown et al., 2022). Again, educators can lean into what multimodality offers students through the use of digital texts and tools.

Being able to navigate a digital text, which may require a higher cognitive load, requires specific reading strategies (Florit et al., 2022). Shimizu (2024) looked beyond narrative texts at static reading passages like those used in standardized testing where static digital texts are presented digitally but do not include any or the quality of interactive or multimodal elements as discussed so far. While this type of text goes against what the other studies have found regarding what types of digital texts result in higher reading comprehension outcomes, Shimizu's (2024) findings are important for educators to consider as these are also the types/genres of digital texts students encounter, especially considering the reality of standardized testing in U.S. schools.

Digital reading is multifaceted, with greater need to be strategic and critical, needing the ability to synthesize over many multimodal sources, being an active reader is heightened with digital texts (Bruner & Hutchinson, 2023; Shimizu, 2024). With paper to screen reading, as many of the texts that were previously read on paper, such as those used in standardized testing, are now digital. When educators consider how to scaffold students with digital reading, reading on screens may factor into that even if that means students are engaged with high quality, multimodal texts (Florit et al., 2022). Navigating digital texts is as much a part of digital learning as knowing how to interact and create digitally (Bruner & Hutchinson, 2023). This is key because digital texts require different skills of engagement than print-based texts. According to Bruner and Hutchinson (2023), digital texts are "intertextual, multimodal, immediate, abbreviated, informal, multi-authored, creative, interactive, hyperlinked and involve a diverse array of participants and languages" (p. 748). Because of their multimodality, Bruner and Hutchinson (2023) see approaching digital texts through a disciplinary lens using specific disciplinary literacy practices common across academic disciplines and acknowledge how features of digital texts are different from printed texts. This would indicate that each digital text would need to be approached with a specific purpose

as each text has a different set of multimodal affordances and can be utilized for different learning goals (Hoch et al., 2019).

Another consideration for educators when using digital texts in the classroom, like the storybook apps or high-quality digital texts, is the link between paired or small group reading and higher comprehension outcomes with digital texts. Christ et al. (2019) compared individual and buddy reading of app books, looking for comprehension outcomes (unprompted retelling, prompted retelling, inference/critical thinking responses, vocabulary-meaning generation). They found app book affordances (or tools) linked directly to individual reading outcomes, appbooks with more hotspots on each page retelling outcomes were better, word hotspots led to higher inference/critical thinking scores. Using these tools connects back to what was suggested earlier about the multimodality of these texts and how that might influence reading comprehension or vocabulary acquisition (Brown et al., 2022). During buddy reading, emergent readers may have more tools to monitor their comprehension leading to better inference/critical thinking scores and showed promise for students' subsequent individual reading because of more possibilities in modeling and scaffolding from the texts themselves, peers, and teachers (Christ et al., 2019). All substantiating the importance of collaboration and mediation, whether by a teacher or peer, when using digital texts in the classroom (Florit et al., 2022). Another approach for student collaboration around multimodal, digital texts is through inquiry projects that are based on teacher-guided, and student-generated, multimodal text sets (Hoch et al., 2019). A text set would allow for planned different uses of texts, beyond whole group instruction, different levels of texts, and different genres of multimodal texts.

The Continued Reshaping of Digital Literacy and Digital Texts

These studies help show that digital texts, through digital storytelling, their capacity of visual aids, and multimodal resources, have the potential to shape reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition for emergent readers due to their affordances. The multimodal affordances of digital texts gives early readers even more support while reading as students can use tools in the moment to help with understanding both the text and the context. This is especially important for individual reading time, small group or "buddy" reading, and supporting multilingual students (Christ et al., 2019; Gleason & Martinez, 2024). As technology continues to shape how people read, and how young people are learning to read, literacy education will have to continue to adjust what digital literacy looks like considering that the digital skills needed to interact with digital texts are constantly evolving alongside those texts (Florit et al., 2022). The prevalence of digital devices, and as young people are engaged on them even before schooling, will require continued research to understand how literacy education will have to respond to this reality. One reality made clear through this review is that early literacy instruction will have to adjust to engage young children in reading skills that equip them to approach multiple modes of information while engaging with digital texts (Cloonan et al., 2020; Serafini et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019). Conversely, this points out a gap in the research as there are few current studies on the variety of digital books and what needs to be invested in classrooms as this may be a factor of the fast-paced nature of digital technology and tools. Research may not also account for the vast variability in school resources across the U.S. and the availability of such technology to teachers and classrooms. While it has been established here that digital book features may help comprehension like the digital tools that are available with the books, further research is needed to understand which

digital tools and what are the best quality digital texts to pull from (Eutsler & Trotter, 2020). Christ et al. (2019) questions how much research or classroom practice has looked at the difference between the use of older style digital texts and newer app books further arguing that research is behind the technology. Most studies regarding digital texts have been done with secondary or college students which does not reflect the reality that digital texts can be in every classroom at every grade level.

Digital Texts and the Changing of Early Reading

As the research reviewed for this paper is limited, the changing of early reading instruction because of increased use or availability of digital texts is still in need for further research but there are clear points of consideration for pedagogy. As a baseline, it is important for educators to remember that students will come into the classroom with varying levels of experience with technology (Brown et al., 2022) and with the breadth of digital text, content, and educational media that is available now, children may require more individualized instruction or support when engaging with digital texts (Christ et al., 2019; Neuman et al., 2019) and that engagement may require different pedagogical approaches than print-texts (Kontovourki & Siegel, 2022). Also, educators may need to monitor students' engagement with the actual devices for the digital texts as this novelty effect, where students are more engaged with the device than the text, could lead to an initial peak of engagement that wanes. However, Reich et al. (2019) maintain that sustained engagement with high-quality digital texts, just as with printed texts, is what will have the highest benefit for reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

Comprehension monitoring and teacher mediation are important parts of potential success with digital texts (Christ et al., 2019). Even though digital texts, like storybook apps, have many tools that can engage students directly, the research reviewed shows that there is a need for simultaneous acquisition of basic digital skills with child-adult interactions together with digital texts. This need for adult guidance, adult mediation, helps level the playing field for digital text comprehension across mediums (Florit et al., 2022). As previously noted, educators will need to consider when to engage with moving from whole-class instruction to individual, group, or buddy reading of digital texts and that research suggests that teacher monitoring should continue from whole-group direct instruction with print texts to individualized or buddy reading with digital texts even if that means monitoring students across text choices and/or platforms (Christ et al., 2019; Cloonan et al., 2020). This monitoring can look like aiding in text selection, device usage, monitoring the use or non-use of multimodal tools, and engaging in talk about the text.

When educators are selecting digital texts for instruction, research suggests that narrative or story book digital texts are the best types of digital texts to work with reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition (Eustler & Trotter, 2020; Reich et al., 2019). Having a dynamic app book selection with appropriately leveled texts, high-quality narrative and illustration options, and digital affordances that uplift interactivity with the text is the best way to consider what type of digital texts are best for reading instruction (Christ et al., 2019). Also, Reich et al. (2019) suggest that in considering the educational affordances of ebooks, it is possible that these verbal outputs during reading, even about the device, could benefit language development. Regarding digital texts, or static digital texts, like those used in standardized testing, Shimizu (2024) also supports monitoring young students' engagement with screen reading and for educators to consider that there are many paths to comprehension

success with digital texts. With static digital texts, linear reading and linear rereading, like with print texts, is most supportive for reading comprehension (Shimizu, 2024), and this is a sharp contrast to other digital texts that are multimodal where linear reading may not be beneficial or appropriate for the text. Again, this indicates that even in early reading instruction, educators need to balance print-reading instruction skills with digital reading skills with strategies that more align with digital literacy components.

The question of digital texts and early literacy will be ongoing and evolving. There is also the question of what young students prefer and how they are engaging with digital texts before schooling (Eutsler & Trotter, 2022). For educators, more research is needed to understand what specific reading strategies best support students while reading digital texts and how educators can work with parents to understand what students are interacting with at home digitally and what types of media may actually be beneficial to students regarding digital literacy outside of the classroom (Eutsler & Trotter, 2022). Also, there needs to be further research into how to balance print and digital texts in the classroom and what the best practices are for early literacy educators when scaffolding the reading of digital texts across the classroom.

As this review, with recommendations for practice, has looked broadly at digital texts and specific reading components reading comprehension and vocabulary of emergent readers to locate the most current research, it is important to acknowledge that there are limitations to this review and needs for future research that includes early childhood educators and their perspectives on incorporating digital texts in the classroom. While research may suggest ways for early childhood educators to approach digital texts, and how to select digital texts for instruction, teachers may be more limited in their ability to make such pedagogical decisions. Therefore, further perspective from educators, specifically early literacy educators, is imperative to research digital literacies.

What was found in this review is that digital texts require specific digital literacy skills to be pre-taught, scaffolded, and monitored simultaneously for students just as they would be with print-texts but differ from those print-based skills. With digital texts, students are engaging through a different medium, they have more choices, and they have more agency in their decision making with the text. As far as the best digital texts to use with early readers, high-quality, narrative digital texts with effective visuals may lead to the best reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition outcomes.

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Digital literacy, and digital texts, will only continue to change, therefore, the research and pedagogical decisions made around them must also evolve and strive to keep up with the fast-paced nature of technology. What is exciting, however, is that there is clear evidence that digital texts, and however they evolve, may give more students engaged, individualized experiences with reading that may more closely mirror the reading choices they will make out of school. Educators looking to harness these reading opportunities for their emergent readers can look to digital texts to see what the future of reading may encompass.

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Research Article

Fostering Social-Emotional Learning in Children's Books: An Analysis of Content and Quality

Forrest R. Parker III
Valdosta State University, Valdosta, GA

Jodi Cronin
Valdosta State University, Valdosta, GA

ABSTRACT

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is increasingly recognized as essential to children's development, equipping them with tools for emotional regulation, positive relationships, and responsible decision-making. This quantitative study explores how SEL is represented in contemporary children's literature, drawing on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework to analyze the frequency and quality of SEL themes across five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The study focuses on two primary research questions: (1) Which SEL themes appear most frequently in children's books based on rubric scores? and (2) How do literary and artistic rubric ratings relate to the effectiveness of SEL content? The study differentiates between the presence of SEL themes and the quality of their delivery. Findings highlight how children's books can serve as powerful tools for modeling empathy and social understanding, offering valuable insights for educators, parents, and publishers seeking to support holistic child development through literature.

KEYWORDS

children's literature; social development; social relationships

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as a crucial component of children's development, emphasizing the importance of helping young learners acquire the skills needed to manage emotions, build healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions. In an increasingly complex world, the ability to navigate social and emotional challenges is essential for both personal well-being and academic success. SEL provides children with the tools they need to understand and manage their emotions, show empathy toward others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible choices.

Children's literature plays a significant role in fostering these skills. Books that are rich in SEL content can serve as valuable resources for parents, educators, and children themselves. Through engaging stories and relatable characters, children's books have the potential to introduce and reinforce SEL concepts in accessible and developmentally appropriate ways. Research suggests that when these texts are intentionally selected and used, they can model behaviors that support emotional growth, empathy, and social understanding (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Ludwig, 2012; Shechtman, 2008). The narratives found in these books often model positive behaviors and provide children with examples of how to handle various social and emotional situations. As such,

CONTACT **Dr. Forrest R. Parker III**, Assistant Professor, Department of Teacher Education, Valdosta State University, Valdosta, GA; email fparker@valdosta.edu (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0671-9097). **Dr. Jodi Cronin**, Assistant Professor, Department of Teacher Education, Valdosta State University, Valdosta, GA; email jcronin@valdosta.edu.

the intentional incorporation of SEL themes into children's literature is a critical component in promoting holistic development.

While social-emotional learning (SEL) is widely regarded as a foundational component of student development, much of the existing research has focused on SEL implementation in school-based programs and curricula (Devaney et al., 2005; Greenberg, 2023). Fewer studies have examined how SEL competencies are represented in children's literature, particularly in terms of how narrative and artistic elements reinforce SEL messages. Because children's books are frequently used in early education settings as both literacy and life-skills tools, there is a need to understand how effectively these books present SEL content—not only in terms of frequency, but in the quality and clarity of those messages (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Mondi & Reynolds, 2020).

This study addresses this gap by exploring not just how often SEL themes appear in children's literature, but also how the literary and artistic quality of the books may contribute to the effectiveness of SEL communication.

Research Objectives

This study aims to explore both the presence and the quality of SEL content in contemporary children's books. Specifically, it investigates the frequency with which key SEL themes appear and examines whether literary and artistic quality influences the perceived effectiveness of these themes. These are treated as two distinct areas of inquiry: representation does not imply effectiveness. Instead, the study seeks to better understand how often SEL themes appear and whether the way they are presented enhances their developmental impact on young readers. The primary research questions guiding this study are:

1. Which SEL themes appear most frequently in children's books based on rubric scores?
2. How do rubric ratings of literary and artistic qualities correlate with the effectiveness of SEL content in children's books?

By addressing these questions, the study endeavors to provide a comprehensive analysis of the intersection between SEL content and the overall quality of children's literature.

Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the existing literature on SEL by offering an in-depth analysis of its representation in children's books. While previous studies have focused on the role of SEL in educational settings (Devaney et al., 2005; Greenberg, 2023), there is a growing need to understand how children's literature can serve as an additional resource for promoting social-emotional learning skills. Children's books that model emotional regulation, empathy, and responsible decision-making have the potential to shape not only how young readers understand emotions but also how they relate to others in meaningful ways (Ludwig, 2012; Shechtman, 2008).

Previous studies suggest that high-quality picturebooks can positively influence children's SEL development by presenting relatable characters and situations that reflect real-world social dynamics (Mondi & Reynolds, 2020; Ursache et al., 2020). Moreover, integrating SEL themes through engaging narratives can support emotional growth, improve behavior, and enhance literacy outcomes (Deliman et al., 2024; Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). This study extends those findings by providing a quantitative analysis of both SEL content and literary/artistic quality, offering educators and publishers specific guidance on what constitutes effective SEL integration in children's literature.

The findings of this study will have practical implications for educators, parents, and publishers, offering guidelines on selecting and creating high-quality SEL-themed books that effectively support children's social and emotional growth. Ultimately, this research underscores the potential of children's literature as a powerful tool for fostering SEL and enhancing the emotional well-being of young readers.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for this study is grounded in the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework, which identifies five core competencies essential for social-emotional learning (SEL). These competencies (Table 1), social awareness, relationship skills, self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making, are critical for the holistic development of children and serve as the guiding principles for evaluating and promoting SEL through children's literature.

Table 1: CASEL Core Competency Terms

Term	Definition
Social Awareness	CASEL (2020) defines social awareness as the ability "to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts" (p. 2).
Relationship Skills	CASEL (2020) defines relationship skills as the ability "to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups" (p. 2).
Self-Awareness	CASEL (2020) defines self-awareness as the ability to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts (p. 2).
Self-Management	CASEL (2020) defines self-management as the ability "to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations" (p. 2).
Responsible Decision-Making	CASEL (2020) defines responsible decision-making as the ability "to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations" (p. 2).

The Role of Literature in Promoting SEL

The Importance of SEL in Education

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is one of the crucial aspects of the whole child learning process. However, it receives little or no attention in schools because the emphasis is on grades and the overall academic situation. The core of the "whole child" method is SEL, such that students are able to recognize and control their feelings, become empathetic and care about those in need, build relationships, make sound judgments, and solve difficult situations (Devaney et al., 2005).

How Literature Supports SEL Competencies

The five core competencies of social and emotional learning (SEL) outlined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2019) can all be meaningfully supported through the integration of high-quality children's literature. Extensive research has demonstrated that fostering these competencies leads to a range of positive student outcomes, including improved academic achievement, stronger interpersonal skills, enhanced school climate, and

reduced emotional stress (CASEL, 2019; Devaney et al., 2005). Greenberg (2023) reinforces these findings by highlighting SEL's long-term impact on student success, while Ursache et al. (2020) link early emotional understanding with later academic performance, especially in under-resourced communities. Furthermore, classroom-based SEL initiatives have been shown to strengthen students' empathy, behavior, and overall emotional literacy (Kaur & Sharma, 2022). Collectively, these findings support the role of literature as a powerful tool for promoting SEL in developmentally appropriate and impactful ways.

Literature as a Classroom SEL Tool. One effective way to incorporate social-emotional learning in the classroom is through the use of children's literature. Children's books can become great resources for educators because they can be both enjoyable to read and very useful in teaching, reviewing, or reinforcing SEL themes. In addition, the length of many children's books allows educators the opportunity to read multiple texts or reread previous texts without requiring a large time commitment.

Instructional Strategies for SEL Through Literature. High-quality children's books can serve as valuable tools to model, reinforce, and review SEL components within a literacy curriculum. When thoughtfully selected, these texts provide opportunities for students to engage with SEL themes through relatable characters and meaningful narratives. Educators can enhance this experience through instructional strategies such as interactive read-alouds and repeated readings, which not only support oral language development and reading fluency but also foster social-emotional growth (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). Research by Gunn et al. (2022) further suggests that engaging with multicultural picturebooks that emphasize SEL can increase student motivation and improve literacy outcomes. These approaches help students internalize SEL concepts while simultaneously developing essential literacy skills, making children's literature a powerful dual-purpose tool in early education.

Extending SEL Themes Beyond Early Grades. The use of picturebooks to teach SEL is not limited to elementary-aged students. "Middle school students need consistent opportunities to learn about, practice, and discuss social emotional skills. These skills aid students in their behavioral and academic growth" (Short, 2022, para. 1). Most picturebooks can be read quicker than a novel as they are shorter in length, which allows the educator additional time to concentrate on the literary elements or the SEL components. Through the imaginative process that reading involves, children have the opportunity to do what they often cannot do in real life, become thoroughly involved in the inner lives of others, better understand them, and eventually become more aware of themselves (Shechtman, 2008). "The more competent children are in their SEL skills, the more successful they will be in school and in life" (Ludwig, 2012, para. 4).

SEL Themes Reflected in Children's Literature

The importance of social-emotional learning in early childhood has led to a growing interest in understanding how these themes are being reflected in the books and stories that young children encounter. Several studies have examined how social-emotional skills and competencies are portrayed in children's literature, highlighting how stories and characters support, or at times overlook, these critical developmental areas (Campagnaro & Ferrari, 2024; Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Health et al., 2017; Morton & Akram, 2022) Through their plots, conflicts, and character

arcs, these books help shape how young readers understand emotions, relationships, and their own social environments.

In the educational world, social and emotional learning (SEL) has reached high importance, showing persistent growth. Numerous studies have linked the development of SEL competencies to improvements in children's well-being, academic performance, and long-term success (Devaney et al., 2005; Greenberg, 2023; Jones & Doolittle, 2017; Ursache et al., 2020). By integrating relevant themes and characters that model important SEL topics, children's literature sources, such as picturebooks, have the potential to serve as a valuable tool for the development of the "whole child."

Key Findings from SEL Literature Research. One area of research has focused on evaluating the extent to which children's literature features the themes associated with the concepts of emotional management, empathy, and positive social connections. The studies of many children's books pointed out that many books present the same fundamental skills related to the SEL process, such as emotional management, role-switching, and social relationship navigation (Devaney et al., 2005; Mondi et al., 2021; Mondi & Reynolds, 2020; Ursache et al., 2020).

High-quality children's literature offers educators a practical means of integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) into literacy instruction, particularly through intentional strategies such as read-alouds and repeated readings. These practices not only reinforce key SEL competencies by allowing students to engage with characters' emotions and decisions but also promote oral language development and literacy growth (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Gonsalves et al., 2018). Read-alouds have been shown to increase student motivation and foster meaningful conversations about emotional experiences, especially when supported by engaging and inclusive texts (Gunn et al., 2022). Moreover, repeated exposure to SEL-themed literature enhances vocabulary acquisition and comprehension skills, while follow-up discussions and reflection activities deepen both reading and writing outcomes through dialogic engagement (Deliman et al., 2024; Gonsalves et al., 2018). Together, these strategies demonstrate the reciprocal benefits of using high-quality literature to support both literacy development and social-emotional growth in early childhood settings.

Connecting SEL with the Science of Reading

The quality of children's books has long been a topic of debate, with many factors contributing to the overall excellence of these crucial educational and entertainment resources. One of the main factors of children's books that is gaining attention is the role of the science of reading; this element has produced great strides in the comprehension of the cognitive processes involved in learning to read over the years.

Cognitive and Linguistic Foundations in Literature. The field of research in the science of reading revealed that different linguistic and cognitive factors are necessary in the process of reading, such as phonological awareness, orthographic knowledge, vocabulary, and comprehension. The basic components of reading ability are currently the main focus of the kids' books' making and checking processes, as the authors, illustrators, and publishers are demonstrating a trend to create materials that readers can fully enjoy and that will drive their literacy growth.

Story Structure and Comprehension Strategy Use. Good readers can use their knowledge of story elements (text features) to combine and activate additional comprehension strategies, to ask and answer questions, monitor story comprehension, predict and preview, connect to world knowledge, construct mental images, and summarize or retell (Honig et al., 2018). Recognizing the story structure is a prerequisite to effective strategy use; therefore, having story elements and plots organized in a predictable format promotes reading comprehension.

Selecting High-Quality Books for SEL Instruction

As educators strive to nurture the essential SEL competencies, the selection of high-quality children's books that integrate SEL principles has become a crucial consideration. It is just as important for educators to have a clear purpose for selecting a book to read to the students. A book could be selected to support an academic standard or skill, aligned to a thematic unit, used to motivate students to read similar texts, or support soft skills, including SEL (Weih, 2015).

Criteria for Evaluating SEL Books. When evaluating the quality of SEL children's books, several key factors should be considered. *Everyday Speech for Educators* (2024) identified five key criteria for educators to consider when selecting SEL books, which are explained in Table 2.

Table 2: Five Key Criteria Considerations When Selecting SEL Books

Criteria	Explanation
Age-appropriate content	The books should be developmentally appropriate, with language, themes, and content that align with the cognitive, emotional, and social abilities of the target age group. The students' reading abilities, emotional maturity, and complexity of the text should be suitable. The book should address the content that is especially suitable for the targeted child group. In addition, educators should check that the manner, topics, and concepts are clear so that children can grasp the meaning.
Relevance to students' experiences and challenges	Utilizing books that address similar topics or challenges that are relevant to the students will help them make a connection to the text. Additionally, the message is conveyed in a positive manner and supports emotional development.
Engaging and interactive elements	Books that are engaging with images or include interactive elements like questions, activities, or reflections may motivate students to engage with the text. The artwork within the book should fit the written text well and provide proper ideas and emotions respectively. The story should be child-friendly and have a thoughtful plot structure.
Diversity and inclusivity representation	Books should present characters and storylines that resonate with the diverse experiences and identities of the children. Representation and inclusivity are paramount in ensuring that all children can see themselves reflected in the narratives and characters. Characters should be well-realized and exhibit character growth as the story progresses.
Alignment with SEL competencies and goals	Books should effectively model and reinforce SEL competencies and goals that an educator wants to address in their classroom, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The narratives and illustrations should provide opportunities for children to engage with and internalize these crucial skills.

