The Utah Journal of Literacy

Volume 17  Number 1  Spring 2014
The Utah Journal of Literacy

Call for Manuscripts

The Utah Journal of Literacy is the peer-reviewed journal of the Utah Council of the International Reading Association. This on-line journal publishes on diverse topics related to literacy, including reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, representing visually, utilizing technology, and teaching/sharing literature with children and young adults.

Articles. Submissions may be made in any of the following categories:

Feature articles. The journal welcomes both literature reviews and basic discussions of either classroom practice or theoretical topics of interest to Utah educators, especially articles on best practices in literacy education. Articles must include APA-formatted references to relevant research literature. Manuscript submissions must not exceed 10 double-spaced pages in 12-point font.

Teaching tips. Items in this category include practical suggestions for teaching all aspects of literacy in the classroom. Manuscript submissions must not exceed 4 double-spaced pages in 12-point font.

Research summaries. Summaries of current published research are also of interest to UJL readers. Manuscript submissions must not exceed 10 double-spaced pages in 12-point font.

Deadlines. The next issue of the Utah Journal of Literacy will be published in the fall of 2014. While manuscripts are reviewed on a rolling basis, the submission deadline for the next issue is August 1, 2014.

Submission. All manuscripts should be submitted electronically as Microsoft Word documents to UJL@byu.edu. To facilitate blind review, submissions should not include the author’s name on the manuscript or on any graphic. A separate cover letter, also submitted as a Word document, should provide the following information for each author: (a) name, (b) title/position, (c) school/district affiliation, (d) work, home, and mobile telephone numbers, (e) email address, and (f) one or two sentences each author would like readers to know about his/her professional work or background.

Sharon Black, Erika Feinauer, and Terrell Young
Brigham Young University
Ars Libri:  
*After Archibald MacLeish*  

J. Patrick Lewis

A book should be spirited and odd  
As a divining rod,  
Wild  
As the wonder of a child,  
Open to the sky and the slanting rain  
As an attic’s shattered windowpane.  

A book should measure its success  
By a censor’s distress.
A book should be a million candle-watts
Of afterthoughts,

Brilliant as a marbled vein in a quarry
Of story,

Bold enough to leave behind
Unpeace of mind.

A book should be a welcome overnight guest
Long after a day’s standardized test.
A book should be the map, flashlight and skeleton key
To literacy.

For all imaginations out of whack or work,
The CEO and the filing clerk,

For kids
Who yearn to see but hesitate to dream—

A book should both be
And seem.

From *Countdown to Summer: A Poem for Every Day of the School Year* by J. Patrick Lewis, illustrated by Ethan Long. Text copyright © 2009 by J. Patrick Lewis; illustrations copyright © 2009 by Ethan Long. By permission of Little, Brown and Company. All rights reserved.

J. Patrick Lewis served as the US Children’s Poet Laureate from 2011-2013 and received the National Council of Teachers of English Excellence in Children’s Poetry Award in 2011. He has published over 85 books for children and young adults.
I used to teach for Los Angeles Unified School District in their home-hospital school, which meant I drove around instructing children with medical problems that kept them out of school. Of course I brought the kids good books. I remember showing Esphyr Slobodkina’s Caps for Sale to a 6-year-old named Anna, who was recovering from having an eye removed as part of her cancer treatment. She immediately recognized the book. She wanted to hold it. Her face lit up, and she leaned forward to whisper some vital information: “There are monkeys in this book.”

What books make your face light up? Have you ever looked up at the end of a book and couldn’t remember who you are or where you were? Have you ever read a book more than once? Maybe three times or ten times. Has a book ever torn your heart out? Has a book ever made you long to be older, taller, better? Or maybe just to catch the train to Hogwarts? Have the characters in a book and their troubles ever felt real to you? Did your mom or dad read a certain book to you that you’ve never forgotten? What books are still in your heart?

Benefits in Pleasure

For many, “reading for pleasure” has been replaced by reading for testing. But from an instructional standpoint, reading pleasure is actually reading practice. Just the way we expect a student of piano or tennis or math to practice, we must expect our students to practice reading. Malcolm Gladwell (2008) found it takes 10,000 hours (or 20 years) to become an expert at something. Thus students should be putting in far more than 10 minutes of reading in class every day or so.

First, regular (even extensive) reading practice improves school performance, especially when it comes to the infamous “fourth grade slump,” as Jeanne S. Chall (Chall & Jacobs, 1983) calls the drop in reading that hits many students at about that point. That’s the time when reading gets harder, as we introduce textbooks and push kids to absorb content in new ways. That, sadly, is when reading tends to stop being fun and become a chore. Ironically, continuing to read for pleasure will make it easier for students to access increasingly difficult textbooks in the fourth through twelfth grades and beyond. And yes, it will help them with those ubiquitous standardized tests.

What’s more, regular reading is a powerful tool for teaching kids to write. I’m a published author, and while I’ve had a few good writing teachers along the way, they’re not the ones who really taught me to write. My best writing teachers were the hundreds of books I read as a
child and into my teens and adulthood. Not only do books teach young readers how stories are constructed—plot, character, setting, and theme—but they also teach children how a paragraph is put together. Even more important, they teach young readers how a sentence is put together. Think of those thousands and thousands of sentences being read, all modeling how to compose the most vital structure of our written language.

As we recognize benefits, we naturally ask how we can promote reading for pleasure—AKA reading for practice. Here’s what not to do: A mother I know assigned her 10-year-old son to read Moby Dick. Because it’s a classic. When I heard about that, I cringed, and not just because I had personally started reading the book at one point in my life and been bored to tears. No, I wondered whether this boy’s burgeoning interest in reading could survive his being forced to slog through something so clearly inappropriate for his age and personal interests. What next, Anna Karenina?

**The Kid-Book Match**

If kids are going to get the practice they need, they must like reading. And that will happen only if we match the right book to the right child.

**Kinds and interests.** I recently polled a group of 16 kids at a summer writing camp about