Katie Cunningham (2016) included additional key elements (Table 3) to consider when deciding whether a book is a new must-have for classroom bookshelves.

Table 3: Additional Key Elements for Consideration When Selecting SEL Books

Criteria	Prompt/Explanation
Text Selection to Engage Literacy Learners	Will the book engage multiple learners?
Curriculum Connections	Are there direct connections to the curricular contexts or skills?
Authentic Representation	There should be authentic representation regarding diverse populations and perspectives, as well as issues of diversity relating to gender, socioeconomic class, religion, etc.
The Value of Social-Emotional Connections	The values of the social-emotional connection should strengthen a reader's capacity to empathize or understand what others are thinking and feeling.

Educators should "select books that include characters from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds authored and illustrated by culturally and linguistically diverse authors" (Cunningham, 2016, para. 3) to support children's sense of belonging or connectedness at school.

In addition, the varied types of texts should each have individual elements that are considered. Narrative books should have a clear setting, problem or conflict, plot or events within the story, and characters (Weih, 2015). Informational books should include a background perspective highlighting the importance of the topic, creatively encourage students to want to read the text, include high quality graphics, demonstrate a logical and clear organization, and include a print size or style that serves a purpose, such as headings, explanations, and captions (Weih, 2015).

The National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness (2011) includes four criteria to review when evaluating culturally and socially diverse children's books. First, the educator should consider the context for the text, including the author's background, copyright date, and content. If the content is outdated or inaccurate, this text should not be utilized. Secondly, the educator should take the time to examine the illustrations to ensure there is diversity with characters and that those illustrations are accurately illustrated and match the story. Thirdly, the educator should analyze the message to ensure there is a clear, positive self-image from diverse backgrounds while also ensuring that the message promotes respect for all characters and cultures within the book. Finally, the educator should review the words used in the text to ensure dialects are used appropriately and respectfully, and the text is free of problematic words or offensive terms.

The Multifaceted Impact of SEL Literature

The evaluation of children's books is a process that is made up of many parts. Some of the aspects to be addressed include the representation of a large group of different perspectives, the depth of the materials, the connectedness to the curriculum, and the promotion of the social and emotional learning themes.

The Educator's Role in Delivering SEL Content. The relationship between social and emotional learning (SEL) and children's literature is a complex one that involves various factors,

such as the quality of the content, the effectiveness of the themes, and the impact on the readers. In addition, if the children's literature is presented in a read-aloud format by an educator, consideration must also be given to the effectiveness of the lesson and the ability of the educator to deliver engaging reading with excellent fluency and prosody factors.

Long-Term Benefits of SEL Literature Integration. Researchers have consistently found that the development of social-emotional skills, such as emotion recognition, empathy, and responsible decision-making, can significantly affect a child's academic performance, motivation, and overall well-being (Devaney et al., 2005; Greenberg, 2023; Matsumura et al., 2008; Ursache et al., 2020). Moreover, research has revealed that these programs also increase academic performance, in that they equip children with the essential skills of school and daily life success (Devaney et al., 2005; Greenberg, 2023).

The Power of High-Quality Literature in SEL Instruction. An important factor that can support the success of social emotional learning in schools is the novelty and the quality of children's literature that is utilized for teaching SEL themes. High-quality children's books that authentically and thoughtfully address topics related to SEL themes can serve as powerful resources for educators to engage students and support essential life skills. Studies show that when social-emotional learning is strategically integrated into well-crafted children's narratives, it can increase the overall effect and retention of these life skills (Greenberg, 2023). In addition, research has shown that a sense of school community and positive social interactions in the classroom are associated with higher levels of reading comprehension and motivation, particularly among disadvantaged students (Matsumura et al., 2008).

Applying SEL Concepts Through Literature. Utilizing high-quality children's literature to teach, review, or reinforce SEL themes can provide engaging and relatable contexts for children to explore and practice these essential skills (Devaney et al., 2005; Matsumura et al., 2008; Greenberg, 2023; Ursache et al., 2020). An important aspect of this relationship is the ability of quality children's literature to capture the emotional experiences and social dynamics of the characters. Thus, they can help children gain a deeper insight into their emotions (Matsumura et al., 2008). Integration of SEL themes into high-quality children's literature, such as picturebooks, can serve not only as powerful tools for the development of students and enhancement of academic excellence, but also help them prepare to confront future hurdles. Thus, books that feature characters and stories that resonate with learners can be used as platforms through which students can apply their learning in real settings. High-quality children's literature can develop the "whole child" and provide students with the necessary skills and dispositions to follow challenges that may unfold around them (Greenberg, 2023).

Ultimately, the research suggests that the strategic integration of high-quality children's literature with SEL themes can serve as a powerful way to support the development of young learners. By providing children with opportunities to engage with stories that resonate with their lived experiences and foster the development of essential life skills, educators can help set them up for long-term success in school and beyond. Therefore, it is essential for educators to prioritize the selection of children's books that not only engage and captivate young readers but also foster the development of essential social-emotional and holistic competencies (Greenberg, 2023; Kaur & Sharma, 2022). When intentionally selected and thoughtfully discussed, these texts can become

catalysts for meaningful dialogue, empathy-building, and real-world application of SEL principles in the classroom and beyond.

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine the quality and effectiveness of social-emotional learning (SEL) content in children's literature to answer the following research questions: (1) Which SEL themes appear most frequently in children's books based on rubric scores? (2) How do rubric ratings of literary and artistic qualities correlate with the effectiveness of SEL content in children's books? It is important to emphasize that frequency of SEL themes and the effectiveness of their presentation are treated as distinct constructs in this study. While frequency offers insight into representation patterns, effectiveness is evaluated independently using a rubric designed to assess literary and artistic quality in conveying SEL principles. The primary method involves the use of a validated rubric to assess the integration and quality of SEL themes within selected books. The rubric generates numerical data based on specific criteria, which are systematically evaluated by literacy experts. This approach allows for objective measurement of how effectively SEL themes are embedded within the narrative and artistic elements of the books.

Data Collection Criteria

Children's books were selected based on their explicit or implicit inclusion of SEL themes. The selection process aimed to ensure a diverse representation of SEL competencies, following the framework established by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). These competencies include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Book Selection Criteria

To develop a purposeful sample of children's literature focused on social-emotional learning (SEL), a multi-step selection process was used to ensure alignment with the study's goals. The initial pool of texts was generated from three primary sources: (1) curated library collections, (2) keyword searches on online bookstores, and (3) professional recommendations from educators, librarians, and SEL experts.

Curated library collections were identified by reviewing SEL booklists published by public libraries, school systems, and national literacy and education organizations (e.g., CASEL, Scholastic, American Library Association). These lists focused specifically on early childhood and elementary-aged readers and included texts known to support SEL development. Titles from these lists were compiled into the initial dataset.

To broaden the sample, additional books were located using keyword searches on Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Search terms included combinations of "social-emotional learning," "children's books," and the CASEL core competencies (e.g., "empathy," "self-regulation," "responsible decision-making"). Only books explicitly marketed or categorized under SEL-related themes were included.

The resulting pool of over 100 titles was then reviewed by a panel of researchers, education faculty, and a school librarian, each with expertise in children's literature and/or SEL. Titles were evaluated for developmental appropriateness, alignment with CASEL competencies, narrative clarity, and overall educational value. A total of 40 books were selected for the final sample based

on their demonstrated relevance to SEL themes and suitability for readers in early childhood through upper elementary grades.

Although the initial pool included a range of text types, only narrative children's books—such as picturebooks, illustrated storybooks, and SEL-themed fiction—were selected for inclusion in the final sample. Informational texts, workbooks, and nonfiction resources that lacked a narrative structure (e.g., plot, characters, or dialogue) were excluded from analysis. This decision ensured alignment with the design of the evaluation rubric, which was developed specifically to assess narrative elements such as character development and story-based SEL theme integration. As such, all books evaluated in the study were consistent in genre and structure, reducing the risk of skewed results due to mismatched text types. This list can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection Methods

Each book was evaluated by at least two independent reviewers using the validated rubric. This full rubric can be found in Appendix B. The reviewers included faculty members with expertise in SEL and children's literature and undergraduate education students trained in the use of the rubric. To ensure consistency, researchers conducted a two-hour training session for the student reviewers, which included an overview of SEL themes, rubric criteria, and guided practice using sample texts. The rubric assessed multiple dimensions of the books, including SEL theme integration, character development, narrative structure, artistic quality, cultural relevance, and overall impact on SEL learning. In addition to these scored dimensions, reviewers also identified which of CASEL's five core SEL competencies—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making—were present in each book. This identification was done using a checklist format on the rubric, and reviewers could select multiple competencies as applicable. Presence was determined based on observable elements in the narrative or illustrations (e.g., characters displaying empathy, resolving conflict, or managing emotions). These identifications informed the analysis of the frequency of SEL competencies across the dataset but were treated separately from overall effectiveness ratings.

The rubric used in this study was developed based on existing literature and best practices for evaluating children's books in the context of SEL. It includes categories that reflect core features of effective SEL instruction and messaging, such as theme integration, character development, emotional resonance, and cultural authenticity. These indicators align with CASEL's framework and related SEL research (CASEL, 2020; Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Greenberg, 2023), making the rubric a valid tool for approximating the quality and potential impact of SEL content on young readers. While the rubric does not measure outcomes such as behavioral change, it serves as a proxy for how well books are likely to model or reinforce SEL principles in developmentally appropriate ways.

Data Analysis

The rubric provided a standardized framework for assessing the SEL content and overall quality of each book. Quantitative data from the rubric scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and evaluate the overall quality of the books. These descriptive statistics directly addressed the first research question by highlighting the most commonly presented SEL themes.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted using the ordinary least squares (OLS) method to explore the incremental impact of different predictor sets (e.g., literary vs. artistic qualities) on SEL outcomes. Nine rubric criteria served as predictors: SEL theme integration, character development, plot and narrative structure, artistic quality (illustrations), language and

style, engagement and appeal, authenticity and cultural sensitivity, cover and text design, and grammar and spelling. This hierarchical approach allowed examination of how adding predictor sets influenced the overall model. Additionally, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed to identify the most influential predictors of overall SEL impact based on statistical criteria.

A Pearson correlation analysis was also conducted to assess the strength and direction of linear relationships between individual rubric categories and overall SEL effectiveness. The correlation matrix provided a comprehensive view of the interrelationships between literary, artistic, and SEL effectiveness scores. Together, these regression and correlation analyses offered detailed insights into how literary and artistic qualities influence SEL outcomes, addressing the second research question.

Reliability and Validity

To enhance validity, the rubric was reviewed by three content experts with backgrounds in SEL, literacy education, and children's literature. Their feedback guided revisions to clarify rubric categories, refine language, and ensure alignment with developmentally appropriate SEL competencies. This expert review process provided face and content validity for the rubric, consistent with qualitative validation approaches in educational research (Brookhart, 2013). The rubric was designed to evaluate narrative children's books for SEL theme integration, character development, narrative structure, artistic quality, cultural relevance, and overall SEL impact.

A two-hour training session was conducted with undergraduate student reviewers prior to data collection. During this session, researchers introduced the CASEL framework, discussed the purpose and scoring of each rubric category, and engaged participants in collaborative scoring exercises using sample texts. This calibration helped establish consistency in scoring practices and minimized interpretive discrepancies. In addition to the initial training, reviewers also had access to a rubric guide with definitions and sample annotations to support consistent interpretation of scoring criteria.

Each book was independently evaluated by at least two reviewers. The review team consisted of four total evaluators: two faculty members with expertise in SEL and children's literature, and two trained undergraduate education students. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa and yielded a score of 0.74, indicating substantial agreement among reviewers (Landis & Koch, 1977). These reliability results support the consistency and trustworthiness of the scoring process.

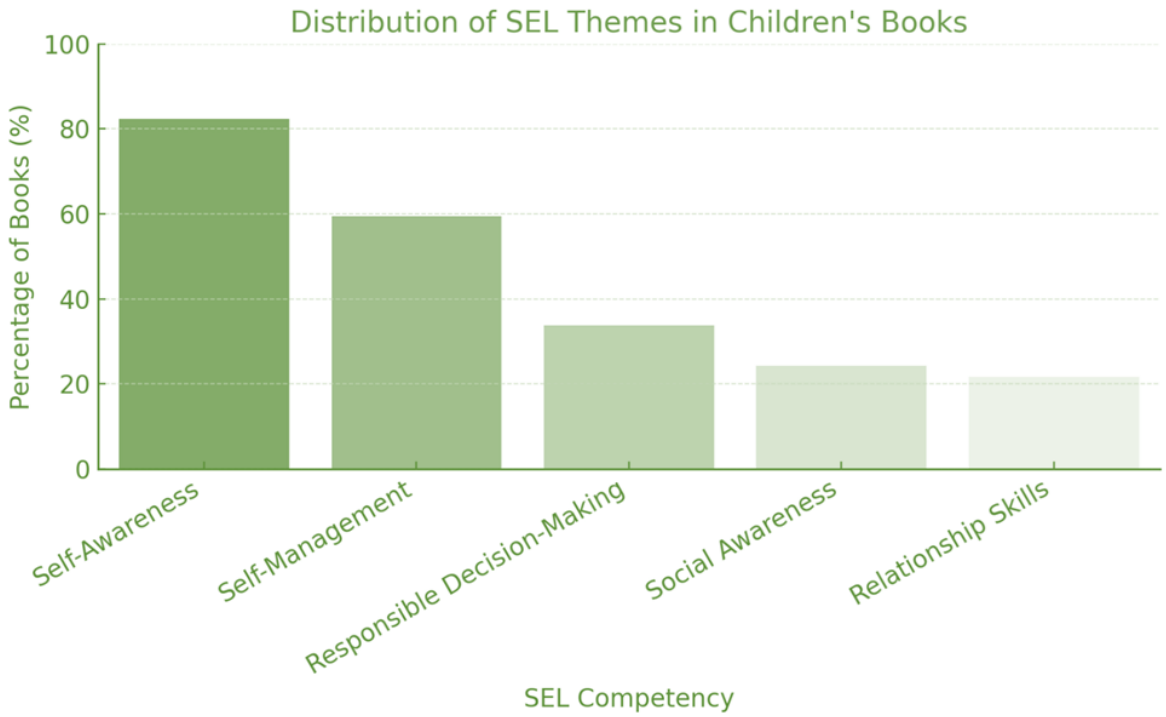
Results

This study examined the prevalence of social-emotional learning (SEL) themes in children's literature and analyzed the impact of literary and artistic qualities on overall SEL outcomes. To ensure consistency in evaluations, inter-rater reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa. The analysis produced a Kappa value of 0.74, indicating a substantial level of agreement between evaluators. This result reflects strong consistency across all paired evaluations, supporting the reliability of the coding process.

Descriptive statistics provided insights into the distribution of SEL themes within the children's books analyzed. Among the five core SEL competencies, self-awareness was the most frequently represented theme, appearing in 82.4% of the books. This was followed by self-management (59.5%), responsible decision-making (33.8%), social awareness (24.3%), and relationship skills (21.6%). Additionally, the analysis of SEL theme integration scores indicated

that 48.6% of the books received an "Excellent" rating, while 26.7% were rated as "Good," meaning that over 75% of the books demonstrated strong SEL representation. These descriptive findings highlight the prevalence of key SEL themes in children's literature and the overall quality of their integration.

Figure 1: Distribution of SEL Themes in Children's Books



To further explore the relationship between literary and artistic qualities and overall SEL outcomes, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis using the ordinary least squares (OLS) method was conducted. The regression model was statistically significant ($F(9, 64) = 9.780$, $p < .001$), with an R-squared value of 0.579, indicating that the model explained 57.9% of the variance in overall SEL outcomes. The hierarchical approach identified SEL theme integration ($\beta = 0.292$, $p = 0.032$) as a significant predictor of SEL outcomes, underscoring the critical role of how well SEL themes are embedded in children's literature.

Table 4: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Overall SEL Outcomes

Predictor	*B*	*SE B*	*β*	*t*	*p*
SEL Theme Integration	0.292	0.131	0.292	2.23	.032
Engagement and Appeal	0.265	0.115	0.278	2.30	.026
Plot and Narrative	0.189	0.102	0.215	1.85	.069

Model Summary: $R^2 = .579$, $F(9, 64) = 9.780$, $p < .001$

Note. This table displays the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis.

A stepwise multiple regression analysis provided further clarity regarding the relative importance of predictors. This analysis confirmed that SEL theme integration was the strongest predictor of overall SEL outcomes. Additionally, engagement/appeal and plot/narrative structure emerged as secondary contributors, further emphasizing the importance of literary elements in promoting SEL competencies.

Table 5: Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Overall SEL Outcomes

Step	Predictor	*B*	*EB*	*β*	*t*	*p*
1	**SEL Theme Integration**	0.295	0.125	0.312	2.36	.021
2	**Engagement and Appeal**	0.267	0.118	0.281	2.26	.027
3	**Plot and Narrative**	0.193	0.104	0.219	1.87	.065
	Model Summary: R^2 = .564, p < .001					

Note. This table displays the results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis.

The findings from the Pearson correlation analysis aligned with the regression results, demonstrating significant positive relationships between overall SEL outcomes and key predictors. Specifically, strong correlations were observed with SEL theme integration (r = 0.674), engagement and appeal (r = 0.748), and plot and narrative structure (r = 0.601). These correlations reinforce the importance of both content quality and narrative structure in influencing SEL outcomes.

Table 6: Pearson Correlations Between Predictors and Overall SEL Outcomes

Variable	SEL Integration	Engagement	Plot & Narrative
Overall SEL Outcomes	.674**	.748**	.601**

Note: $^{**}p$ < .01 for all correlations.

In summary, the results of this study consistently highlight SEL theme integration as the most significant predictor of overall SEL outcomes, with engagement, appeal, and plot and narrative structure serving as important supporting factors. The alignment between the descriptive statistics, hierarchical regression, stepwise regression, and correlation analyses provides a comprehensive understanding of how literary and artistic elements contribute to the effectiveness of children's literature in fostering SEL competencies.

Discussion

Overview of SEL Representation in Children's Literature

The findings of this study underscore the crucial role that social-emotional learning (SEL) content plays in children's literature. The analysis revealed that self-awareness was the most frequently represented SEL theme, followed by self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills. This distribution suggests that while there is broad

representation of the core SEL competencies, some areas, such as social awareness and relationship skills, are less prevalent. The prominence of self-awareness and self-management may reflect the tendency of children's literature to focus on individual emotional growth and regulation, which are foundational for personal development.

Quality and Consistency of SEL Integration. Furthermore, the strong SEL theme integration across most of the books, with over 75% receiving "Excellent" or "Good" ratings, suggests that a significant number of books integrate SEL themes effectively. This indicates a growing recognition among authors, publishers, and educators regarding the importance of embedding SEL principles within stories for children. Given the consistent and substantial agreement among evaluators (as reflected in the Cohen's Kappa value of 0.74), we can confidently conclude that the quality of SEL content is not only widely present but also well-implemented across the sample. This alignment of content quality with the SEL themes also suggests that children's literature serves as a powerful tool for promoting SEL competencies when these themes are seamlessly integrated into narratives and characters.

Implications for Narrative Integration of SEL

The results from this study suggest several important implications for the promotion of SEL through children's literature. First, the significant role of SEL theme integration in predicting overall SEL outcomes ($\beta = 0.292$, $p = 0.032$) underscores the importance of how well SEL concepts are embedded within the narrative. Stories that incorporate SEL themes in a meaningful and authentic way are more likely to foster SEL competencies in young readers. Therefore, educators, authors, and publishers should prioritize the seamless inclusion of SEL themes into the fabric of the narrative, ensuring that these themes are not superficial or didactic but integrated into the plot, character development, and conflict resolution.

Aesthetic Qualities and SEL Impact. The finding that engagement and appeal, along with plot and narrative structure, also contribute to SEL outcomes highlights the role of artistic qualities in enhancing the effectiveness of SEL content. Books that engage readers through compelling plots and relatable characters are more likely to stimulate emotional and social learning. For instance, a well-crafted narrative can create opportunities for young readers to relate to the characters' emotions and experiences, fostering empathy and emotional regulation. These elements support the idea that the aesthetic quality of children's literature is as important as the SEL content itself in promoting social-emotional development.

Storytelling Engagement and SEL Outcomes. The correlation analyses reinforce the value of both content and narrative structure. With significant positive relationships between overall SEL outcomes and both SEL theme integration ($r = 0.674$) and engagement and appeal ($r = 0.748$), the findings indicate that the effectiveness of children's literature in promoting SEL is not solely dependent on the presence of SEL content but also on the quality of the storytelling and emotional engagement it fosters. This suggests that books that capture the reader's attention and resonate emotionally are more likely to result in positive SEL outcomes.

Limitations

While the study provides valuable insights into the prevalence and integration of SEL themes in children's literature, it is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in the methodology

employed. Although the study used rigorous inter-rater reliability measures, the evaluation of SEL content and literary qualities is still subjective to some extent. Evaluators may have different interpretations of the elements that constitute effective SEL integration or may prioritize certain themes over others, leading to variability in the assessments. Furthermore, the coding process is reliable; however, it still relies on the evaluators' judgment in identifying and categorizing SEL themes, which may be influenced by their personal experiences, biases, or theoretical orientations. While the findings are robust, these constraints could reflect a particular interpretative lens and may not fully capture the nuances of all children's literature or the diversity of approaches to SEL integration.

Additionally, the focus on literary and artistic qualities as predictors of SEL outcomes may have overlooked other potential factors influencing SEL development, such as the socioeconomic context of readers or the manner in which books are used in educational settings. The methodology's reliance on specific evaluative criteria may not account for the broad range of contexts in which children's literature is encountered, such as family reading versus classroom discussions, which could affect the way SEL themes are perceived and internalized.

Sample size and potential biases in the selection of books is another limitation to this study. While the analysis covered a significant number of children's books, the sample may not be fully representative of all available literature. The selection criteria for the books analyzed may have inadvertently excluded certain genres, publishers, or authors that present different approaches to SEL. For example, the study may have overrepresented books from popular publishers or those that are already well-established in educational settings, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives on SEL.

Lastly, the book selection process could have introduced bias by favoring books that explicitly address SEL themes, while those that subtly incorporate SEL concepts or offer more complex, nuanced portrayals of social-emotional development may have been underrepresented. The reliance on a set of pre-selected texts may have also resulted in an overrepresentation of books that align with certain pedagogical frameworks or theoretical perspectives on SEL, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings to a wider range of children's literature.

Recommendations

Authors, Educators, and Publishers

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for authors, educators, and publishers seeking to create or select effective SEL-focused children's books. First, it is crucial to integrate SEL themes seamlessly into the narrative. As highlighted by the study, the most significant predictor of positive SEL outcomes was the integration of SEL themes. Authors and publishers should aim to embed these themes naturally within the storyline, ensuring that they emerge organically from the characters' experiences, plot developments, and resolutions. SEL concepts should not feel forced but rather reflect the real-life challenges and growth children may encounter. Additionally, fostering emotional engagement and appeal is essential. The findings suggest that books that engage readers emotionally may enhance the impact of SEL themes by fostering deeper personal connection and reflection. Authors should create compelling, relatable characters and plots that resonate with children's lived experiences. The emotional depth and vibrant illustrations of these stories can help capture the attention of young readers, thus enhancing their connection to the SEL themes presented.

Furthermore, a balance between narrative structure and SEL themes is important. The study identified the plot and narrative structure as important contributors to SEL outcomes, suggesting

that well-paced narratives with strong character development and conflict resolution are key. Authors should construct stories that not only teach SEL principles but also offer clear, engaging plots. Publishers should focus on selecting stories that balance artistic and educational elements, providing an enriching experience for young readers. Another recommendation is to provide diverse SEL representation in children's literature. While themes such as self-awareness and self-management were prominently represented, other competencies, like social awareness and relationship skills, were less frequent. To ensure comprehensive SEL development, authors and publishers should include a broad range of SEL themes in their books, promoting a more holistic emotional and social growth for children. Lastly, educators should be provided with resources that highlight SEL themes in children's literature. These resources could include discussion prompts, activities, and reflection exercises designed to enhance the SEL potential of books. Educators should also be encouraged to use these books in ways that foster active engagement, such as group discussions or role-playing, to deepen students' understanding of the SEL themes explored.

Future Research

Several areas warrant further exploration to expand our understanding of how children's literature supports SEL. One important area for future study is conducting longitudinal research to examine the long-term effects of reading SEL-focused books on children's emotional and social development. This would provide deeper insights into how repeated exposure to SEL themes influences children's behavior and emotional regulation over time. Additionally, future studies could explore how SEL is represented in literature across diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds. Understanding how SEL themes resonate with children from various demographics will ensure that literature reflects the needs and experiences of a broader range of readers. Another direction for future research is to conduct comparative studies of different literary genres, such as fantasy, historical fiction, and realistic fiction, to determine how each genre incorporates and promotes SEL themes. This would offer insight into whether certain genres are more effective in fostering social-emotional learning than others. Moreover, since illustrations play a vital role in children's literature, future research could investigate how visual elements, such as artwork and design, contribute to SEL outcomes and emotional engagement. This would offer a more holistic understanding of how both literary and artistic qualities together can support children's social-emotional growth. Lastly, research could explore how teachers and parents perceive and implement SEL-focused books in their classrooms and homes. Understanding how adults facilitate the discussion of SEL themes would offer valuable insights into how these resources can be used most effectively in educational settings.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the prevalence of social-emotional learning (SEL) themes in children's literature and highlights the importance of both literary content and artistic qualities in fostering SEL outcomes. The analysis revealed that self-awareness was the most frequently represented SEL theme, followed by self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills. Over 75% of the books analyzed demonstrated strong integration of SEL themes, suggesting a widespread recognition of the importance of these competencies in children's literature. Moreover, the study found that SEL theme integration was the most significant predictor of overall SEL outcomes, with engagement and appeal, as well as plot and narrative structure, also contributing to positive SEL results. These findings underscore

the critical role of the content of children's literature and the way the story is conveyed through compelling narratives and engaging artistic elements.

The importance of SEL in children's literature cannot be overstated. SEL competencies are essential for children's emotional and social development, helping them navigate complex interpersonal relationships, regulate their emotions, and make responsible decisions. Children's literature offers a unique and accessible platform for introducing these concepts in an engaging and relatable way. By integrating SEL themes into stories, authors can help children understand and practice these skills in a context they can connect with, thereby fostering a positive impact on their overall development.

These findings build on earlier research suggesting that narrative quality and reader engagement play a vital role in SEL learning through literature. For example, Doyle and Bramwell (2006) highlighted how dialogic reading of emotionally rich texts supports emergent SEL skills, while Gunn et al. (2022) demonstrated that multicultural picturebooks can promote both motivation and empathy. Similarly, Ludwig (2012) and Deliman et al. (2024) emphasized that high-quality stories with well-developed characters offer opportunities for emotional connection and social-emotional reflection. This study extends their work by offering quantitative support for the value of narrative structure, engagement, and theme integration in shaping SEL impact.

The potential impact of SEL-themed books on children's emotional and social development is profound. Books that effectively integrate SEL themes can provide children with valuable tools for emotional regulation, empathy, and relationship-building, laying the foundation for healthier social interactions and personal growth. As this study demonstrates, when SEL is embedded seamlessly within a narrative, accompanied by engaging plots and relatable characters, it can enhance children's ability to understand and manage their emotions and behaviors. The study emphasizes that well-crafted children's books with strong SEL content and artistic qualities can serve as a powerful tool for educators, parents, and children alike in promoting social-emotional learning and contributing to the development of emotionally intelligent and socially responsible individuals.

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Appendix A: Children's Book Used in this Research

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Whelan, S. M. (2017). *Don't think about purple elephants*. EK Books.

Winner, M. G., & Murphy, L. K. (2016). *Social thinking and me*. Social Thinking Publishing.

Appendix B: Children's Book Evaluation Rubric for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Integration

Criteria	*Excellent (4)*	*Good (3)*	*Fair (2)*	*Poor (1)*
SEL Theme Integration	SEL themes are seamlessly woven into the narrative and central to the story, deeply resonating with the target age group.	SEL themes are well-integrated and clearly present, though not always central. Accessible to the target age group.	SEL themes are present but may feel forced or secondary. May lack clarity or development for the target age group.	SEL themes are poorly integrated, barely present, and unclear or inappropriate for the target age group.
Character Development	Characters are well-developed, relatable, and demonstrate emotional and social growth aligned with SEL themes.	Characters show development and model SEL themes, though growth may not be fully explored.	Characters exhibit limited development with inconsistent SEL modeling.	Characters are flat or stereotypical, lacking SEL-based growth.
Plot and Narrative Structure	All plot elements (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution) are well-crafted, creating a coherent narrative that naturally integrates SEL themes.	Plot is well-structured, with most elements supporting SEL, though some aspects may lack full integration.	Plot structure is basic and may lack coherence or depth, with SEL elements explored inconsistently.	Plot lacks structure or coherence, not supporting SEL themes effectively.
Authenticity and Cultural Sensitivity	Portrayal of cultures and lifestyles is accurate, respectful, and avoids stereotypes, enhancing SEL content.	Cultural representation is generally respectful and avoids major inaccuracies, though depth may be limited.	Limited diversity present, with potential oversimplification or minor inaccuracies in representation.	Depictions are stereotypical, inaccurate, or disrespectful, failing to support inclusive SEL themes.
Cover and Text Design	Cover is engaging and relevant, with clear, legible text that supports the story and SEL themes without distraction.	Cover and text design are generally effective and engaging, with minor limitations in clarity or relevance.	Cover or text design may lack appeal or clarity, impacting reader engagement.	Cover or text design is ineffective, lacking relevance and legibility, distracting from the narrative.
Grammar and Spelling	Text is free from grammar or spelling errors, enhancing readability and professional quality.	Minor grammar or spelling errors present, but do not significantly affect readability.	Several grammar or spelling errors disrupt flow, affecting readability.	Frequent grammar and spelling errors interfere with comprehension.
Artistic Quality (Illustrations)	Illustrations are high-quality, visually appealing, and enhance SEL themes by effectively conveying emotions and social situations.	Illustrations support SEL themes and are visually appealing, though not always enhancing the narrative.	Illustrations are adequate but lack depth in conveying emotions or SEL themes.	Illustrations are poor quality, detract from SEL themes, and fail to convey relevant emotions.
Language and Style	Language is engaging, age-appropriate, and enhances SEL theme	Language is generally appropriate and engaging, though some areas may lack depth.	Language may be occasionally inappropriate or inconsistent,	Language is inappropriate, disengaging, or confusing, with an inconsistent style that

	comprehension, with a consistent style.		detracting from the story's message.	detracts from the narrative.
Engagement and Appeal	Book is highly engaging, capturing attention and fostering a deep connection to SEL themes.	Book is engaging and generally appealing to the target audience, with a solid connection to SEL themes.	Engagement is limited, with weaker connections to SEL themes.	Book is unengaging, failing to capture interest or foster SEL connections.
Overall Impact on SEL Learning	Book strongly promotes SEL, encouraging reflection and application of SEL concepts.	Book positively promotes SEL, with some encouragement for reflection.	Limited SEL impact, with minimal encouragement for reflection or application.	Little to no SEL impact, failing to promote reflection or learning.

Scoring Guide (total points)

(36–40) Exceptional SEL content and quality, highly effective for SEL promotion

(28–35) Good SEL content, effective, but with areas for improvement

(18–27) Fair SEL content, requiring significant improvements to promote SEL effectively

(10–17) Poor SEL content, not suitable for SEL promotion

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Research Article

Teachers as Readers: Examining the Personal Reading Lives of English Educators

Matthew J. Sroka
Mercer University, Macon, GA

ABSTRACT

This study explores the personal reading lives of four English teachers, providing insight into how teachers engage with texts both inside and outside of the classroom. Using participant-generated artifacts, reading journals, teaching artifacts, interviews, group meetings, and virtual discussion boards, the study uncovers the diverse reading habits, practices, and motivations of these English teachers. Findings reveal that teachers' reading choices are influenced by personal experiences, professional demands, and continually evolve over time. The study suggests that when teachers reflect on their reading histories and experiences, they gain deeper insight into how they view their students as readers, helping them foster meaningful student engagement with books and potentially inspiring more authentic and positive classroom reading experiences.

KEYWORDS

reading; reading motivation; teachers as readers; English language arts; adolescent literacy

Several years ago, a fellow English teacher poked his head in my classroom and said, "Hey, I saw you're interested in reading Murakami." I nodded, realizing he must have noticed the recent additions to my "want to read" list on Goodreads. When I asked if he had read any of Murakami's work, our conversation unfolded into a lively 15-minute discussion about Murakami's distinctive style and our experiences reading Japanese literature. By the time he walked away, I felt intellectually energized, eager to read the latest Murakami novel, and already looking forward to our next literary exchange.

It was a small moment—just a casual hallway chat—but one that left a lasting impression. One might assume that in a profession built around reading, discussions about books would be a natural part of daily life; yet my 14 years as an English teacher suggest otherwise. Even in spaces lined with literature posters and classroom libraries, conversations about personal reading lives don't always happen organically.

This experience led me to wonder: What does research tell us about the reading habits of teachers? How much do English teachers read? What do they read? How often do they share what they've read? And why does a strong reading life even matter? At a time when the value of reading—and the role of books in schools—is increasingly debated (Ingraham, 2018; Voice of America, 2024), these questions, understanding how teachers engage with books in their personal lives, feel more urgent than ever.

Literature Review

Research suggests that teachers' personal reading lives shape how they introduce, discuss, and value books in the classroom (Daisey, 2010; Hall et al., 2010; McCarthey & Moje, 2002). This research appears even more meaningful given that, as students move into adolescence, their

CONTACT **Dr. Matthew J. Sroka**, Assistant Professor of Literacy, Tift College of Education, Mercer University, Macon, GA; email sroka_mj@mercer.edu.

disengagement with books becomes more pronounced (Webber et al., 2024; Wilkinson et al., 2020). When thinking about how to engage students with books, English teachers could start by reflecting on what motivates them to read.

Another factor in considering the reading life of an English teacher is the ever-evolving and subjective nature of the English curriculum. This raises broader questions about the types of texts and lessons teachers should create based on their views and assumptions about the goals of reading in their classroom. Luke (2004) suggests that the very notion of "what counts as English has become somewhat unclear" (p. 88). Luke also questions, "how we might reinvent (English) in relation to an understanding of its own social and cultural complexities and dynamics" (p. 87). A teacher's reading habits and history influence their perception of what English should look like in their classroom. It shapes what counts as a text and what texts students should or should not be reading.

In a climate where teachers are teaching fewer longer works (Voice of America, 2024), what role do books play in the English classroom? How do teachers think about the canon? What is the place for young adult literature in the classroom? What are realistic expectations for students as readers? How do teachers balance positive experiences with texts while also preparing students for standardized assessments? These are just a few of the seemingly endless questions that an examination of a teacher's reading life may help address.

Insights into these questions may also influence pedagogical decision-making around texts within a teacher's classroom. There exists a wealth of research around the best practices for teaching texts and guiding students to become better readers (Beach et al., 2016; Jago, 2019; Kittle, 2024; Styslinger, 2017). Still, it is unclear if teachers themselves follow the recommended best practices in their teaching practices and in their own reading lives. Research suggests that teachers who are avid readers are more likely to utilize best practices in their literacy instruction and, in turn, are more likely to motivate their students to read (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; McKool & Gespass, 2009; Merga, 2016). Recent quantitative research by Griffin and Mindrila (2024) identified distinct profiles of teacher reading motivation among over 1,000 U.S. educators, revealing that while many teachers demonstrate high intrinsic motivation to read, others report lower engagement due to diminished reading self-efficacy or undervaluing the importance of reading. These findings underscore the need to examine not only what teachers read, but why they read, and how these motivational patterns may influence classroom practice. This article seeks to investigate the following question:

> What are the reading practices of in-service secondary English teachers, and how do these practices influence how they approach texts and reading in the classroom?

Theoretical Framework

This research is situated within a sociocultural perspective of literacy, drawing on Street's (2003) assertion that literacy is "always embedded in social practices" (p. 78). Reading texts is one form of social practice, and the ways one reads and interprets texts are shaped by larger cultural contexts that influence one's understanding.

Reading is an event occurring in a specific time and place, involving a transaction between reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1994). This transactional theory of reading highlights the reciprocal relationship between the reader and the text, situated within the historical and cultural contexts of both. As a result, the contexts of both texts and readers evolve over time, influencing the meaning-making process in this transaction.

Together, Street's (2003) sociocultural perspective and Rosenblatt's (1994) transactional theory support viewing reading as a social act, shaped not only by texts and contexts but also by the social roles and lived experiences of the reader. Specifically, looking at the literacy lives of teachers, Gomez (2009) explores how they engage with texts through the lens of their relationships, professional identities, and lived experiences. These factors influence not only what is read in their personal and professional lives but also how meaning is made, reinforcing the idea that reading is an evolving practice shaped by readers, texts, and the contexts in which they are situated.

Methods

This article is part of a larger participatory action research (PAR) study. While researchers have defined and taken up action research in a variety of ways, most agree that this type of research involves "inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 3). PAR assumes that research questions do not have simple, easily answerable responses to the research question and require a problem that takes long-term and persistent effort to explore (Lawson et al., 2015). PAR also acknowledges the idea of shared expertise, recognizing that knowledge is not solely produced by the researcher but is co-constructed with participants. Using a PAR design allowed these in-service teachers, over the course of four months, to explore their reading histories and practices, reflect on these experiences in a group setting, and consider how these insights might influence their own and their students' relationships with reading.

Participants

For PAR to be effective, participants must be genuinely invested in the topic and the knowledge being generated, as Lawson et al. (2015) emphasize that it relies on "'local stakeholders' genuine participation in knowledge generation intertwined with real-world problem solving" (p. 15). Using purposive sampling (Salkind, 2012), this study recruited in-service English teachers from a previous pilot project who, as "local stakeholders," were interested in exploring the role of reading in their lives and classrooms. The "real-world problem" is the growing disengagement with books among adolescents (Webber et al., 2024; Wilkinson et al., 2020). English teachers participated by reflecting on their own reading lives, with the belief that fostering an appreciation of reading in students may first require understanding what motivates them as readers.

This article focuses on four of those participants: Robert (all names are pseudonyms), a male high school English teacher in Illinois; George, a male high school English teacher in Maryland; Cheryl, a female educator who, at the time of this study, had transitioned to a literacy coach position in Maryland after teaching high school English for over 20 years; and James, a male middle school Language Arts teacher in Colorado.

Data Collection

Data for this article consists of participant-created reading identity artifacts. Reading identity artifacts serve as a creative method for encouraging teachers to share insights into their reading lives. The creation of such artifacts can be useful when attempting to express something as abstract as a reading identity (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010; Sroka et al., 2022). Participants also submitted teaching artifacts related to reading (course syllabi, lesson plans, worksheets). Throughout the study, participants contributed to an asynchronous discussion board on Slack. In addition to these reading identity artifacts. teaching artifacts, and discussion board, seven 90-

minute biweekly group meetings were conducted over the course of 4 months focusing on different aspects of reading and teaching lives. Two semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with each participant, one midway through the four-month period and one at the end, to follow up on topics discussed in the group meetings and to explore the submitted artifacts.

Participants also kept reading journals. Defining what counts as reading for their reading journals, and in general, proved increasingly difficult as the study progressed. Most participants preferred an inclusive approach, with one stating, "let's include it all," an openness that echoed Eaglestone and Field's (2015) view of reading literature as "not something that can be defined but as something that overflows or escapes from any attempt to limit it or put it into a box" (p. 54). However, through data analysis, it became clear that participants had varying and sometimes inconsistent notions of what constitutes reading. For instance, podcasts, ranging from story-centered to news-centered content, were discussed as an acceptable form of reading. However, only one participant included podcasts in their reading journal data. These responses revealed a dissonance between what participants said and did, pointing again to reading being a social act, where even what counts as reading is constantly being shaped by readers, texts, and contexts. (Gomez, 2009; Rosenblatt, 1994, Street, 2003).

Data Analysis

All data were collected and uploaded to NVivo software for organization and coding. For coding, Saldaña's (2016) first and second cycle coding were utilized. In the first cycle, in vivo coding was applied to capture participants' precise language and "honor the participant's voice" (p. 106). Given the PAR design, it was essential to capture their language when discussing their reading beliefs and experiences.

Trustworthiness was established throughout the study by fostering positive rapport and creating an open environment that encouraged authentic sharing during collaborative meetings (Herr & Anderson, 2015). To enhance internal validity, multiple data sources were incorporated, and member checking was done during individual interviews, where participants reviewed transcripts and analyses. These strategies strengthened the credibility of both the data and findings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Findings

The findings profile the reading lives of four English teachers, exploring their reading habits, beliefs, and the evolving nature of their literary experiences. A common thread among these educators is their belief that reading is inherently social, whether through reading alongside others, recommending texts, or engaging in discussions about books. Central to their reading practices is the importance of choice; each teacher selects texts based on their immediate needs, curiosities, and desires, whether for knowledge, escape, personal growth, or connection with self and others. These profiles also underscore the importance of reflecting on one's reading life, highlighting how such reflection can inform both personal reading choices and professional practices in the classroom.

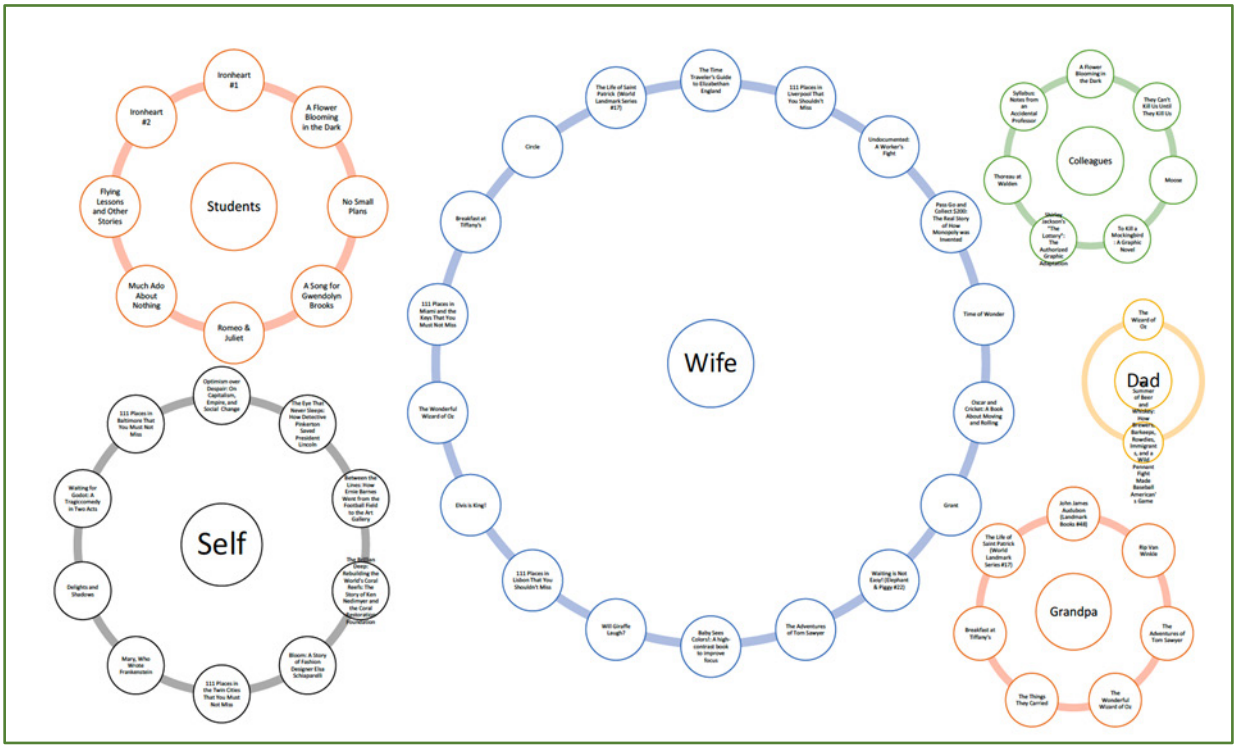
Robert

> *I always kind of chose things to read that I was interested in, but also that others were interested in.*

I first connected with Robert, a White male in his early 30s, after he responded to a recruitment letter that I posted on the NCTE message board. With a decade of experience, Robert teaches high school English in Chicago. Previously a middle school teacher, at the time of this study, Robert was working in an urban school serving a predominantly Latinx student population.

Robert's reading identity artifact (Figure 1) visually depicts the interconnectedness between his reading life and his relationships. In this representation, various social circles are surrounded by different types of texts, providing insight into Robert's personal and professional connections. For example, the circle labeled "Students" includes texts he teaches, such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Song for Gwendolyn Brooks*, alongside those he reads with his students, like *Ironheart*. Some texts, such as *The Wizard of Oz*, appear in multiple circles, spanning different relationships. The "Wife" circle features the greatest variety of texts, ranging from children's books like *Will Giraffe Laugh?* to travel books such as *111 Places in Lisbon That You Shouldn't Miss*, to classic novels like *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and biographies such as *Grant*.

Figure 1: Robert's Reading Identity Artifact Caption



A central theme in Robert's reading life is the connection between reading and social interaction, which shapes both his personal and professional reading habits. In our first meeting, he explained his reading choices: "I always kind of chose things to read that I was interested in, but also that others were interested in. So, it was like a conversation piece." For Robert, reading is not just an individual act–it's a way to foster dialogue, whether with colleagues, students, or his wife. As a teacher, Robert encourages his students to engage with texts through conversation. He believes that "if you're reading something that is good, it can start a conversation, or it should be an entry point to have a conversation about something." Robert's approach to reading reflects his belief that texts should serve as a catalyst for thoughtful interaction, with his personal choices often guided by a desire to discuss what he's reading with others.

Robert's reading journal further demonstrates his eagerness to engage with and discuss his reading. Spanning 35 pages, his journal, significantly longer than those of any other participant, captures not only the books he was reading but also the personal connections he was making with them, as can be seen in the following journal entry (see Figure 2). Robert, dialoguing with the text, writes about his personal experiences and preferences for learning about education history. He also brings in his professional identity, discussing how the texts apply to his teaching and the power of storytelling. Overall, this entry demonstrates a reader who is constantly in dialogue with what he is reading through his background knowledge, past experiences, and professional identity.

Figure 2: Robert's Journal Entry April 28th, 2020

Tuesday, April 28, 2020	*Should We Burn Babar? Essays on Children's Literature and the Power of Stories* by Herbert Kohl	**Essay:** The Good Old Days. I Was There. Where Was They? A Fictional History of Public Education in the United States

I took two courses on education history for my BA and MA, both of which, education and history, are subjects I love. Somehow, both classes were some of the lamest courses I've ever taken. Kohl's reimagining of the history of our educational system, using generations of a fictional family in a small town, brought the decisions to life and could form the basis for an entire education history course. All that would be needed would be footnotes of articles that relate that could then be read. Again, I think this really illustrates the power of storytelling and reinvigorates me to place even more emphasis on this in my classes and find ways to make this come alive even though e-learning.

I'll admit that some of Kohl's work reads dated and has some contradictions. Still, I feel an odd sense that Kohl is a "kindred spirit," and I wish I had read his work earlier in my career. I, too, believe that teaching criticism, the earlier the better, makes for richer, more authentic discussion. I, too, believe that literacy is a social endeavor grounded in storytelling, which is what makes us human. I, too, believe in the messiness of history and literature in the movement toward a more progressive education. I know Babar brought me to this book (I'm a fan of Babar, regardless of the problematic plot and characterization), but I left feeling somewhat vindicated in much of my educational philosophy, for better or for worse.

Robert's reading life is also deeply intertwined with his local context, as he actively seeks out texts that reflect Chicago's literary and cultural landscape. His involvement in the Young Authors Book Project (see Figure 3) demonstrated a deliberate effort to explore works by Chicago authors, both to deepen his own understanding of the city and to better connect with his students. In his journal, he noted how this experience led him to "consciously start seeking out texts that were written by authors with a Chicago or Illinois aesthetic" to fill gaps in his knowledge.

Figure 3: Robert's Journal Entry April 3rd, 2020

Tuesday, April 3, 2020	*Algren: A Life by Wisniewski*	Chapters 1–2

Beginning last year, I started to take an increased interest in Chicago authors, specifically in response to the Young Authors Book Project, with which I had the opportunity to work with my freshmen students in collaboration with 826CHI, and for which they returned again this year for my Creative Writing elective. The writers-in-residence there are really fantastic, and through the writing prompts they shared with students and my conversation with them, I became reinvigorated to "rediscover" Chicago and tap into that sense of shared experience and community. This isn't to say that I didn't read Chicago authors before, of course, but I started to consciously start seeking out texts that were written by authors with a Chicago or Illinois aesthetic and really with an eye toward plugging the gaps in my own understanding of what that aesthetic is.

Robert also prioritizes understanding his students' backgrounds and tailoring his text selections to reflect their experiences. He described using Bishop's (1990) "windows and mirrors" framework to select readings that resonate with his students' lived realities. For example, when teaching near Chinatown, he incorporated texts about Chinese American experiences, while his current work with a predominantly Latinx population has shifted his focus to stories reflecting their culture. Additionally, Robert often draws inspiration from his students' interests to foster engagement. Reflecting on one class, he shared, "One of my classes was really, really into ghost stories. So, we ended up using a lot of different ghost stories as models." His personal reading choices and knowledge of books frequently inform his teaching, helping him identify texts that would connect with his students.

Robert's reading life demonstrates a balance between his desire to learn, his professional goals, and his personal enjoyment. He explores his community's past and present through texts such as *Algren: A Life* and seeks to improve his teaching by engaging with academic works such as "Education Builds Character" and *Should We Burn Babar? Essays on Children's Literature and the Power of Stories*. To prepare for parenthood, he turns to parenting books such as *Bringing Up Bébé and Dad to Dad: Parenting Like a Pro.* While much of his recent reading has focused on professional growth, with texts such as *Reaching and Teaching Children Who Hurt* and *Teach Like a Champion*, Robert also carves out time for personal enjoyment with a graphic novel titled *Darwin: An Exceptional Voyage*, which he describes in his reading journal as "nice to pick something up that was just for me."

Through meetings, reading journals, and participant-generated artifacts, Robert maintains an active and diverse reading life centered on social connections. He not only acquires recommended readings from others but also seeks out conversations about the texts. His reading choices reflect his commitment to continuous learning and professional growth, while leaving room for personal enjoyment.

George

> *There was almost a guilt associated with reading. I felt like if I wasn't reading to enhance my teaching, then I was wasting time.*

A hand-drawn pen and ink sketch (Figure 4) portraying stacks of large nameless books with children perched atop illustrates how George identified himself as a reader. The viewer's eyes are drawn to the right of the picture, where the largest child sits, not reading, but simply looking. George views this giant child as himself, sitting on a stack of books, gazing down through his telescopes at his reading peers. To George's left, in the foreground, sits a boy with his chin resting on his hands, appearing to listen to a story, possibly being read by the boy next to him. This boy of a darker complexion sits cross-legged as he reads a book, while in the background, another boy appears to be in mid-climb, ascending a stack of books.

Figure 4: George's Reading Identity Artifact

In explaining his reading identity artifact, George shared how his motivation as a young reader often stemmed from a desire to outperform his peers. He recalled, "My goal was just to compete with every other kid and read the most complex, ridiculous, fancy English stuff. I was reading Shakespeare in elementary school, lots of Dickens. Not because Dickens is good, but because Dickens is Dickens." George read to demonstrate sophistication, choosing texts well above his grade level. Though less competitive now, George's motivation remains goal-oriented and focused on personal growth.

When I first met George, a 12-year veteran high school teacher in his mid-30s, he was transitioning from a district with a prescribed curriculum to one where he had more autonomy. George shared that, as a new teacher, he felt "almost a guilt associated with reading... if I wasn't reading to enhance my teaching, I was wasting time." For much of his career, George's reading life, like that of many English teachers, centered on the texts he taught, with any personal reading often considered "wasting time."

George described a life-changing event that reignited his love for personal reading: "Last summer I got appendicitis, and sitting up for long periods was exhausting. I just wanted to lie in bed and started reading again. I remembered how much I loved it." He began reading anything that caught his interest. "I got into *Conan the Barbarian*, of all things, and loved it." He began to distinguish between his past reading of "Shakespeare" and his new interest in "absolutely not Shakespeare," signaling a shift in his view of what has value and a place in his own reading life. This shift allowed him to rediscover the joy and value of exploring diverse texts. In describing this shift, George said:

> I started exploring other things, and there's a lot of cool stuff out there. Part of the fun for me now is discovery—finding new genres. It's no longer something I feel like I'm doing to enrich myself intentionally. Maybe it is, but the intention isn't to improve as a reader or a person; it's just to occupy my time. This perspective has

> made it easier to enjoy things I would've thought were beneath me earlier. And that's been fun.

George's reading habits underwent a transformation, leading to a shift in both his attitude and purpose. He began to read more freely, without needing a professional justification.

George's reading journal reflects this newfound freedom in his reading life, with entries that include high-interest, contemporary texts such as *The Inheritance Trilogy* by N. K. Jemisin, *Lost Stars* (set in the Star Wars universe), and *The Silent Patient*. On our Slack message board, he shared his excitement about a short story by Carly Holmes: "'Sleep': WOW. I want everyone to read this story . . . It's a great metaphor for parenthood, especially for motherhood." This experience reignited his interest in the short story genre, inspiring him to seek out more collections and anthologies.

During his final interview, George reflected on how examining his own reading life shaped his understanding of his students as readers and has encouraged him to share books with others. Thinking about when he was an adolescent, he considered, "Why do I seek out the books that I seek out?" and how this awareness could inform his approach to supporting students' reading choices. He acknowledged that while he isn't always successful, he strives to connect students with books that align with their interests, explaining, "When I have a kid who knows what they like to read, I'll pull a book off my shelf and say, 'I think you'd like this one.' And they usually return them, loving it." Through this reflection, George expresses his commitment to fostering meaningful reading experiences for his students, using his own personal history with books as a guide.

George's reading life, like Robert's, reflects a reader who seeks to engage with a variety of texts and share those texts with others. The evolution of his reading life occurred both gradually, as George became more comfortable in his profession, and suddenly, such as when he was forced to remain still while recovering from appendicitis. His journey evolves from reading for competition to seeing reading as a luxury he couldn't afford amidst professional responsibilities, and finally to reading for discovery and finding a new appreciation for a strong personal reading life.

Cheryl

> *When I read something, I kind of live through it. I don't remember as much, and that's why I'm a good teacher—I understand when kids say, 'I can tell you this or that, but not the name.'*

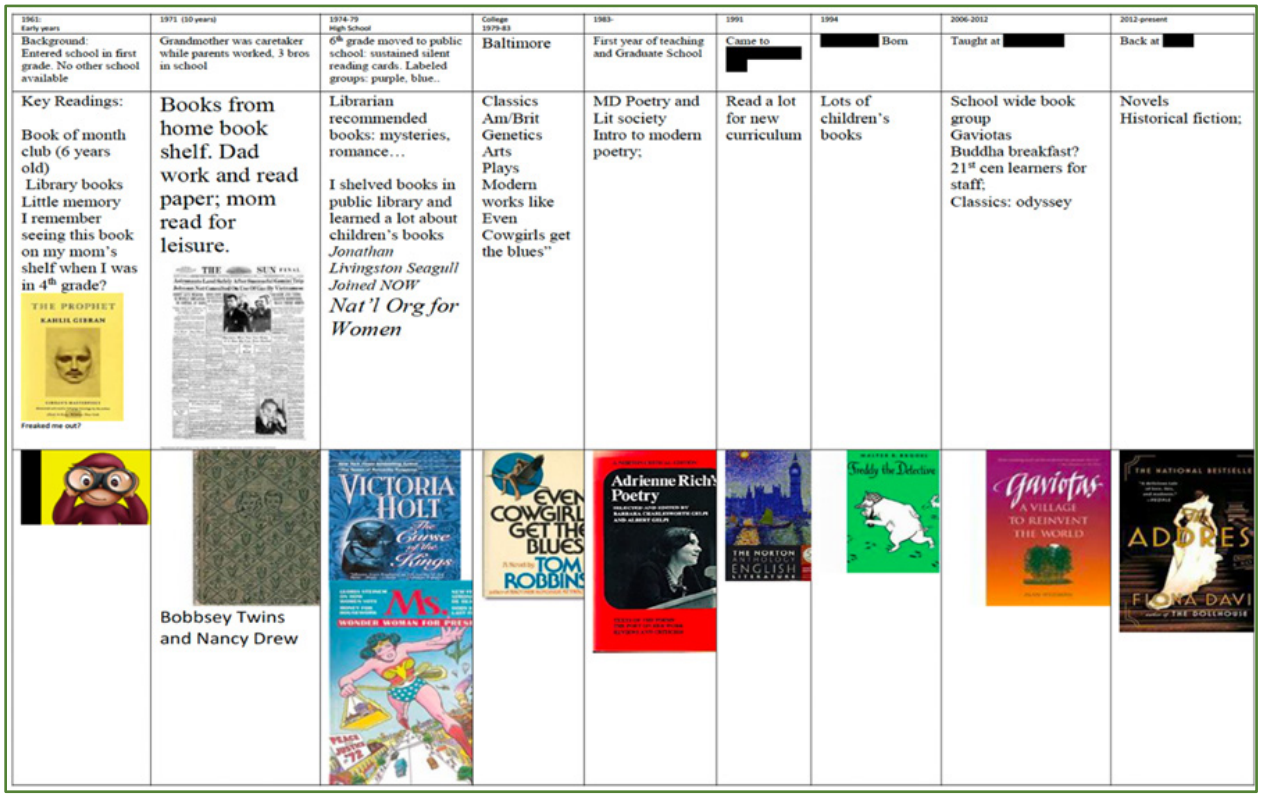
Three months after our final interview, Cheryl sent me an email with a link to the article "Does Johnny's Reading Teacher Love to Read?" (McKool & Vespas, 2009), writing, "Thought of you when I found this. Hope you are surviving . . ." I smiled, knowing it was quintessentially Cheryl, continuing to reflect on the study and thinking of ways to connect her reading life to help others.

I first met Cheryl in 2015 when we were both teaching English in the same county, though at different schools. With over 20 years of experience, she seemed like a seasoned veteran compared to my seventh year of teaching. In 2018, I changed schools and moved to a new county, but when I began this research, I reached out to Cheryl, who had transitioned from her position as an English teacher to her new role as a county-based literacy coach. She eagerly agreed to participate in the study.

Cheryl's reading identity artifact (Figure 5) features a timeline with four rows representing key periods in her life, each tied to significant texts. The first row spans the years from 1961 to the

present, illustrating how reading has remained an ongoing part of her life. The second row connects major life events and places with her reading choices. The third row lists key readings, often categorized by genre. The final row displays book covers representing each phase. This timeline reflects how different personal and professional moments shaped her reading, from preparing to write a new curriculum for her new job to the birth of her daughter, which prompted her to read more children's books. Throughout, reading has been woven into the fabric of Cheryl's life.

Figure 5: Cheryl's Reading Identity Artifact

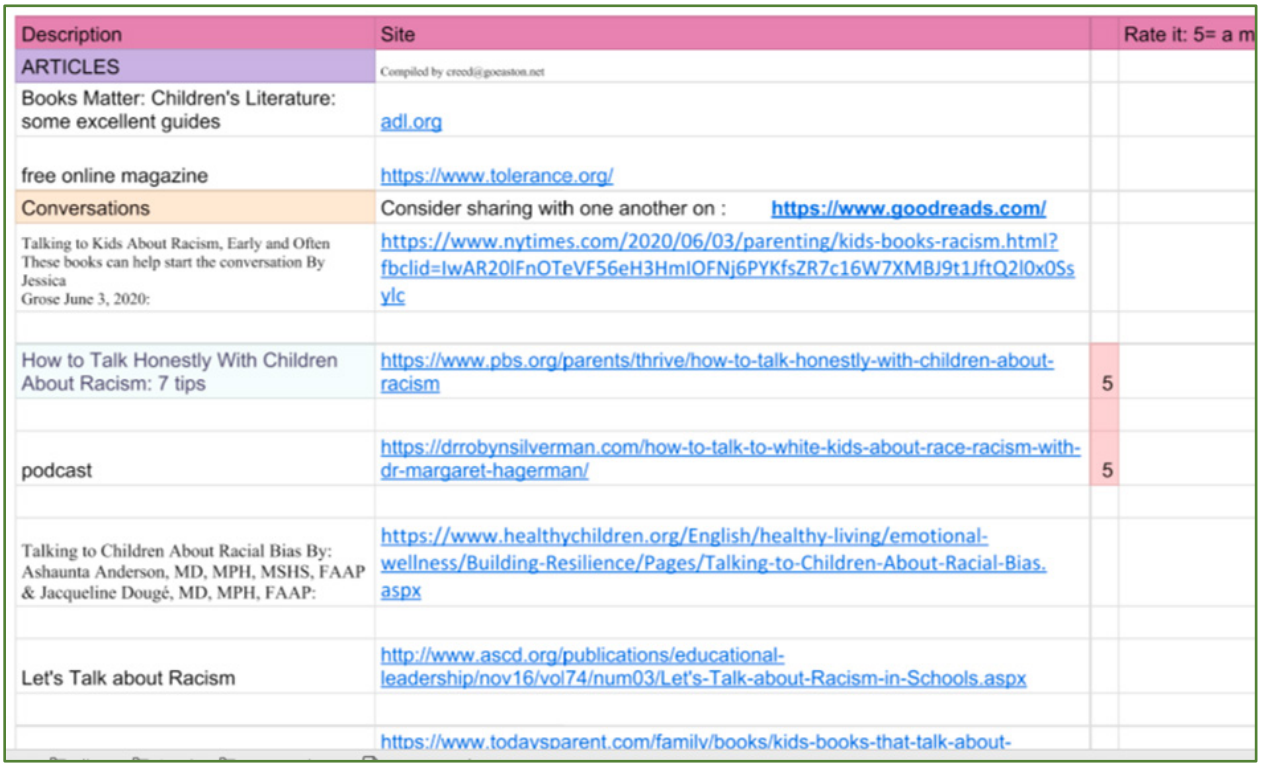


Reading was not only woven into the fabric of Cheryl's personal life, but it was also central to how she supported others. As a veteran teacher, texts became a tool for Cheryl to support her colleagues and other community members. Her desire to help is evident in the teaching artifacts she submitted, including a summer reading list for students (Figure 6) and a curated collection of books, articles, websites, podcasts, and videos to help parents engage in race-related conversations with their children (Figure 7). In this current stage of her life, reading has become a thread she uses to connect with and support those around her.

Figure 6: Cheryl's Recommended Summer Reading List

Incoming 9th graders: belonging, journey, intelligence, love, goals	Incoming 10th graders culture, past, ties,	Incoming 11th graders Sci Fi, Culture, War, Am Dream/Reality	Incoming 12 graders education, environment, Ethics, Global
Go on EHS Media Center FROG site	Go on EHS Media Center FROG site	The Marrow Thieves (Dimaline) The Road (McCarthy)	*How to Read Literature Like a Professor* * by Foster
Stargirl (Spinelli)	*The Other Wes Moore*	*Night Circus* by Morgenstern	Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Twain
I am the Messenger (a) by Zusak. http://esl-bits.net/ESL.English.Learning.Audiobooks/I.Am.the.Messenger/preview.html. (Messenger audio)	***On the Come Up*, Angie Thomas**	Kindred by Butler (sci fi) (a). http://esl-bits.net/ESL.English.Learning.Audiobooks/Kindred/preview.html	Catch 22 by Heller
The Pact (Drs. Davis, Jenkins and Hunt)	*Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Saenz	Children of Blood and Bone	*Flannery O'Connor's Short Story Collection*
Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy http://esl-bits.net/ESL.English.Learning.Audiobooks/Guide.To.The.Galaxy/preview.html	"Shift" Jennifer Bradbury.	Never Let Me Go (Ishiguro) audio	Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close. Foer
		How it Went Down , Magoon	
Check out these authors:	Check out these authors:	Authors: Fiona Davis (historical fiction)	Authors: Salinger, Stephen King Fitzgerald Hemingway
N.K. Jemisin,	John Green	Stephen King James McBride	*Between the World and Me (Coates)*
Laurie Halse Anderson	Laurie Halse Anderson	The Nightingale	Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance by Robert Pirsig
Mayberry. (Rot and Ruin series)	N.K. Jemisin	Beneath a Scarlet Sky, Sullivan	
Delaney. (Last Apprentice series)	Renee Watson	Unbroken	Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood by Trevor Noah
Flanagan (Rangers Apprentice Series)		Poet X	Dear Martin, by Nic Stone
John Green	Furious Hours: Harper Lee and an Unfinished Story of Race, Religion, and Murder in the Deep South Cep	Where the Crawdads Sing	*Educated by* Westover

Figure 7: Cheryl's Recommended Reading List for Parents



Description	Site		Rate it: 5= a m
ARTICLES	Compiled by creed@goeaston.net		
Books Matter: Children's Literature: some excellent guides	adl.org		
free online magazine	https://www.tolerance.org/		
Conversations	Consider sharing with one another on : **https://www.goodreads.com/**		
Talking to Kids About Racism, Early and Often These books can help start the conversation By Jessica Grose June 3, 2020:	https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/03/parenting/kids-books-racism.html?fbclid=IwAR20lFnOTeVF56eH3HmIOFNj6PYKfsZR7c16W7XMBJ9t1JftQ2l0x0SsylC		
How to Talk Honestly With Children About Racism: 7 tips	https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/how-to-talk-honestly-with-children-about-racism	5	
podcast	https://drrobynsilverman.com/how-to-talk-to-white-kids-about-race-racism-with-dr-margaret-hagerman/	5	
Talking to Children About Racial Bias By: Ashaunta Anderson, MD, MPH, MSHS, FAAP & Jacqueline Dougé, MD, MPH, FAAP:	https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/Talking-to-Children-About-Racial-Bias.aspx		
Let's Talk about Racism	http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov16/vol74/num03/Let's-Talk-about-Racism-in-Schools.aspx		
	https://www.todaysparent.com/family/books/kids-books-that-talk-about-		

Cheryl compared her reading habits to a "squirrel," describing her reading life as "all over the place." Like a squirrel catching food across multiple spaces, her reading was scattered yet purposeful, guided by curiosity, professional needs, and personal interest. Her reading journal reflects this approach, documenting an expansive range of texts across genres and mediums from academic articles and poetry to podcasts, novels, websites, and magazines, in both print and digital

formats. Just as her summer reading list included diverse forms of text, her personal reading practices reveal a reader who gathers texts wherever she finds them, drawing on a wide array of content to nourish herself and others. This variety stems not only from her responsibilities as a literacy coach but also from her broad personal interests.

Cheryl appears to be self-aware about her reading habits and history, acknowledging times when she struggled to find time to read or felt frustrated with her reading pace. Reflecting on her high school experience, she recalled being criticized for not remembering specific details in *The Great Gatsby*: "I remember my teacher saying because I couldn't remember the names of characters, that I didn't read it. I kept being told I hadn't read things when I had; I just couldn't recall the basic characters." This experience continues to shape how she views reading today. Cheryl shared, "When I read something, I kind of live through it. I don't remember as much, and that's why I'm a good teacher—I understand when kids say, 'I can tell you this or that, but not the name.'" Her reflection reveals how reading, for her, is an immersive and emotional experience, less about memorizing facts and more about feeling and understanding the content. This personal way of reading allows her to relate to students who may understand the story even if they forget specific details. Instead of viewing this as a deficit, Cheryl sees it as an acceptable way to read. Cheryl's reading reflects an aesthetic stance, where she focuses on the feelings, ideas, and emotions evoked by a text, engaging with the tension and resolution as the story unfolds (Rosenblatt, 2013). This contrasts with the more text-centered, efferent approach often emphasized in schools.

Cheryl shared that her positive reading identity shifted in middle school, recalling the transition from a Catholic school to a public school. She said, "The public school didn't really have books. They had these boxes of cards for silent reading, and most of the reading was answering multiple-choice questions." Cheryl explained that her love of reading "kind of died out" during this time, as it became more about competition and keeping up with others, rather than reading for enjoyment. This shift echoes a larger trend of students becoming disinterested in reading as they reach adolescence (Webber et al., 2024).

In high school, Cheryl found support from librarians who "recommended just some wonderful books." Cheryl repeatedly spoke about the powerful role librarians and libraries have played in her reading life. For instance, she shared, "The joy of my job is I actually have an office in the library, so I can influence the library and help select books… Whenever I know kids are coming to the library, I run around picking out books for them based on what I know about them." Cheryl's role in the library and the joy she finds in curation of texts for students highlight the deeply relational nature of her reading identity, where her personal and professional reading interests align. Given her aesthetic stance, her recommendations were not strictly academic or skills-based but rooted in an understanding of what it means to *feel* seen or comforted by a book.

Further evidence of this aesthetic stance can be observed in Cheryl's reading journal. Cheryl often reads to ease her mind using phrases such as "escapism from work," "more fluff, really rough day just need escapism," "more relief from a taxing day," and "fluff reading to get sleep." While Cheryl differentiates between what she refers to as her "beach reads" and the other texts that she reads, she often employs the same aesthetic stance. This emotional engagement with texts shapes not only her personal reading but also how and why she recommends texts to others as she seeks to offer that same experience to students, sharing books that she believes could connect personally with that student in meaningful ways. In this way, her aesthetic stance does not exist apart from her professional role but actively informs how she supports others through reading.

In summary, Cheryl's reading identity artifact highlights the importance of reading throughout various phases of her life. Her reading journals and discussions show a reader who embraces an aesthetic stance, fully engaging with the experience of reading across a broad spectrum and sharing those experiences with others, including her students. Her teaching artifacts further reflect how she integrates her reading life in socially conscious ways, aiming to support her school and home communities.

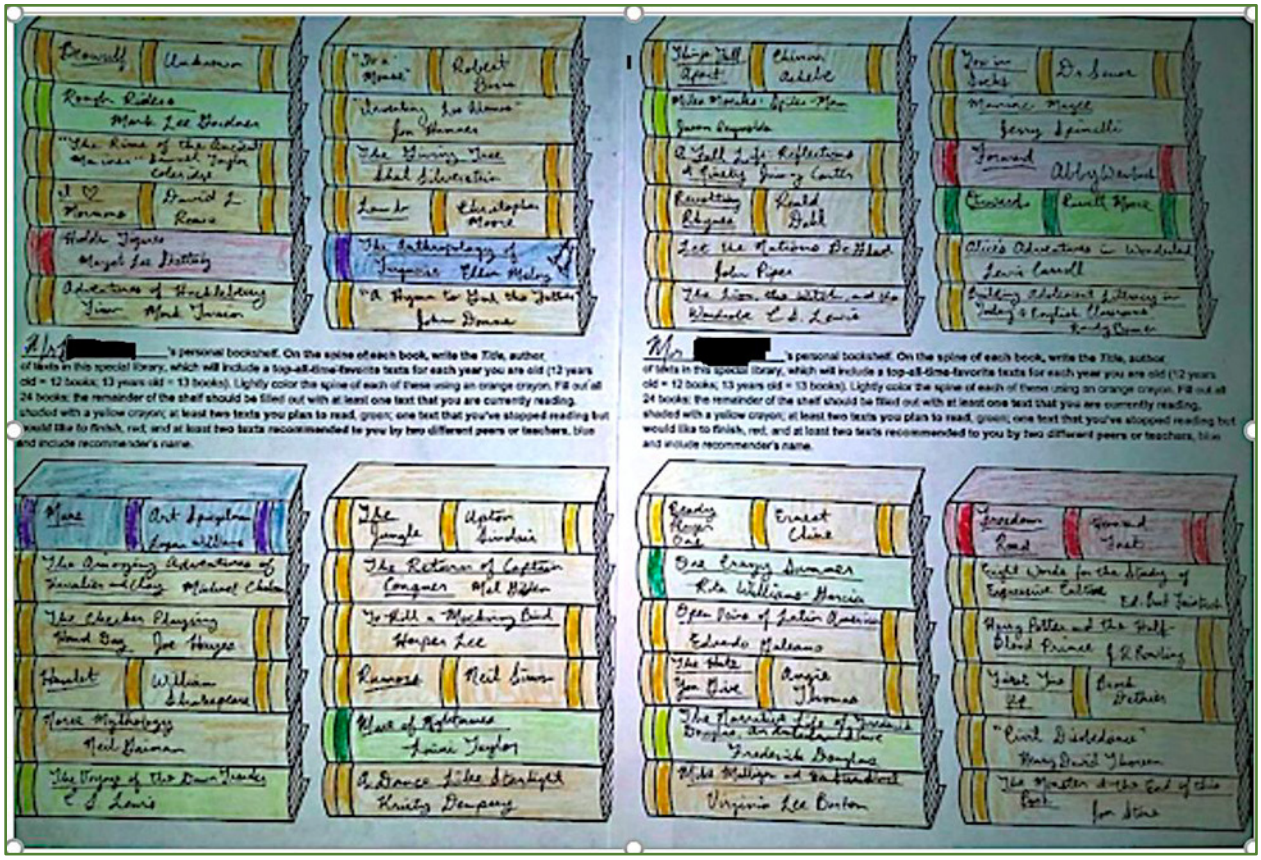
James

> *If you don't take time to listen to someone's ideas, or weep together when Johnny dies in The Outsiders, then you haven't really met them—you're just in the same room.*

James, a middle school Language Arts teacher in his mid-30s from Western Colorado, arrived late to one of our group meetings. He was still dressed in a black suit after attending the funeral of a former student. He shared, "I had two students who died last summer, and I wrote a poem for them. I shared that part of my life with my students at the beginning of the year, asking, 'What are you dedicating this year to?'" This moment highlights the healing and connective power of words, reflecting James's authenticity in both his personal and professional reading life.

James's reading identity artifact (Figure 8) is a personal bookshelf that provides a window into the breadth of his reading life, a concept he also encourages his students to explore. The color-coded book spines represent different stages of his reading journey. Orange spines list James's all-time favorite books, including classics such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Hamlet*, poetry by John Donne, nonfiction such as *Open Veins of Latin America*, and contemporary young adult novels like *Ready Player One*. Yellow spines represent books he is currently reading, such as *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and *Miles Morales: Spider-Man*. Red spines mark books he has paused but plans to finish, including *Hidden Figures* and *Forward: A Memoir* by Abby Wambach. Green spines display books he intends to read, like *One Crazy Summer* and *Onward*. Blue spines identify books he recommends to others, such as *Maus* and *The Anthropology of Turquoise*. Overall, James's bookshelf reflects a reader who values past experiences with texts while remaining open to a wide range of diverse books in both content and form. The bookshelf, according to James, is not intended to remain stagnant, but is constantly evolving as his reading life evolves.

Figure 8: James's Reading Identity Artifact



James's reading journal reflects his multiple roles—parent, teacher, Christian, citizen, sports fan, and reader. For example, on April 20, 2020, he listed a variety of texts:

- *Michael Jordan's Least Favorite Teammates Ever* by Marty Fenn
- *All Colorado Schools to Remain Closed for the Rest of the Academic Year* by Erica Meltzer
- *Starry River of the Sky* by Grace Lin
- *Solid Joys* by John Piper
- *The Name of the Wind* by Patrick Rothfuss
- *The Outsiders* by S. E. Hinton
- "Miss Bianca: The Ultimate Disney Princess: Is Miss Bianca the Greatest of All Disney Princesses?" by Peter Fenzel

This snapshot of his active and varied reading life shows the breadth of his interests, from sports and current events to children's literature, epic fantasy, and Christian devotionals.

James often emphasized the power of shared reading experiences, especially with his students. When asked why reading together was important, he explained:

> Shared experiences bring people together. You grow to love one another, understand each other, or even dislike each other based on what you go through

> together. If you don't take time to listen to someone's ideas, or weep together when Johnny dies in The Outsiders, then you haven't really met them—you're just in the same room.

When James talked about "weeping together," he wasn't speaking figuratively. For him, texts can be personal, capable of bringing readers to tears and drawing them closer to one another. He shared a memorable story of this vulnerability in his classroom:

> I read *The Wednesday Wars* with my seventh graders. There are two parts that make me weepy—the cafeteria worker whose husband died in Vietnam, and a Vietnamese child at a refugee orphanage who faces a racist attack. There's this moment where I'm just like, 'Whoa,' I'm in tears. A kid once asked me, 'Why are you crying?' I said, 'Why aren't you crying? That's the real question.'

When James wept while reading *The Wednesday Wars*, he modeled authenticity in his reading and teaching. While this moment underscores James's deep emotional engagement with the text and his willingness to model vulnerability for his students, it also reveals certain assumptions about how readers should respond. He was surprised when a student did not share the same emotional connection, which perhaps inadvertently reinforced a view of reading that privileges a singular, "correct" emotional response. Rather than inviting multiple ways of reading, James's comment may have missed an opportunity to validate diverse reader experiences. Still, for James, reading is not just about acquiring skills for a test; it is a deeply personal and potentially transformative experience—a response he encourages, and perhaps expects, his students to share.

James often spoke about reading in grand terms. To him, reading is a way to "connect with humanity". When asked if all English teachers need to love reading, James responded, "No, but yes. You don't have to read everything, or love it, but doesn't it make life so much better?" This belief in the value of reading is embedded in his teaching. James encourages his students to engage in self-selected reading throughout the year, exploring a variety of genres. Reflecting on his teaching, James used a metaphor, saying, "This job has a lot of sowing seeds... It might sprout sometime, but I'm doing a lot of work, just hoping, hoping, hoping." His words suggest that for James, reading goes beyond academic success; he is striving to nurture an appreciation and love of literature in his students, similar to the deep appreciation he holds for literature.

Through both his personal reading and his teaching, James demonstrates how literature can be personally impactful and help to forge meaningful connections. His commitment to reading extends beyond acquiring knowledge or meeting expectations; it is about forging connections, embracing new perspectives, and enriching the lives of those around him.

Discussion and Implications

Several trends emerged in the profiles that provide insight into the reading of English teachers and how these lives may inform how teachers take up reading with their students. For example, choice often led to positive experiences with reading, and these choices often reflect participants' current life circumstances. Robert read parenting books to prepare for fatherhood. Cheryl read to escape from a challenging workday. George, when life circumstances forced him to slow down, read for the sake of discovery. James read for the not-so-simple reason of enhancing the quality of his life and deepening his connection with others. These varied reasons for reading provide just a glimpse into the multitude of purposes and circumstances that can shape a teacher's (and everyone else's) reading lives. Talking openly, amongst other teachers and their students, about the varying purposes that guide their reading can help other people to see the different ways reading does or

could emerge in their own lives. These conversations can also help teachers consider how to align in-class readings with both existing and potential reading purposes and interests of their students.

The reading profiles also underscore that reading can be a social act that thrives in shared experiences and interactions. For example, James demonstrates that reading can enhance his ability to deepen relationships with others through texts like *The Wednesday Wars*. Similarly, Cheryl's sharing her reading lists with community members and recommending books to students in the library shows a commitment to taking her reading experience and using it to benefit others. Likewise, George's excitement in guiding students in their book selections underscores how a teacher's reading life can potentially influence the reading lives of others. Robert's reading identity artifact visualizes a reading life shaped by his social connections as he engages in ongoing dialogue about texts with family, students, colleagues, and community members to inform his text selection. Taken together, these reading profiles highlight the social nature of reading, suggesting that teachers should foster positive social experiences around books, whether through shared reading, recommending books to others, creating reading lists, or finding other ways to bring reading into communal spaces in the classroom.

These reading profiles also highlight the importance of teachers finding time to read and reflect on text selection. All participants chose to read a wide variety of texts, and this led to opportunities to provide positive reading experience for their students. James's reading identity artifact illustrates a teacher who thoughtfully considers what he reads, what he plans on reading, and how he can model an active reading life for his students. Perhaps his profound experience teaching *The Wednesday Wars,* a high-interest young adult text, would not have happened if he had not prioritized reading outside of his professional responsibilities. An active reading life fosters other positive experiences with reading, as seen in Cheryl's and George's approaches to helping students select books. Their abilities to guide student selection of books suggest the value of reading widely and developing a strong knowledge of books that may interest students (Cremin et al., 2009). This knowledge of books can also extend to understanding one's own community and students, as demonstrated by Robert's effort to find texts that were more relevant and meaningful for his students.

Across profiles, participants' reading lives shift in response to changes in their personal and professional contexts. Cheryl describes turning to escapist fiction after exhausting days at work, while also curating reading lists for her students and community, a reflection of her dual identity as reader and mentor. George notes that he read more widely during a period of personal transition, using reading as a space for exploration and renewal. Robert's reading shifts as he prepared for fatherhood, with a noticeable increase in parenting books and resources relevant to his life stage. These examples show how reading practices evolve alongside participants' responsibilities, identities, and emotional needs. These patterns reinforce the idea that teachers' reading lives are dynamic rather than static, continually shaped by life circumstances, professional roles, and personal interests. Recognizing this fluidity is essential for understanding how teachers engage with reading in ways that are both personally meaningful and professionally responsive, and this may also help teachers to understand the many ways that students could engage with texts.

Recognizing the significance of teachers' personal reading lives has implications not just for teachers but also for the institutions that support them. The findings of this study suggest that teacher preparation programs, school systems, and departments should talk explicitly about the value of personal reading and dedicate time and energy to fostering the personal reading lives of teachers (Cremin & Scholes, 2024). This could take many forms, including intentionally providing opportunity for self-reflection through activities such as reading identity artifacts, reflective

drawings (Daisey, 2010), and literacy autobiographies (Brown, 1999; Neville & Johnson, 2022). At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that reading lives are dynamic (Merga, 2016; Sroka, 2021).

Participants in this study described positive and meaningful experiences with texts. The reading experiences shared by these teachers did not strictly align with ways students typically are expected to read texts in school. This suggests that teachers should reflect on their own reading lives as they consider ways to foster positive reading experiences for students–experiences that can take many forms (Gomez, 2005). James, Robert, and Cheryl emphasize the powerful relationship between text and others, while Cheryl and George demonstrate that positive experiences with texts often involve reading high-interest, self-selected texts outside of their professional responsibilities. Teacher preparation programs, educators, and schools should investigate ways for teachers and students to have similar positive experiences with texts by prioritizing shared reading experiences and allowing for greater autonomy in text selection.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the reading lives of the participants are shaped by personal experiences, professional demands, and evolving interests. This study underscores the importance of valuing, fostering, and exploring teachers' personal reading practices, not only for their own growth but also for the impact it has on how they view and take up reading in their classrooms. When the teachers in this study engaged in meaningful, self-selected reading, they gained deeper insight into the motivations, struggles, and joys that accompany reading experiences, making them better equipped to support students. By creating space for reflection, discussion, and choice in both teacher preparation programs and school settings, educators can potentially help make the connection between personal and professional reading, ensuring classroom reading experiences are authentic, engaging, and relevant to students' lives, leading to more positive experiences with texts both inside and outside the classroom.

Limitations

Participants' existing interest in reading likely shaped how they reflected on their reading lives throughout the study. Social and identity factors as English teachers may have influenced participants' self-reported reading habits. For instance, participants may have been aware of each other's reading behaviors and felt implicit pressure to read more or present themselves as more avid readers, which could have subtly shaped responses. Similarly, guilt-driven reading may have played a role, where participants felt internal or external pressure to read more than usual to align with their professional identity.

Future Areas for Research

This study contributes to previous research that has explored how teachers influence curriculum and text selection (Brauer, 2009; Brauer & Clark, 2008; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). However, little is known about how teachers' reading habits and attitudes regarding curriculum and text selection shape students' attitudes and perceptions of school reading. Future research could explore how teachers' reading habits, along with teacher-student interactions around text selection, impact both groups' beliefs about the texts they read in school.

Another potentially promising area of study involves the role of reading identity artifacts in fostering reflection and dialogue among teachers and students. Prior research has highlighted

how artistic creation supports self-expression and identity development (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010; McKay & Barton, 2018). The reading identity artifacts in this study proved to be a powerful tool for reflection among English teachers. Future research could investigate how students engage in creating their own reading identity artifacts and what insights this process might reveal about their self-perceptions as readers. Such work could deepen our understanding of how both teachers and students construct their reading identities and interact with texts in meaningful ways.

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Practitioner Article

Leveraging AI to Enhance Literacy in Students with ASD: Insights and Applications

Alexis Lawton
Speech-Language Pathologist, Walterboro, SC

ABSTRACT

Students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) face unique challenges in literacy development, often requiring more individualized support than traditional interventions can provide. This paper explores the potential of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as AI-powered notetaking, natural language processing (NLP) applications, image generation, and AI-powered tutoring, to enhance literacy outcomes for students with ASD. Drawing on both research evidence and clinical practice, the paper highlights how AI tools can offer personalized, adaptive learning experiences that promote key literacy skills such as reading fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and writing organization. These tools provide a flexible and engaging approach to learning that can increase confidence and reduce anxiety, particularly for students who struggle with traditional methods. The paper also offers practical strategies for educators, therapists, parents, and policymakers to effectively integrate AI tools into educational and therapeutic settings, ensuring a collaborative approach to supporting students with ASD. However, the author stresses that while AI offers promising support, it is most effective when used alongside traditional literacy strategies and continually assessed to ensure it meets the evolving needs of students with ASD.

KEYWORDS

autism spectrum disorder; literacy; artificial intelligence; interventions; educational settings

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental difference characterized by persistent challenges in social communication, restrictive behaviors, and repetitive patterns of activity (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2020). This definition was selected as it emphasizes the communication aspects of ASD, which are directly related to literacy development and central to my work as a speech-language pathologist. Students with ASD, regardless of age, often face unique literacy challenges, including difficulties with reading comprehension, summarizing information, and understanding text (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2020). These challenges can significantly impact their learning, particularly in the areas of literacy development. This paper specifically focuses on preschool-aged (ages 3–5) and school-aged children (ages 6–18) with ASD as they navigate literacy in educational settings. Traditional literacy strategies—such as phonics-based programs, comprehension drills, and small group instruction—have long been employed. However, these approaches may not always align with the needs of students with ASD, as they often do not address sensory sensitivities, rigid thinking, or challenges with social communication (Iannone, 2023).

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) has recently emerged as a promising tool for enhancing literacy instruction. Unlike traditional AI, which focuses on tasks like data analysis, generative AI can create human-like text, engage in dynamic conversations, and adapt to learners' needs, making it especially suited for environments where individualized support is critical (Solari

CONTACT **Alexis Lawton,** Speech-Language Pathologist, MS+30, CCC-SLP, Walterboro, SC; email alexis.lawton1@gmail.com.

et al., 2021). In education, generative AI holds the potential to reshape how students interact with content by offering flexible, adaptive learning experiences (Arciuli & Bailey, 2021). For students with ASD, this technology offers the potential to address specific literacy development challenges. While promising, the empirical research on the effectiveness of generative AI tools for students with ASD is still limited. Most existing studies focus on general education contexts, with little research exploring how these tools impact literacy outcomes for students with ASD (Yim, 2024). Moreover, concerns about biases in AI models exist, which could unintentionally reinforce stereotypes or fail to meet the diverse learning needs of students with ASD (Li et al., 2024). These gaps highlight the need for further research into how AI tools can be effectively designed and implemented to support literacy development in students with ASD. This paper explores the potential of generative AI tools in addressing these challenges and provides practical strategies for educators and therapists to implement them effectively.

Author's Perspective

As a school-based speech-language pathologist, I have worked with students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) for many years and have observed firsthand the difficulties they face in literacy development. Traditional literacy methods often fall short because they do not consider the unique cognitive and social-emotional needs of these students. For instance, some students struggle to connect text to their personal experiences, while others find it challenging to process complex language or abstract concepts. In my practice, I've begun incorporating generative AI tools to support literacy development, and I have observed promising results. AI offers a personalized, adaptive learning experience that traditional methods often cannot provide. These tools help students remain engaged, practice literacy in dynamic ways, and receive immediate, context-specific feedback, essential for students with ASD. This isn't just about innovation for its own sake—it's about finding real, effective solutions to the literacy challenges my students face every day. I am eager to share these insights and help others in the field explore how generative AI can transform literacy education for students with ASD.

Target Audience and Relevancy

This paper is intended for professionals working with students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), including educators, therapists, parents, and policymakers. It provides valuable insights into the integration of generative AI tools to support literacy development in these students. General and special education teachers will find practical guidance for implementing these tools in classrooms, while therapists, such as speech-language pathologists, can explore how AI enhances therapy sessions. Parents and caregivers will receive strategies for reinforcing literacy skills at home, ensuring consistent support beyond the classroom. Policymakers will benefit from evidence-based recommendations on incorporating AI into educational settings for students with special needs.

The literature review offers a comprehensive overview of AI tools in education and their potential to address literacy challenges for students with ASD. It identifies existing gaps in research while exploring AI's benefits, limitations, and practical applications. The review first discusses the context of ASD and literacy challenges, then examines AI's role in education, including specific tools like Grammarly, ChatGPT, and Otter.AI. It concludes with evidence and recommendations for how educators, therapists, and policymakers can effectively utilize these tools to meet the needs of students with ASD. By addressing the research gaps, this paper aims to

guide future studies and practices that can enhance educational experiences and outcomes for these students.

Method

I used a comprehensive and systematic approach to identify relevant studies on AI tools in literacy interventions for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). I searched academic databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, and ERIC, using keywords like "AI in education," "literacy interventions for ASD," "generative AI tools," and "technology in special education." Selection criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles published within the past ten years, prioritizing research on the impact of AI on literacy outcomes for students with ASD and the efficacy of specific tools (e.g., Grammarly, ChatGPT, Otter.AI). Additionally, I included studies on personalized learning and data-driven instructional strategies in special education. After screening, I narrowed down sources based on relevance, methodological rigor, and empirical data to ensure a comprehensive and up-to-date review.

AI Tools for Literacy Development in Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Literature Review and Practical Applications

Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have garnered attention in educational settings for their potential to provide personalized learning experiences, especially for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD; see Table 1 below) Students with ASD often face unique challenges in communication, social interaction, and academic performance, which traditional literacy instruction may not fully address (Popenici & Kerr, 2017). AI tools, by offering customized interventions and real-time feedback, present a promising solution for enhancing literacy outcomes (Gillon et al., 2017). Research highlights their potential in improving reading fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and writing skills (Solari et al., 2021), although research on their effectiveness in special education remains in the early stages (Rose et al., 2016). This paper explores how various AI tools—such as Otter.AI, Microsoft Word, Grammarly, Turnitin, ChatGPT, DALL-E 2, and Khanmigo—can be implemented to support literacy development in students with ASD.

AI-Powered Notetaking Tools

AI-powered notetaking tools like Otter.AI and Microsoft Word offer significant benefits for students with ASD. These tools can improve engagement and participation, particularly for those with learning difficulties (Provenzani et al., 2019). For example, Otter.AI's speech recognition system aids with reading fluency by providing real-time feedback on pronunciation and sentence structure (Knight et al., 2019). In one case, an eighth-grade student of mine with ASD, who experiences fine motor difficulties and struggles with handwriting, uses Otter.AI to transcribe spoken content during our virtual therapy sessions. Not only does the tool capture the verbal information, but it also summarizes key takeaways and breaks down the material into manageable sections (Bannur, 2023). This feature is particularly helpful for students with ASD, who often experience information overload and may struggle to prioritize essential details by organizing the material into clear, digestible segments, ensuring better comprehension and sustained engagement (Pangriptaningrum & Hermanto, 2022). The improvements in my student's ability to recall and apply key points were evident after a semester of using Otter.AI. The student showed a 25% increase in their ability to summarize and recall reading comprehension material, as measured by pre- and post-reading comprehension probes. Additionally, the student and their parent expressed increased independence in the sessions.

Educators can allow upper elementary to high school students to use Otter.AI during writing assignments to help them dictate their thoughts, which are then transcribed into text. As students become more comfortable using Otter.AI, they can gradually take on more independent tasks, completing writing assignments alongside their peers. During therapy sessions, therapists can provide a series of prompts, and the student dictates their responses to Otter.AI. The therapist can then review the text with the student, focusing on ways to improve clarity, organization, and grammar. By focusing on improving the quality of the written output, the therapist helps the student become more aware of how to structure and organize their ideas more effectively. Parents can also use Otter.AI to assist their child with dictation exercises, such as short stories or journaling. The child can dictate their thoughts aloud, focusing on generating ideas and expressing themselves verbally, rather than struggling with the mechanics of handwriting. This helps alleviate stress around writing and allows the child to feel more confident in their ability to communicate. However, challenges related to background noise, unclear speech, and specialized vocabulary remain. Despite these limitations, the overall impact of Otter.AI on the student's literacy development has been positive.

Similarly, Microsoft Word offers several AI-powered tools like Editor and Dictation, which are invaluable for students of various grade levels with ASD who have difficulty with writing composition, grammar, and organization. A sixth-grade student of mine, who struggles with writing structure, finds the Editor tool especially helpful for restructuring sentences for clarity and flow. The Dictation feature also eliminates the physical challenge of typing, allowing the student to focus more on generating ideas rather than on the motor difficulties associated with writing (Mukherjee et al., 2022). Over the course of two months, this student demonstrated a 40% improvement in writing organization and clarity, as evidenced by pre- and post-intervention writing samples. The student also reported feeling more independent in her writing process and less anxious about spelling and grammar. Teachers observed increased assurance and a reduction in avoidance behaviors typically associated with writing tasks.

Like Otter.AI, educators can use Dictation to help students express their ideas verbally, allowing them to focus on content rather than the mechanics of writing, and then refine their work using Editor for grammar and clarity. Therapists can incorporate Dictation for students who struggle with writing by transcribing their verbal responses, while Editor can guide students through grammar corrections and improve written expression. At home, parents can use these tools to assist with homework and creative writing activities, helping their child express ideas freely without the stress of writing by hand. By reviewing the Editor's feedback, stakeholders can reinforce grammar lessons in a supportive, non-judgmental way. While Microsoft's AI tools are beneficial, challenges remain. Over-reliance on AI suggestions can sometimes hinder the development of critical thinking skills and an understanding of writing conventions (Chen et al., 2022). Additionally, AI-generated feedback may not always be contextually appropriate, which emphasizes the importance of teacher or therapist oversight to ensure that students' intended meaning is preserved (Barrios-Fernandez et al., 2020).

Natural Language Processing (NLP)

Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools, which use machine learning techniques to understand and generate human language, have become increasingly important in literacy development. They have often been integrated into literacy platforms to support comprehension and text analysis (Ghilain et al., 2016). These tools, including Grammarly, TurnItIn, and ChatGPT, offer personalized, real-time feedback that helps students improve their writing skills (Dai et al., 2020).

For instance, Grammarly is an AI-powered writing assistant that provides feedback on grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and overall clarity. It helps students refine their writing by suggesting improvements in sentence structure, word choice, and punctuation (Cardon et al., 2021). Another sixth-grade student of mine with ASD, who struggles with grammar and sentence construction, showed significant improvement after using Grammarly. Over the course of their Individualized Education Plan (IEP), this student exhibited a 30% improvement in syntactical accuracy and a 40% improvement in overall clarity, as measured by pre- and post-assessments. The student reported feeling more confident in writing tasks, citing that immediate feedback helped them feel in control of their work (Fiok et al., 2021).

Educators can incorporate Grammarly to assist students with ASD across various grade levels who struggle with grammar, sentence structure, and writing organization. Students can type their thoughts into a word processor, and Grammarly will automatically highlight errors, offering suggestions for corrections. Therapists can use Grammarly to identify areas for improvement in grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. At home, parents can integrate Grammarly into the child's daily homework routine. As the child writes their assignments, they can use Grammarly to revise their work, receiving immediate, receptive feedback on grammar, spelling, and sentence structure.

Similarly, Turnitin—known for its plagiarism detection capabilities—also offers powerful NLP tools that assist students in improving writing coherence and syntax. The platform's feedback encourages students to focus on clarity and flow, which are essential components of literacy development (Hemment, 2023). My twelfth-grade student with ASD, who struggles with writing organization, improved in both overall organization and coherence of his writing, showing a 35% improvement in writing structure, as observed in teacher assessments and writing samples. For middle and high school students, teachers can assign essays and encourage students to submit drafts to Turnitin for feedback. The tool will check for plagiarism and originality and offer writing suggestions, helping students refine their work before final submission. This encourages students to engage with their writing more critically and become more aware of the importance of academic integrity.

ChatGPT, a generative AI tool, further supports students in creative and conversational contexts. Research suggests that AI models like ChatGPT can improve writing skills and reading comprehension (Zhou et al., 2020). I used ChatGPT with a student who struggles to write cohesive stories. The tool helped him generate ideas for characters, settings, and plot development, ultimately producing more structured narratives. Engaging in this interactive writing process allowed him to expand his vocabulary and improve the quality of his writing drafts. This approach is particularly effective for students with ASD, who often struggle with traditional social interactions and written communication (Kreinsen & Schulz, 2023).

Educators can allow students in middle and high school with ASD who struggle with organizing their thoughts to use ChatGPT to help them with narrative writing. For example, the tool can provide structured guidance by asking questions like, "Tell me about the main character," or "Describe the setting of your story." This interaction helps students generate coherent narratives while fostering independent thinking and creativity. In a therapy session, if a student struggles with generating ideas for a story, the student can provide a brief description of the story they want to write, and ChatGPT will offer suggestions for plot twists, character development, and settings. Parents can work alongside the child, using ChatGPT to refine ideas and guide them through the writing process. Over time, as the child becomes more comfortable with the tool, they can begin using ChatGPT independently to brainstorm and develop future writing assignments. This gradual

increase in autonomy helps build confidence in the child's writing abilities. However, while NLP tools like ChatGPT are effective in generating contextually relevant responses, they sometimes fail to provide detailed, targeted feedback on grammar and syntax unless specifically prompted by the user (Song, 2023). Therefore, these tools are best used as part of a broader curriculum that includes direct language instruction and teacher or therapist guidance (Lund, 2023).

Image Generation

Image generation tools, such as DALL-E 2, can also enhance literacy development, particularly for students who benefit from visual aids. Research shows that combining visual and textual learning can improve comprehension and recall, especially for students with ASD who may struggle with abstract concepts or verbal expression (Lurtz, 2021). These tools allow students to generate images from text prompts, bridging the gap between abstract and concrete thinking. For instance, my kindergarteners love using image generation, and one student in particular, with whom I worked, generated an image of a forest described in a story passage. This exercise helped her connect the details in the text to a visual representation, which improved her comprehension of the key story elements. After using DALL-E 2, the student demonstrated a 20% improvement in her ability to describe key elements of the story and an increase in vocabulary usage as she described the images she created.

Educators can ask students of any age to write descriptive passages about an imaginary scene or character and then use DALL-E 2 to generate images based on their descriptions. This visual representation of their writing helps students connect words to imagery, improving comprehension and stimulating creative thinking. In therapy, the therapist can prompt the student to describe their favorite place or a dream vacation and then use DALL-E 2 to generate images based on the student's descriptions. Parents can prompt the child to write a short story or describe a scene in detail and then use DALL-E 2 to generate images based on the child's descriptions. Incorporating both writing and visual elements into storytelling makes the writing process for students more interactive, enjoyable, and effective. While this tool can support comprehension, they do not directly address writing structure or grammar, making it important to integrate it with other literacy tools. Additionally, the quality of generated images depends heavily on the specificity of the prompt, which may require guidance to ensure the output aligns with the student's understanding (Derevyanko, 2023).

AI-Powered Tutoring

Khan Academy's Khanmigo is another AI tool that tailors responses based on student input, offering personalized feedback to support literacy development. Research suggests that AI tutors can improve engagement and learning outcomes by delivering immediate, context-specific feedback (McDowell, 2024). Khanmigo has helped my students break down complex passages by prompting them with questions that encourage critical thinking about the text. For example, my first-grade student with ASD, who struggled with analyzing character motivations, benefited from Khanmigo's guidance to explore character choices and their broader implications. After using the tool for several months, the student showed steady improvement in writing structure and the ability to articulate ideas more clearly. Despite its strengths, Khanmigo has limitations. It does not address non-cognitive barriers, such as drive or emotional regulation, which are often present in students with ASD (Pitt & Carless, 2021). Although Khanmigo helped one student improve his reading fluency and engagement by 18% over six weeks, the student still required additional support to manage emotional responses and build classroom confidence. AI tools like Khanmigo can play a

crucial role in fostering academic progress. However, they should be considered part of a broader, more comprehensive learning plan that includes teacher or therapist support (Rovagnati et al., 2021).

Educators can use Khanmigo for any grade level to tailor assignments to provide step-by-step guidance, breaking tasks and readings into smaller, manageable pieces. Therapists can use Khanmigo as a self-paced learning tool. If the student encounters difficult vocabulary or has trouble understanding key concepts in a passage, they can ask Khanmigo for explanations or clarifications. For practicing both math and reading skills at home, parents can use Khanmigo to work through practice problems in math or reading exercises. This individualized support allows the child to learn at their own pace, building confidence in their abilities while reinforcing foundational skills in a way that feels engaging and supportive.

Table 1: Overview of Generative AI Tools for Literacy

AI Tool	Description	Key Features	Potential Benefits for ASD Students	Studies/References
Otter.AI	Speech-to-text transcription and note-taking tool	Real-time transcription, customizable vocabulary, supports multilingual inputs	Provides students with ASD a way to transcribe speech to text, aiding in writing tasks, improving comprehension, and note-taking	Positively received by educators and therapists, who note its effectiveness in supporting children with neurodevelopmental disorders, including ASD (Barua et al., 2022).
Microsoft AI	A suite of AI-powered educational tools for reading support	Text-to-speech, translation, syllable highlighting, customizable fonts, and backgrounds	Assists students with reading fluency and comprehension; helps those with dyslexia or attention difficulties	Can facilitate a more inclusive learning environment, allowing educators to tailor their instruction to meet the unique needs of each student (Barua et al., 2022).
Grammarly	AI-powered writing assistant for grammar and style improvements	Grammar checks, writing style suggestions, tone detection, translation	Supports students with writing challenges; helps students with ASD improve their grammar, clarity, and expression	Research indicates that the use of such tools can lead to improved writing outcomes, as students become more aware of their writing mechanics and develop greater confidence in their abilities (Wiggins et al., 2019).
Turnitin	Plagiarism detection and writing feedback tool	Grammar checks, originality reports, and feedback from instructors	Helps students with ASD improve writing through feedback; teaches proper citation practices	Helps students understand the importance of proper citation and ethical considerations, which is particularly relevant for children with ASD who may require additional support in these areas (Barua et al., 2022).
ChatGPT	AI chatbot for personalized tutoring and conversation	Text generation, language comprehension, and problem-solving capabilities	Can engage students with ASD in personalized learning, offer real-time feedback, and adapt to different literacy levels	Can be used to facilitate low-pressure writing tasks, allowing children with ASD to generate and refine their ideas in a structured manner (Dixon et al., 2019).

Limitations and Future Directions

While integrating AI tools into literacy instruction for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) holds significant potential, several limitations must be addressed to optimize effectiveness (see Table 2 for a concise summary of these generative AI tools). Technological challenges include the varying quality, accessibility, and adaptability of AI tools and the requirement for stable internet and hardware, which may not be available in all educational settings. Many tools are not explicitly designed for ASD students, limiting their applicability for certain needs. Moreover, the implementation of these tools can differ widely across educational contexts due to factors such as classroom size, teacher familiarity, and support staff availability. AI tools may not be equally effective for all students with ASD, as their cognitive and emotional profiles vary widely, necessitating research into how these tools can be more effectively tailored to individual needs.

Ethical and privacy concerns are also significant, as AI tools often require the collection of sensitive student data, raising questions about data security, consent, and privacy. Since students with ASD may be particularly vulnerable to misuse of their data, clear guidelines for safeguarding privacy while utilizing the benefits of AI tools are crucial. Policymakers play a critical role in advocating for equitable access to these tools, ensuring adequate school funding, and training for educators and therapists. Moreover, they must address data privacy issues by implementing robust safeguards to protect students' sensitive information and ensure the development of best practices accessible to all students, regardless of socioeconomic status or disability.

Future research should focus on several areas: longitudinal studies to track the long-term effects of AI on literacy, academic progress, and social-emotional development; comparative research to identify the most effective AI tools for specific subgroups within the ASD population; and research into customizing AI systems to accommodate individual student strengths, challenges, and learning preferences. Additionally, ethical guidelines for data security and the integration of AI tools in educational settings need further exploration. Training programs for educators and therapists will be crucial for effective tool integration, while studies on integrating AI into holistic educational frameworks that blend traditional methods with AI interventions will help support both literacy and social-emotional growth.

Table 2: Summary of Generative AI Tools

AI Tool	Type of Tool	Age/Grade Level	Applicability for ASD Literacy	Limitations
DALL-E 2	Image generation	Preschool to high school (PreK-12th grade)	Assists in visualizing abstract concepts in reading or writing	The images generated may not accurately represent the intended concepts, which can be problematic for children with ASD who rely on visual aids for understanding (Saharia et al., 2022).
Khanmigo	AI-powered tutoring	Preschool to high school (PreK-12th grade)	Provides one-on-one tutoring, including literacy skills	Potential to suppress critical thinking and communication skills by providing answers without encouraging deeper engagement with the material (Huang, 2023).
Otter.AI	Speech-to-text	Elementary to high school (Grades 3-12)	Supports students in converting speech to text for written assignments	Reliance on clear audio input; background noise or unclear speech can lead to inaccuracies in transcription, which may confuse students who depend on accurate text representation for learning (Abouammoh et al., 2023). Additionally, it does not inherently teach

				social skills or contextual understanding, which are crucial for children with ASD (Sallam, 2023).
Microsoft AI	Reading support	Elementary to high school (Grades 3-12)	Enhances reading fluency, comprehension, and engagement	Suggestions may not always align with the individual learning styles or needs of children with ASD, potentially leading to frustration or disengagement (Sallam et al., 2023). Furthermore, students may become overly dependent on technology for generating ideas and structuring their writing (Hung, 2023).
Grammarly	Writing assistant	Middle school to college (Grades 6-12, higher education)	Helps improve writing quality for students with ASD	Children with ASD may struggle with nuanced language use, and Grammarly's algorithms may not fully grasp the subtleties of their writing intentions (Derevyanko, 2023). Additionally, the tool does not address the emotional or social aspects of writing, which are particularly important for children with ASD who may need support in expressing their thoughts and feelings effectively (Truong, 2023).
Turnitin	Plagiarism detection	Middle school to college (Grades 6-12, higher education)	Supports writing improvement through feedback	This emphasis on compliance with academic standards can lead to anxiety and may stifle the creative expression that is essential for students' engagement and learning (Alneyadi & Wardat, 2023).
ChatGPT	Conversational AI	Middle school to college (Grades 6-12, higher education)	Personalized tutoring, helps with communication and comprehension	Additionally, the quality of responses generated by ChatGPT can vary, and it may not always provide accurate or contextually appropriate information, leading to confusion (Choudhry, 2023).

Conclusion

Integrating AI tools into literacy interventions for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) offers significant promise for enhancing educational outcomes. Both research and clinical experience highlight AI's potential to address the literacy challenges faced by students with ASD, particularly in areas such as reading fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and comprehension. AI tools provide personalized, adaptive learning experiences that engage students in ways traditional methods may not fully achieve. However, it is essential that AI complements, not replaces, established intervention methods. While AI can enhance traditional approaches, human interaction, direct literacy instruction, and ongoing assessments remain foundational for success.

A key takeaway from the literature is the necessity for customization and personalization in AI tools. Given the diversity within the ASD population, AI tools must adapt to individual learning profiles to be effective. This calls for dynamic systems capable of meeting students' unique needs. Moreover, the collaborative role of educators, therapists, and parents is crucial for ensuring the effective use of these tools and alignment with students' evolving needs.

AI's ability to analyze large datasets is another promising aspect for improving literacy outcomes. By tracking student performance in real-time, AI tools can identify specific literacy challenges and offer data-driven insights, helping educators and therapists tailor instructional strategies accordingly. This approach ensures that interventions remain personalized and responsive, fostering long-term literacy growth. For educators, therapists, and policymakers, the

next step is to adopt a holistic approach that integrates AI tools with traditional methods. By continuously adapting and refining AI-driven strategies, we can create more equitable, engaging learning environments for students with ASD, helping them overcome literacy challenges and improve academic outcomes. Thoughtful integration of AI into special education holds exciting possibilities, and with careful planning, we can ensure these tools contribute to the long-term success and well-being of students with ASD.

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Teaching Tips

Teaching with a Twist: Embracing Appalachian (and Other) Dialects—Y'all Ready for This?

Melissa Comer
Tennessee Tech University, Oak Ridge, TN

ABSTRACT

Situated within the Appalachian region, I celebrate dialect diversity within the courses I teach. Appalachian English, a recognized marginalized language variety, is my own dialectical heritage and that of my students. As such, I reinforce the notion that home languages, i.e., dialects, have a place in English language arts instruction in a direct, not peripheral, manner. To build students up in their use of their home languages, to help children see the value in native speech patterns, and to know that no single voice can represent an entire region, engaging in language and culture studies that reinforce the dialect and region in a positive manner is a must. Focusing on books that promote the Appalachian area and people group in a way that is free of stereotypes is central to supporting the acceptance of this marginalized language variety. Additionally, including intentional activities that highlight the richness of language serves to celebrate students' voices and cultural histories.

KEYWORDS

Appalachian English; marginalized-language variety; dialect acceptance in schools; writing

Growing up poor in the rural South, the Appalachian Mountains were my playground. Traipsing their hills, I learned to appreciate and respect nature. Using empty plastic milk jugs as sleds, my siblings and I discovered the joy of flying down a hard-packed dirt hill at a breakneck speed. It was the closest we ever came to bobsledding. We dug for buried treasures, skipped rocks across ponds, and chased lightin' bugs (a.k.a., fireflies). Attending a K–12 community school, I knew my teachers, some of them personally; intuitively, I recognized they cared about me as a student and as a person. They held me accountable for my academics and my actions. Teaching holistically, they adopted Maslow's hierarchy of needs, realizing that education is more than just academics, a lesson I take with me into my own teacher education courses.

Looking back, it may be that my glasses have a rose-colored tint. School was not perfect (nor do I think it needs to be). There was no diversity, at least not in the most commonly viewed terms of race and ethnicity. And, truthfully, there were few socio-economic differences. We were all poor, living paycheck to paycheck or on government assistance. We all spoke the same rich Appalachian dialect, so linguistic variations were, for the most part, nonexistent. Regardless, many of us secretly carried the stigma of speaking hillbilly (a term I overheard a group of non-native well-meaning teachers call our speech). Sensing that speaking in this manner brought with it a degree of pity, I determined to eradicate, or at least hide, my dialectical heritage. As such, I erased 'youns' and 'y'all' from my conversations, quit saying 'reckon' and 'fixin' too, and even contemplated calling my grandparents something other than 'mamaw' and 'papaw.' My new voice was uncomfortable, as if I were wearing someone else's skin. In essence, I no longer trusted, as Lyon (2014) calls it, my first voice—"the one tuned by the people and place that made [me]" (p.

CONTACT **Dr. Melissa Comer**, Professor, Department of Curriculum & Instruction, Tennessee Tech University, Oak Ridge, TN; email mcomer@tntech.edu.

187). Little did I know then that this was the beginning of my linguistic journey, one that would follow me into adulthood and my own teaching career.

Appalachian English, a recognized marginalized language variety (Clark & Hayward, 2013; Cummings-Lilly & Forrest-Bank, 2019; Siegel, 2006), plays a critical role in shaping the identities and experiences of those of us who call this region home. As such, it is essential to affirm that our home language, i.e., dialect, occupy a central place in English language arts instruction rather than being relegated to the periphery. By fostering an environment where students can appreciate the value of their native speech patterns (and other rich dialects), we can help them understand that no single voice can encapsulate the entirety of a region (Winchester, 2020). This approach necessitates engaging in language and culture studies that positively reinforce one's dialect and its associated heritage. Central to this effort is the selection of literature that portrays the Appalachian people, their language, and their stories in an authentic manner, free from stereotypes (see Table 1 for an Appalachian children's and young adult booklist). It should be noted that although this paper focuses on the Appalachian dialect and culture, the premise discussed can and should be adapted to other linguistic patterns.

Table 1: Appalachian Children's and Young Adult Book List

Title	Author(s)	Copyright	Publisher
Down Cut Shin Creek: The Pack Horse Librarians of Kentucky	Kathi Appelt & Jean Cannella Schmitzer	2001	Harper Collins Publishers
Ashpet: An Appalachian Tale	Joanne Compton	1994	Holiday House
Knoxville, Tennessee	Nikki Giovanni	1994	Scholastic Trade Publishers
When Uncle Took the Fiddle	Libba Moore Gray	1999	Orchard Books
That Book Woman	Heather Henson	2008	Atheneum Books
Saturdays and Teacakes	Lester Laminack	2004	Peachtree Publishers
With a Hammer for My Heart	George Ella Lyon	2014	The University Press of Kentucky
Molasses Man	Kathy May	2000	Holiday House
A is for Appalachia: The Alphabet Book of Appalachian Heritage	Linda Hager Pack	2002	Harmony House Publishers.
When I Was Young in the Mountains	Cynthia Rylant	1982	Reading Rainbow
The Relatives Came	Cynthia Rylant	1985	Simon and Schuster
Silver Packages	Cynthia Rylant	1997	Orchard Books
Appalachia: The Voices of Sleeping Birds	Cynthia Rylant	1998	Harcourt Brace and Company
Affrilachia: Poems	Frank X. Walker	2020	Ohio University Press Distributed Titles
The Serpent King	Jeff Zentner	2016	Crown Books for Young Readers/ Random House

Furthermore, including intentional activities—such as the one described below—that celebrate the richness of language patterns honors students' voices and recognizes their cultural histories. This approach encourages students to explore both their own dialects and the linguistic heritages of others. It also has the potential to engage students in critical thinking, encouraging

them to question their own assumptions and examine how language and culture intersect through an authentic lens. Additionally, the multimodal approach of connecting students' spoken language experiences and cultural backgrounds to written text, along with visual support, improves comprehension, engagement, and literacy development. This is particularly beneficial for students whose dialects differ from the standard form taught in school, as it makes learning more relevant and accessible by affirming their unique linguistic identities. Exploring different linguistic and cultural perspectives, the activity also provides students with a broader lens through which to analyze text, particularly the author's background and intended audience.

Appalachian Language Book

Using an online bookmaker like Bookemon (bookemon.com), students create a book that explores Appalachian vocabulary, phrases, and pronunciations. They build on the language patterns of their life and/or the area, explaining the meaning of the entries. For example, most of us who are native to Appalachia understand that Blackberry Winter is a cold spell that occurs in May, just as the wild blackberry bushes begin to bloom. We also know that we should avoid a polecat or skunk at all costs. In creating the book, students celebrate the region's linguistic richness by highlighting the uniqueness of the dialect and the culture that influences it. The online digital tool allows students to write and illustrate a book they can share with each other, their families, and their community. Beyond this, Bookemon also permits students to purchase their books in hard copy, becoming, in essence, a published author. See Table 2 for assignment details and Table 3 for its associated rubric as well as a modified example, i.e., *Rednecks, Hillbillies, and Hicks: Exploring the Language and Culture of a Place*, of the assignment I created at https://www.bookemon.com/flipread/1040897/rednecks-hillbillies-and-hicks&refid=l8w2p.

Table 2: Appalachian Language and Culture Book Assignment Details

Assignment Component	Description and Directions
Objective	The goal of this assignment is to research, create, and publish an online book that explores the rich language and culture of the Appalachian region. You will use a digital tool like Bookemon to design and present your findings in an engaging and informative format.
Assignment Overview	Conduct thorough research on various aspects of Appalachian language and culture. Focus on topics such as dialect, folklore, music, art, food, traditions, and contemporary issues facing the region. Utilize credible sources, including books, articles, interviews, and online resources as well as your own personal knowledge or experience with the dialect and culture.
Content Development	Organize your research into coherent sections. Each section should highlight a different aspect of Appalachian culture and/or language. Sections to include: **Introduction** (overview of Appalachian culture and language**), Dialects & Linguistic Features** (examples of Appalachian grammar, vocabulary, phrases, and their meanings, etc.). **Cultural Characteristics** (descriptions and/or illustrations of traits unique to the area). Note: You may include other sections/things of your choice.
Book Creation	Using Bookemon or a similar digital tool, design your online book. Pay attention to layout, visuals, and multimedia elements (such as images, videos, or audio clips) that enhance the reader's experience. Ensure that your book is visually appealing and easy to navigate.
Citations and References	Include a bibliography of your sources at the end of your book. Use a consistent citation style (e.g., APA, MLA) to acknowledge the resources you consulted.

Table 3: Appalachian Language and Culture Book Rubric

Criterion	*Excellent (4)*	*Good (3)*	*Fair (2)*	*Poor (1)*
Content Accuracy	Thoroughly researched, accurate information with credible sources.	Mostly accurate with minor errors; generally credible.	Some inaccuracies; misrepresents key concepts.	Numerous inaccuracies; lacks credible sources.
Cultural Representation	Rich and nuanced portrayal; includes diverse Appalachian perspectives.	Good representation; lacks depth in some areas.	Limited representation; focuses narrowly on culture.	Misrepresents or oversimplifies culture.
Language and Dialect	Deep understanding of language and dialect exhibited with several authentic examples.	Adequate understanding: some authentic examples present.	Limited understanding: few examples or authenticity is questionable.	Little understanding; no authentic examples.
Engagement and Accessibility	Highly engaging; accessible to a wide audience.	Generally engaging; mostly accessible, with some challenging sections.	Somewhat engaging; may be difficult for certain audiences.	Not engaging, confusing, or inaccessible to most readers.
Visual and Multimedia Elements	Excellent use of visuals and multimedia; enhances understanding and engagement.	Good use of visuals and/or multimedia that mostly supports content.	Limited visuals or multimedia and/or visuals that may not enhance understanding.	Little to no visuals or multimedia; detracts from the content.
Organization, Structure & Editing	Well-organized, virtually error-free, clear structure that enhances comprehension and flow.	Acceptable organization, a few errors, some sections are unclear.	Poorly organized, several errors, difficult to follow the main points.	Disorganized, an abundance of errors, lacks coherent structure.
Citations and References	All sources cited correctly in a consistent style; comprehensive bibliography.	Adequate number of sources present, cited correctly and consistently	Limited sources present; several inconsistencies or some missing citations.	Few or no citations; fails to acknowledge sources.

Conclusion

O'Mahoney (2018) reminds us that we need to raise awareness among our educators. By doing so, we can integrate more culturally appropriate instructional practices, including dialect acceptance. "In a society," O'Mahoney argues, "where it is felt that no ethnicity, religion, and gender should be considered better or worse than any others, it follows that a person's language(s) or dialect(s) should likewise not be associated with any kind of stigma" (p. 221). He, of course, is right. Poet Rhina Espaillat (1998), when told by her father to speak "English outside this door, Spanish inside," questioned, "But who can divide the world, the word (*mundo y palabra*) from any child?" (p. 60). Herein lies the most simple and critical answer: No one. Words, languages, cultures, and yes, dialects, are part of who we are; they make us, us. As such, they deserve to be explored and welcomed in the English classroom.

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Teaching Tips

Combining Picturebooks and Poetry as Blended Genres to Teach Life Science

William P. Bintz
Kent State University, Kent, OH

ABSTRACT

This article introduces the concept of combining poetry and picturebooks as blended genres and shares an instructional strategy that K–8 teachers can use with blended genres to help students learn important concepts in ELA and life science. It begins with background on the important relationship between science and literature. Next, it describes fundamental differences between paired text and blended genres and connects blended genres to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Then, it shares examples of blended genres and a sample of an instructional strategy that can be used with blended genres to teach important concepts in Life Science. It ends with a final thought.

KEYWORDS

science and literature integration; intertextuality; blended genres, picturebooks and poetry; inquiry-based learning

> There is much to be learned from both poetry and science, and when they are combined, the potential for learning grows.
>
> (McClure, 2013, p. 13)

I teach a graduate reading course entitled Reading in the Content Areas. A major goal of the course is for me to demonstrate, and my students to experience, the power and potential of picturebooks as curricular resources to teach content material across the curriculum. I begin each class session by reading aloud a selected picturebook from a different content area and for a specific purpose.

Recently, I read aloud *I Wonder* (Harris, 2013) to highlight wondering as an important process in learning science and introduce the importance of inquiry in learning. This picturebook tells the story of Eva, a little girl who likes to take walks with her mother. On one walk, Eva wonders and poses questions to her mother about gravity, life cycles, and the vastness of the universe. While neither knows the correct answers, her mother reminds Eva that wondering is the first step to understanding and it is always okay to say, "I don't know."

Afterwards, I invited students to share their responses to the picturebook. All responses were thoughtful, but one response caught my attention. One student stated,

> This picturebook reminded me of taking walks with my grandfather around his farm when I was little. Like Eva, I'd asked lots of questions, too. And like the mother, my grandfather listened, too. It also reminded me of the poem, "I Like to Wonder Off Alone." I read this poem in high school, and I've never forgotten it. As you were reading, I found myself seeing all kinds of similarities between the picturebook and the poem.

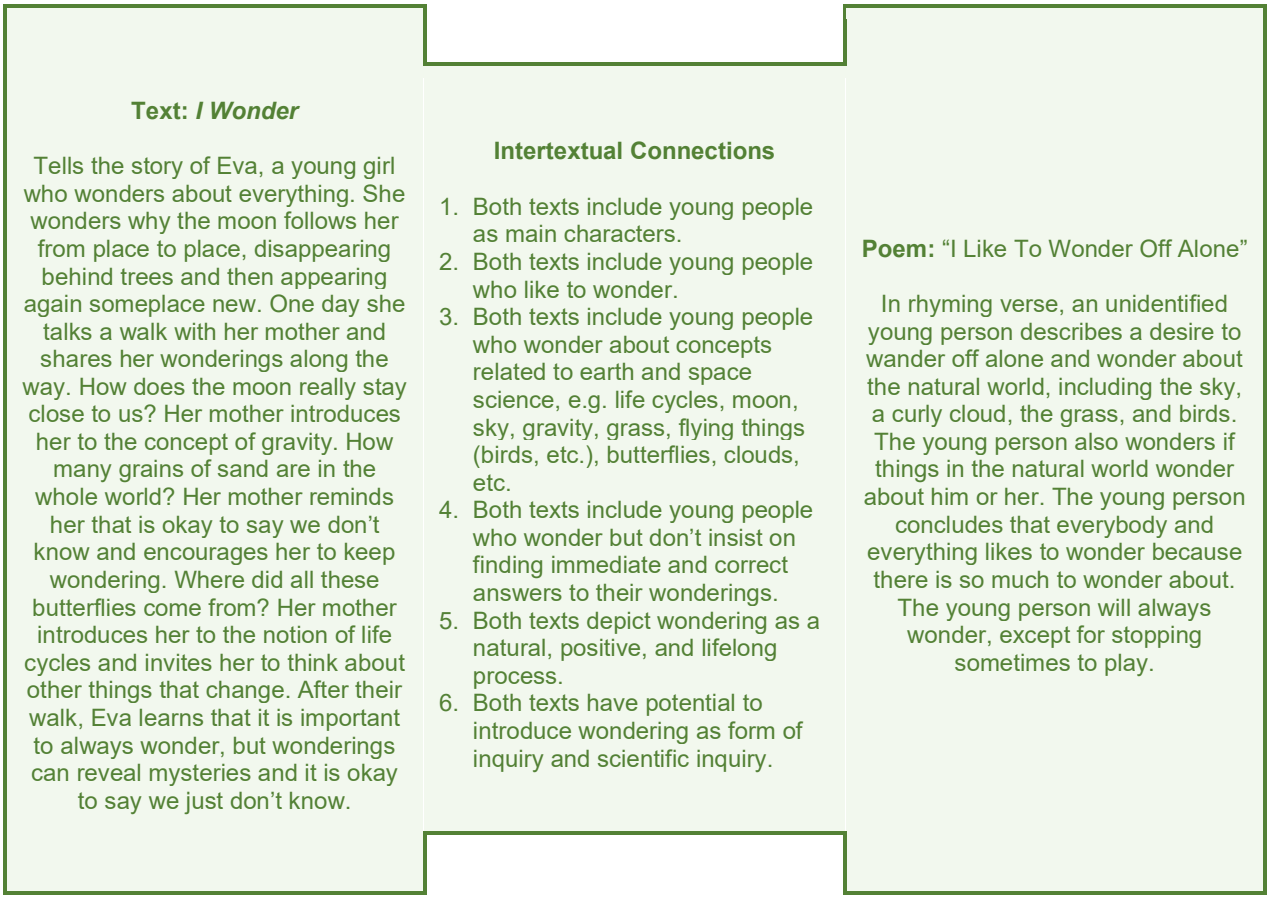
CONTACT **Dr. William P. Bintz**, Professor of Literacy Education, College of Education, Health, and Human Services; School of Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum, Kent State University, Kent, OH; wbintz@kent.edu.

This response was interesting and insightful, but not the first of its kind. After reading aloud picturebooks, I often hear students saying they were making personal connections to the picturebook during the read aloud. In this instance, however, this student's response, unbeknownst to her and me at the time, created a paired text. Traditionally, a paired text consists of two texts that are interrelated in some way, and the texts reflect the same or similar genre (Bintz, 2015). Her paired text was different. *I Wonder* (Harris, 2013) and "I Like to Wonder Off Alone" (Wynne, 2023) is a paired text but consist of two different genres, one a picturebook and the other a poem. In many ways, her paired text was a blended genre.

I started to wonder about the idea of blended genres. I have read *I Wonder* several times, but was unfamiliar with the poem, "I Like to Wonder Off Alone." I wondered what connections I would make between the picturebook and the poem. I read the picturebook again, then the poem, and completed an H-Map to record my connections between the two texts (see Figure 1).

I used an H-Map to record my intertextual connections between this blended genre. I wrote the title of the picturebook at the top of the left vertical column, and the title of the poem at the top of the right vertical column. I wrote the heading, Intertextual Connections, at the top of the rectangle to connect the left and right columns. During and after reading, I recorded important ideas from the picturebook in the left column, and important ideas from the poem in the right column. In the middle, I recorded important intertextual connections from this blended genre. I found this instructional strategy helpful for recording and reflecting on my intertextual connections.

Figure 1: H-Map



In the end, this whole experience sparked my curiosity about the idea of blended genres. It generated my interest in developing other blended genres across the curriculum that I could use with students in my own courses. Specifically, I wanted to develop and share blended genres that English/Language Arts (ELA) and science teachers could collaboratively implement in the K–8 classroom.

The purpose of this article is to share picturebooks and poetry as blended genres and an instructional strategy to teach important concepts in ELA and life science. I focus on ELA and science for several reasons. One, I am a former middle and high school English/Language Arts teacher with a personal interest in this content area. Two, I am presently a teacher educator in literacy education with a professional interest in advocating for the use of literature, specifically picturebooks, to support student learning across the K–12 curriculum. Three, to date, I have developed blended genres by pairing picturebooks with poems in English/Language Arts and am currently developing blended genres in English/Language Arts & Social Studies and English/Language Arts & Mathematics. However, I have not developed blended genre in English/Language Arts & Science. This whole experience inspired me to do so.

With this experience and background in mind, I began by providing background on the relationship between science and literature, describing differences between paired text and blended genres, and connecting blended genres with Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Next, I share examples of blended genres and a sample of an instructional strategy to teach important concepts in Life Science. I end with a final thought.

Science & Literature

> Storytelling will bring the science to children.
>
> (Kaser, 2001, p. 355)

The value of literature and storytelling to teach and learn science has long been recognized by both science and literacy specialists (Dagher & Ford, 2005). Much research continues to indicate that literature is a valuable tool to support growth and development across science and literacy (Broemmel et al., 2021). Consequently, and fortunately, literature is increasingly being included as an integral component to the science curriculum (Rice, 2002).

Moreover, much research indicates that picturebooks are effective instructional tools to integrate science and literacy (Saul, 2004). Among other things, picturebooks help students "ask and address questions about science content…and build their capacity to engage in scientific reasoning" (Hapgood & Palincsar, 2007, p. 55). Poetry is also an effective tool to integrate science and literacy.

Poetry

> Instead of coexisting as parallel lanes without intersection, poetry and science can cross over as one merges lanes.
>
> (Brown, 2015, p. 1)

Historically, poetry has been a popular and flexible literary genre, a way to experiment with rhyme, rhythm, repetition, and a variety of poetic formats. Poetry supports abstract thought and provides a means to communicate "complex ideas in symbolic ways" (Graves, 1992, p. 163). It also helps develop rich vocabulary and explore "poetic devices like metaphor, simile, imagery, alliteration, and rhyme" (Kane & Rule, 2004, p. 665).

Poetry offers many benefits for readers of all ages and backgrounds. One benefit is that poetry is often brief. Vardell and Wong (2015) state,

> poetry has an advantage in that it typically consists of fewer words than expository-prose passages, and poems can be read and reread in very little time. The brevity of poetry is less intimidating to children who may be overwhelmed by longer prose and streams of new vocabulary, especially students acquiring English as a new language. (p. 30)

Poetry is also multisensory. It allows readers and writers to experience all five senses, especially through metaphor and imagery. Poetry also supports interdisciplinary teaching and learning across the curriculum (Vardell & Wong, 2015), including science (Kane & Rule, 2004).

Science

> Historically, science and poetry have been viewed as dichotomies, or at least "unlikely partners."
>
> (Vardell & Wong, 2014, p. 15)

In large part, this is because scientists and poets perceive the world through different lenses and reflect different mindsets. Instead of dichotomies, however, science and poetry have had a long symbiotic relationship. Webb (1948) stated,

> Poets find science, in the form of nature, more interesting than love…Practically every bird, flower, and tree has been studied with poetic insight. The sea, the mountains, the sky, the fields, the list of nature's wonders that have inspired poets is almost endless. (p. 30)

More recently, Hoffman (2002) described this relationship as "two luxuriating contra entropic glories of the human spirit walking hand in hand" (p. 137).

Today, much research indicates that science and poetry are interdependent fields of study (Bono, in Kurtz and Loewenstein, 2007), and incorporating poetry in the teaching of science offers many benefits for students (Rule et al., 2004). These benefits are based on three important concepts: transfer, process, and goal. Transfer recognizes that "spontaneous transfer of useful knowledge across domains is a powerful cognitive tool" (Kurtz & Loewenstein, 2007, p. 335). In this case, the domains are science and poetry. Process recognizes that the "processes of science and literacy learning are similar and may help the development of each discipline" (Akerson, in Vardell & Wong, 2015, p. 1). Goal recognizes that science and poetry share a common goal and "emerge from an attempt to understand the universe around us—and from a wish to share that understanding with others in words" (Hoffman, 2002, p. 140). Additional benefits of integrating poetry and science include:

- Poetry plays a role in *humanizing science* and functions as a *creative trespasser* to end the cold war between science and poetry (Watts, in Rule, 2001).
- Poetry uses images and metaphors which can clarify and intensify the meaning of science content (Rule et al., 2004).
- Poetry invites and enables scientists to quickly capture and express new ideas.

- Poetry offers a way for scientists to play with language, to reframe concepts, and to engage with aesthetics to capture readers in ways that are not possible with scientific articles (Silverton, 2015).
- Poetry that reflects good science leads to a fuller inquiry, interpretation, and appreciation of science.

Paired Text and Blended Genres

> All texts are tinted with echoes and reverberations of other texts.
>
> (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 91)

Traditionally, a paired text consists of two texts that are conceptually related in some way (Harste, Short, Burke, 1988). It is a curricular resource and instructional tool to teach the concept of intertextuality, a term commonly referred to as making connections between texts (Harvey & Goudvis, 2017). Intertextuality is an important concept in reading and learning. For example, one College and Career Readiness Reading Anchor Standard (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) states the need for students to "Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take" (Integration of Knowledge and Ideas section, para. 3). Paired text is one way to put intertextuality into action and address this standard in the classroom. A blended genre is also a paired text. It consists of two texts with each text representing a different literary genre. For example, the picturebook *The Life Cycle of an Emperor Penguin* (Kalman, 2006) and the poem "Dark Emperor" (Sidman, 2010) is an enjoyable and informative blended genre that focuses on the topic of life cycle.

Blended Genres, CCSS, and NGSS Standards

The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS, 2013) states that "literacy skills are critical to building knowledge in science" (see Appendix M, p. 1). Similarly, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in literacy identify skills for high proficiency in literacy, and the Common Core Reading Anchor Standards (CCRAS) identify skills for high proficiency in reading. To ensure consistency, NGSS identifies connections between CCSS literacy and CCRAS reading skills and science content demands in grades 6–12. Blended genres is a curricular resource that, when used with instructional strategies, can integrate NGSS, CCSS, and CCRAS standards.

Blended Genres and Instructional Strategies

In this section, I share an example of a blended genre and a sample of an instructional strategy that teachers can use to teach important content area material in Life Science. I created this sample to share specifically with K–8 ELA and science teachers, but the instructional strategy can be used with any blended genre across the curriculum.

First, however, I want to share a two-step process that teachers can use to teach this strategy, along with the other strategies, to help students make intertextual connections between the two texts in any blended genre. The two-step process involves teacher demonstration and student engagement. For demonstration, teachers can do the following: 1) organize students in pairs or small groups (3–4) to support collaboration and discussion, 2) prepare and distribute a blank copy of the instructional strategy to each student, 3) display a selected blended genre to students and introduce each text with a picturewalk, introduction, book chat, etc., 4) demonstrate

the instructional strategy by reading aloud both texts, pausing at strategic times, e.g., major episodic changes in the text, 5) identify examples of intertextual connections between the texts and record these connections on the instructional strategy displayed to the entire class, e.g. PowerPoint, and 6) as a culminating experience, invite student discussions on the paired text, reflections on the intertextual connections, and 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.

Life Science

Summer Birds: The Butterflies of Maria Merian (Engle, 2010) is a picturebook biography of Maria Merian, naturalist, field scientist, and artist. Born in 1647, she secretly captured, fed, and observed insects that at the time people considered "beasts of the devil." She observed that many insects, especially butterflies, go through developmental life cycles. Over time and with persistent observation, she discovered metamorphosis and nine new species of butterflies.

"Maria Sibylla Merian, January 1670" (Ackerman, 2020) is a biographical poem about Maria Merian. Here is an excerpt.

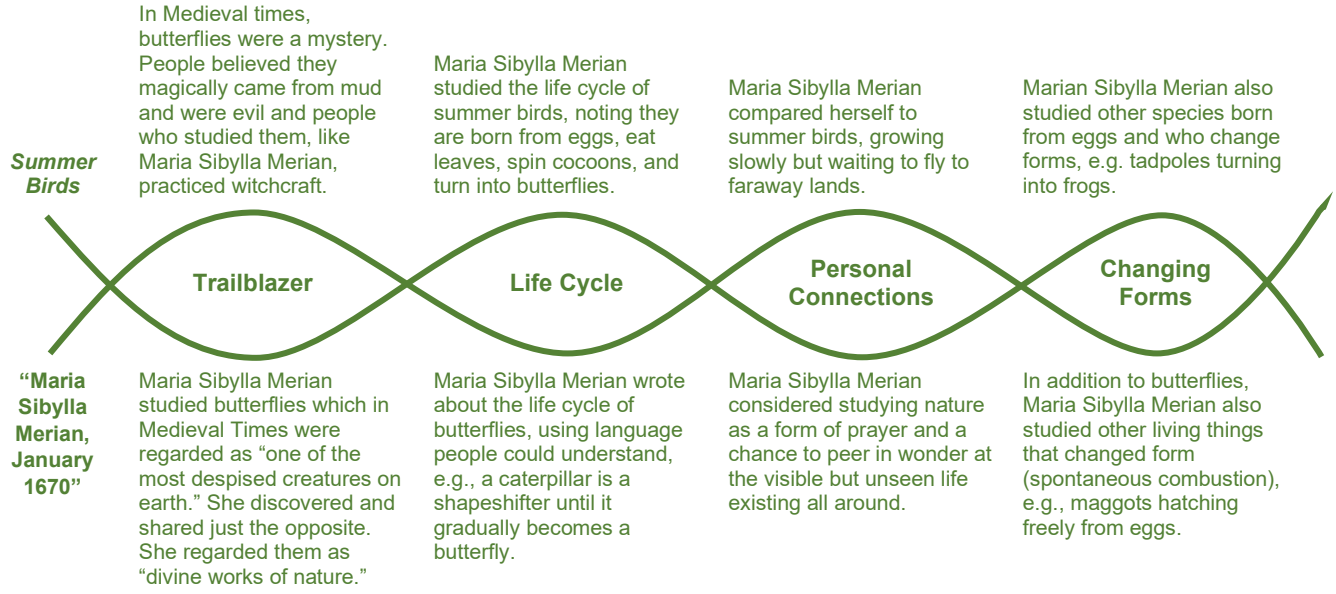
Maria Sibylla Merian, January 1670

There was a way of beholding nature
that was like a form of prayer.
When she painted a caterpillar,
she limned the whole bracing saga of its life
from birth, instars, and metamorphosis…
She chose to reveal the smallest,
most despised creatures on earth
as divine works of nature…
and peer in wonder at the visible
but unseen life all around them,
dining, sparring, molting, mating…
Here is a caterpillar's eye, her paintings said,
look how cleverly it's designed!
Here is a spider's toe with tiny hairs.
Can you imagine how they tread?
Here is time elapsing inside a chrysalis,
where caterpillar becomes butterfly,
shape-shifting with infinite gradualness
from one unlikely form to another,
its behavior and purpose radically changed.
Come closer, I will show you.

Figure 2 illustrates Interwoven Intertextual Connections as an instructional strategy to represent intertextual connections between this blended genre (for additional strategies, see Bintz, 2015). This strategy invites individual students, pairs of students, or small groups of students to create and represent intertextual connections they consider most important across the blended genre. Afterward, students share their connections with the whole class, noting and discussing similarities and differences between connections.

Teachers can also use this strategy to create and represent their own intertextual connections and share them with the class. This is important for three reasons. One, it demonstrates active engagement by teachers. Second, it allows students to see and understand connections different from their own. Third, in the event students do not recognize some important connections, it allows teachers to bring those connections to the attention of students.

Figure 2: Interwoven Intertextual Connections



Final Thought

According to Vardell and Wong (2015), "Science is rich in content and poetry offers powerful language. Together they can both inform and inspire" (p. 15). The student vignette at the beginning of this article inspired me to develop blended genres for use in the English/Language Arts and science classrooms. I hope this article will inform and inspire ELA and science teachers to use blended genres of picturebooks and poems as an instructional tool not only to teach life science, but also earth and space, and physical science. In addition, I hope this article will inspire students and teachers to develop and use their own blended genres.

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Table 1: Additional Blended Genres in Life Science

	Topic	Picturebook	Poetry
Grade Band K–4	Charles Darwin	*The Tree of Life: Charles Darwin* (Sis, 2016)	Darwin (Gunawardana, 2016)
	Charles Darwin	*When Darwin Sailed the Sea* (Long, 2020)	Charles Darwin (Monem, 2019)
	Charles Darwin	*One Beetle Too Many* (Lasky, 2012)	Forgiven (Milne, 1927)
	Evolution	*The Story of Life: A First Book About Evolution* (Barr, 2015)	Evolution (Scieszka, 2004)
	Evolution	*Grandmother Fish: A Child's First Book of Evolution* (Tweet, 2016)	Evolution Song (Wing, 2005)
	Natural Selection	*Galapagos George* (George, 2014)	The Loneliest Creature (Lewis, 2007)
	Life Cycle	*The Life Cycle of an Emperor Penguin* (Kalman, 2006)C	Dark Emperor (Sidman, 2010)

	Life Cycle	*The Ugly Butterfly: An Imaginative Story About the Life Cycle of a Caterpillar* (Espinoza, 2021)	Chrysalis Diary (Fleischman, 1988)
	Life Cycle	*Spring Peepers are Calling* (Billings, 1978)	Listen for Me (Sidman, 2005)
	Life Cycle	*Beavers* (Gibbons, 2014)	Under Ice (Sidman, 2014)
	Life Cycle	*Song of the Water Boatman and Other Poems* (Sidman, J., 2005)	Water Boatmen (Fleischman, 1988)
	Life Cycle	*Coral Reefs: A Journey Through an Aquatic World Full of Wonder* (Chin, 2016)	How Coral Reefs are Made from Tiny Animals (polyps) not Much Bigger than a Pinhead (Lewis, 2007)
Grade Band 5–8	Life Cycle	*Cicada* (Tan, 2019)	Cicadas (Fleischman, 1988)
	Life Cycle	*The Emperor's Egg* (Jenkins, 1999)	If I Were an Egg (Sidman, 2000)
	Life Cycle	*And the Bullfrogs Sing: A Life Cycle Begins* (Harrison, 2020)	Bullfrog (Lewis, 1998)
	Life Cycle	*The Tiny Seed* (Carle, 2005)	The Seed (Hopkins, 1999)
	Life Cycle	*The Peregrine's Journey: A Story of Migration* (Dunphy, 2008)	Egg Business (Sidman, 2000)
	Snakes	*Snakes!* (Yost, 2013)	Snake's Lullaby (Sidman, 2014)
	Seasons & Weather	*Why the Butterfly: Why do Seasons and Weather Change?* (Recao, 2021)	Life Like a Butterfly (Pulsifer, n.d.)
	Seasons & Weather	*The Story of Snow: The Science of Winter's Wonder* (Cassino, 2009)	The Six-Cornered Snowflake (Nims, 1990)
	Seasons & Weather	*The Very Hungry Caterpillar's First Spring* (Carle, 2022)	First Burst of Spring (Lewis, 1998)
	Five Senses	*My Five Senses* (Aliki, 2015)	The Senseless Lab of Professor Revere (Scieszka, 2004)
	Five Senses	*My First Book About the Five Senses* (Wynne, 2017)	Senses (Silverstein, 1981)
	Food Chain	*Dory Story* (Pallotta, 2000)	Food Chain (Scieszka, 2004)
	Food Chain	*Pass the Energy, Please!* (McKinney, 2000)	Food Chain (Scieszka, 2004)
	Food Chain	*Food Chain* (Robertson, 2009)	Food Chain (Scieszka, 2004)
	Metamorphosis	*Summer Birds: The Butterflies of Maria Merian* (Engle, 2010)	Maria Sibylla Merian, January 1670 (Ackerman, 2020)
	Metamorphosis	*Moth & Butterfly: Ta da!* (Petty, 2021)	Changes (Scieszka, 2004)
	Metamorphosis	*The Very Impatient Caterpillar* (Burach, 2019)	Conversation on a Leaf (Lewis, 2005)
	Metamorphosis	*Waiting for Wings* (Ehlert, 2001)	Metamorphosis (AmberLynne, 2014)
	Metamorphosis	*Caterpillar's Journey to Metamorphosis* (Padmini, 2021)	Changes (Scieszka, 2004)
	Metamorphosis	*Butterfly House* (Bunting, 1999)	Butterfly Metamorphosis (Mr. R's, n.d.)
	Hibernation	*Bear Snores On* (Wilson, 2002)	Bubba Bear's Cozy Hibernation Haven (Krutsinger, 2022)
	Migration	*Gotta Go! Gotta Go!* (Swope, 2000)	Mystical Migration of the Monarch Butterflies (Sunprincess, 2013)

	Human Heart	*Cardiology for Kids: A Fun Picture Book About the Cardiovascular System* (Pham, 2022)	You Can't Beat Your Heart (Wolf, 2003)
	Human DNA	*Rosalind Franklin* (Senker, 2003)	Rosalind Franklin (Mahtrow, 2006)
	Human DNA	*DNA is Here to Stay* (Balkwill, 1993)	DNA Test (n.d.)
	Human Cells	*Cell Wars* (Balkwell, 1993)	Cell theory (Reniscience Education, n.d.)
	Human Cells	*Cells are Us* (Balkwell, 1990)	Fifty Million Cells (Lewis, 2007)
	Human Bones	*The Bones You Own* (Baines, 2009)	Human Bones Poem (Mr. R's, n.d.)
	Genes	*What a Family!* (Isadora, 2006)	My Genes (Hough, 2011).
	Chromosomes	*My Name is James Madison Hemings* (Winter, 2016)	Chromosome poem (Lewis, 2007)
	Chromosomes	*Amazing Schemes Within Your Genes* (Balkwill, 1993)	Chromosome Poem (Lewis, 2007)
	Human Bones	*Give Me Back My Bones!* (Norman, 2019)	Boneless (Wolf, 2003)
	Human Circulatory System	*The Circulatory Story* (Corcoran, 2010)	Shy Silent Rivers (Wolf, 2003)
	Human Lungs	*Lungs* (Brown, 2022)	Lungs (Wolf, 2003)
	Human Germs	*Under the Microscope: Earth's Tiniest Inhabitants* (Professor, 2024)	Under the Microscope (Hopkins, 1999)
	Human Germs	*Cell Wars* (Balkwill, 1993)	Germ (Nash, 1937)
	Germs	*Germs Make Me Sick!* (Berger, 1985)	Germ (Nash, 1937)
	Germs	*Operation Achoo!* (Humowitz, 2020)	Germ (Nash, 1937)
	Germs	*Body Battles* (Gelman, 1992)	White Blood Cells (SilentFairyNat, 2011)
	Viruses	*A Little Spot Stays Home: A Story About Viruses and Safe Distancing* (Alber, 2020)	Untitled poem about COVID-19 (Vilma, 2020)
	Parasites	*What's Eating You? Parasites, the Inside Story* (Davies, 2009)	Mary had a… (Scieszka, 2004)
	Allergies	*The Sneezy Breeze* (Loper, 2020)	Allergies (Smith, 2022)
	Human Heart	*The Heart: All About Our Circulatory System* (Simon, 2006)	Heart to Heart (Dove, 2004)
	Human Body	*Human Body Book: Introduction to the Respiratory System* (Professor, 2017)	Respiratory Failure (Bagert, 2006)
	Viruses & Pandemics	*A Little Spot Stays Home: A Story About Viruses and Safe Distancing* (Alber, 2020)	In the time of Pandemic (O'Meara, 2020)

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Teaching Tips

Combining Picturebooks and Poetry as Blended Genres to Teach Earth and Space Science

William P. Bintz
Kent State University, Kent, OH

ABSTRACT

Recent research introduces the innovative concept of blended genres, the combination of picturebooks and poetry to teach across the curriculum. In science, for example, blended genres are described as an effective instructional tool to teach important concepts in life science (Bintz, 2025). This article builds on and extends this emerging and exciting body of research by 1) presenting blended genres of picture books and poetry to teach earth and space science, 2) reviewing the value of integrating poetry and science, the important relationship between paired text and blended genres, and the connection between blended genres and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Standards, and 3) sharing examples of blended genres and samples of instructional strategies that K–8 teachers can use to help students learn important concepts in earth and space science.

KEYWORDS

blended genres; picturebooks and poetry; science literacy; earth and space science; intertextual connections

This article builds on recent research that introduces the innovative concept of blended genres, the combination of picturebooks and poetry to teach across the curriculum. In science, for example, blended genres are described as an effective instructional tool to teach important concepts in life science in life science (Bintz, 2025). This article builds on and extends this emerging and exciting body of research by presenting blended genres of picture books and poetry to teach earth and space science.

It begins by reminding readers about the important relationship between poetry and science, the fundamental differences between paired text and blended genres, and the connection between blended genres and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Standards. Next, it shares examples of blended genres and samples of instructional strategies that K–8 teachers can use to help students learn important concepts in earth and space science.

Poetry and Science

According to McClure (2013), “There is much to be learned from both poetry and science, and when they are combined, the potential for learning grows” (p. 13). Among other things, “science is rich in content and poetry offers powerful language: together they can both inform and inspire” (Vardell & Wong, 2015, p. 15). Historically, science and poetry have been treated as dichotomies; that is, scientists do science and poets do poetry. Today, research continues to indicate that integrating poetry and science has many benefits for teachers and students (Rule et al., 2014).

CONTACT **Dr. William P. Bintz**, Professor of Literacy Education, College of Education, Health, and Human Services; School of Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum, Kent State University, Kent, OH; email wbintz@kent.edu.

Blended Genres, CCSS, and NGSS Standards

Blended genres consisting of poetry and science are consistent with the NGSS, which state that "literacy skills are critical to building knowledge in science" (NGSS, 2013, Appendix M, p. 1). Similarly, the CCSS identify skills for high proficiency in literacy, and the Common Core Reading Anchor Standards identify skills for high proficiency in reading (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). To ensure consistency, NGSS identifies connections between CCSS literacy and CCR reading skills and science content demands in grades 6–12. Blended genres are a curricular resource that can integrate NGSS, CCSS, and CCR standards when used with instructional strategies.

Paired Text & Blended Genres

Blended genres are rooted in the rich history of paired text (Bintz, 2015). Traditionally, a paired text consists of two conceptually related texts, e.g., topic, theme, genre, etc. (Harste et al., 1988). A blended genre is one way to pair text. It consists of two texts, each text representing a different literary genre. For example, a blended genre can include a picturebook and a poem. Like paired text, blended genres have much power and potential to support intertextuality, the process of creating intertextual connections across two texts.

The following section contains examples of picturebooks and poems as blended genres, along with samples of instructional strategies to teach and learn important concepts in earth and space science. For teachers unfamiliar, I share some practical guidelines for developing and using blended genres with instructional strategies that highlight intertextuality (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Guidelines for Teachers

I used the following guidelines to help students use blended genres and instructional strategies to create and record intertextual connections across both texts. I share these guidelines with teachers, especially those who are unfamiliar with blended genres and instructional strategies that highlight intertextuality. Teachers can put blended genres into practice using demonstration, engagement, and reflection (Smith, 1981).

Demonstration is "*Watch me do this,"* in which teachers are experts and students are apprentices. Teachers provide demonstrations of how they make intertextual connections across a blended genre, introducing this process with a prompt like, *"I wonder how these two texts are related?"* Then, teachers read aloud each text, identify, and record intertextual connections, and explain how each connection relates to both texts.

Engagement is *"Now, let me watch you do it,"* in which teachers use a gradual release of responsibility (Fisher & Frey, 2021) by inviting students to demonstrate their current understanding of and ability to make intertextual connections across a blended genre. Teachers can read aloud each text, pausing during and after each reading, and students record and share intertextual connections.

Reflection is *"What do we now know about making intertextual connections that we didn't know before?"* and highlights the notion that moving forward also means looking backward. Students reflect on the whole experience and share their new understandings about blended genres and intertextuality. Teachers use reflections to make next-step curricular and instructional decisions and continue providing students with a gradual release of responsibility.

Blended Genres and Instructional Strategies

Earth Science

Snowflake Bentley (Martin, 2009) and "Snowflakes" (McCord, in Hopkins, 2002) are a blended genre in earth science. *Snowflake Bentley* is a picturebook biography of Wilson Bentley, a young boy who studied snowflakes with a microscope. Later, his parents purchased a camera with a microscope so he could photograph snowflakes and study their intricate designs. Bentley shared

his photographs and designs with the world. After his death, he was honored with a monument in tribute to Snowflake Bentley. “Snowflakes” is a poem combined with Snowflake Bentley to create a blended genre.

Snowflakes

Sometime this winter if you go
To walk in soft new-falling snow
When flakes are big and come down slow

To settle on your sleeve as bright
As stars that couldn’t wait for night,
You won’t know what you have in sight—

Another world—unless you bring
A magnifying glass. This thing
We call a snowflake is the king.

Of crystals. Do you like surprise?
Examine him three times his size:
At first you won’t believe your eyes.

Stars look alike, but flakes do not:
No two the same in all the lot
That you will get in any spot

You chance to be, for everyone
Come spinning through the sky has none
But his own window-wings of sun:

Joints, points, and crosses. What could make
Such lacework with no crack or break?
In billion billions, no mistake?

Interlocking Spheres of Intertextual Connections is an instructional strategy that invites students to create and record intertextual connections between two texts. Figure 1 illustrates this strategy using the blended genre of the picture book *Snowflake Bentley* and the poem “Snowflakes.” Students read each text and record a significant intertextual connection in each sphere, using “Both texts…” to introduce each connection.

Figure 2: Interlocking Spheres of Intertextual Connections

Space Science

Maria's Comet (Hopkinson, 2003) and "The Comet" (Florian, 2007) are a blended genre in space science. *Maria's Comet* is a picturebook biography of Maria Mitchell. Born in 1818 on Nantucket Island, Massachusetts, Maria became America's first woman astronomer. As a young girl, she learned much about stars from her father, an astronomer who used his telescope to study flickering stars and mountains on the moon. He also searched for comets. Inspired by her father, Maria read about early astronomers such as Copernicus and Galileo while aspiring to be an astronomer herself. She hoped to see a comet. One night, Maria joins her father on the rooftop to peer through her father's telescope. Suddenly, she sees a star bursting into view, a bright spark. One star very far away but it seems so close. It lights her heart. "The Comet" (Florian, 2007) is a short but informative poem about the characteristics of a comet.

The Comet

Ice, rock, dirt,
Metal and gas—
Around the sun
A comet may pass.

A dirty snowball
Of space debris,
The biggest snowball
That you'll ever see.

A *Z-Map* is another instructional strategy that invites students to create and record intertextual connections between two texts. Figure 2 illustrates this strategy with the blended genre of the picturebook *Maria's Comet* and the poem "The Comet." Students read each text and record a significant intertextual connection in the middle of the alphabetic letter Z, using "Both texts…" to introduce each connection.

Figure 3: Z-Map

Maria's Comet

Maria's Comet (Hopkinson, 2003) is a picturebook biography of Maria Mitchell, America's first woman astronomer. As a young girl, she learned about stars from her father, an astronomer who used his telescope to search for comets. Maria aspired to be an astronomer, too. One night, she peered through her father's telescope and saw a distant star bursting into view. It lights her heart

Metaphor: Both texts use the metaphor of a dirty snowball to describe comets.

Properties: Both texts describe the properties of comets as consisting of frozen gases, including water, ice, and dust particles.

Scientific Instruments (telescopes): Both texts highlight the picturebook directly and the poem indirectly, that telescopes were used by astronomers to discover, track, and analyze comets.

Pathway: Both texts describe comets as traveling around the sun.

"The Comet"

Ice, rock, dirt,
Metal and gas—
Around the sun
A comet may pass.

A dirty snowball
Of space debris,
The biggest snowball
That you'll ever see.

Final Thoughts

Combining picturebooks and poems as blended genres is an innovative and exciting way to pair text. This article shared examples of blended genres and samples of instructional strategies using blended genres. It also provides a curricular resource of additional examples (Table 1) of blended genres to teach various essential topics in Earth and space science. K–8 teachers are encouraged to use this resource to collaborate on developing and implementing blended genres in both English Language Arts (ELA) and science classrooms.

Combining picturebooks and poems as blended genres can ignite teacher interest in exploring more innovative ways to pair text. For example, recent research has advanced the idea of developing paired texts using expanded formats of texts (Lupo et al., 2019; Tracy et al., 2016).

Expanded formats of texts include newspapers, cartoons, field guides, websites, tweets, blogs, songs, podcasts, etc.

Similarly, recent research has advanced the idea of developing paired text using linked texts (Cappiello & Dawes, 2021; NWESD Communications, 2019; Pytash et al., 2014; Cummins, 2017). Linked texts consist of non-traditional texts like multimodal and multi-genre texts, including, among others, digital texts, YouTube videos, news articles, and podcasts. These non-traditional texts offer students different formats to read, voices to hear, and perspectives to consider.

This article aims to spark new thinking for teachers who are unfamiliar or inexperienced with combining picturebooks and poems as blended genres or using inked texts, including multimodal and multi-genre texts, to teach across the curriculum. Either way, let the new thinking begin!

Table 1: Additional Blended Genres in Earth and Space Science

Picturebook	Poem
Zoo in the Sky (Mitton, 2006)	"The Constellations" (Florian, 2007)
Hurricane (Weisner, 1992)	"Hurricane" (Lewis, 2007)
Why Do Leaves Change Color? (Krupinski, 2015)	"Why Leaves Change Color in the Fall" (Lewis, 2007)
The Island That Moved: How Shifting Forces Shape Our Earth (Hooper, 2004)	"The Lithosphere" (Lewis, 2007)
Pass the Energy, Please! (McKinney, 1999)	"Sun's Busy Day" (Scholastic, n.d.)
Drop: An Adventure through the Water Cycle (Moon, 2021)	"Water Cycle" (Hayley, n.d.)
The Incredible Water Show (Frasier, 2004)	"Water Cycle" (Hayley, n.d.)
Nature Did It First (Ansberry, 2020)	"Counting on the Woods" (Lyon, 1998)
The Pebble in My Pocket: A History of Our Earth (Hooper, 2015)	"Geology" (King, 2005)
Tsunami! (Kajikawa, 2009)	"Tsunami" (Lewis, 2007)
It Started with a Big Bang: The Origin of the Earth, You, and Everything Else (Bal, 2019)	"Twas the Night" (Scieszka & Smith, 2004)
There was a Black Hole that Swallowed the Universe (Ferrie, 2021)	"Cosmology and Scientists on My Mind" (Deo, 2022)
Waiting for High Tide (McClure, 2016)	"Danceline at High Tide" (Esbensen, 1995)
Born with a Bang: The Universe Tells Our Cosmic Story (Morgan, 2002)	"The Big Bang" (Lewis, 2007)
No One Walks on My Father's Moon (Curtis, 1996)	"Quarrel Between Truth and Falsehood Forever" (Reza, 2008)
Sector 7 (Weisner, 1999)	"Cloud Watching" (Reeve, 2024)
Lessons from Mother Earth (McLeod, 2010)	"Nature's Way" (2024)
Pluto and the Planets: Children's Storybook about the Solar System (Awa, 2022)	"The Great Beyond" (Florian, 2007)
There was a Black Hole that Swallowed the Universe (Ferrie, 2021)	"The Black Hole" (Florian, 2007)
Maria's Comet (Hopkinson, 2003)	"The Comet" (Florian, 2007)
Pluto's Secret: An Icy World's Tale of Discovery (Weitkamp, 2015)	"Pluto" (Florian, 2007)

Come See the Earth Turn (Mortensen, 2010)	"Scientific Method at the Bat" (Scieszka & Smith, 2004)
Mr. Archimedes Bath (Allen, 1998)	"Scientific Method at the Bat" (Scieszka & Smith, 2004)
Archimedes and His Numbers (Professor, 2017)	"Bring Back Archimedes" (Smith, 2006)
Papa, Please Get the Moon for Me (Carle, 1991)	"Moon-Catchin Net" (Silverstein, 1981)
The Little Dipper (Stanley, 2015)	"Little Dipper" (Bager, 2007)
Dinosaur Lady (Skeers, 2020)	"Dinosaur Bone" (Schertle, in Hopkins, 2002)
Galileo Galilei (Munoz, 2020)	"Galileo's Universe" (Lewis, 2005)
Stars (Simon, 2006)	"Stars" (Sandburg, in Hopkins, 2002)
When I Heard of the Learn'd Astronomer (Whitman, 2004)	"Stars" (Sandburg, in Hopkins, 2002)
Feel the Wind (Dorros, 2000)	"What Are You, Wind?" (O'Neil, in Hopkins, 2002)
The Relationship of the Moon and the Tides (Professor, 2017)	"Strictly for the Birds" (Fatchen, 1987)
Telling Time: How to Tell Time on Digital and Analog Clocks (Older, 2000)	"Tide Talk" (Fatchen, 1987)
The Waterhole (Base, 2001)	"A Cliché" (Merriam, 1964)
I Am the Solar System (McDonald, 2020)	"Spinning Song" (Shields, 1995)
Maria's Comet (Hopkinson, 2003)	"Halley's Comet" (Lewis, 1998)
A Birdwatcher's Guide to Chickadees (Harasymiw, 2015)	"Chickadee's Song" (Smith, 2014)
When Cloud Became a Cloud (Hodgson, 2021)	"Water Cycle Poem" (Mr. R., 2002)
Feel the Wind (Dorros, 2000)	"Wind On the Hill" (Milne, 2022)
The Sun: Shining Star of the Solar System (Perdew, 2021)	"Voice of Unnamed Star" (Bagert, 2006)
Super Stars: The Biggest, Hottest, Brightest, Most Explosive Stars in the Milky Way (Aguilar, 2010)	"The Brightest Star" (Bagert, 2006)
Round the Garden (Glaser, 2000)	"Photosynthesis Poem" (Mr. R., 2002)

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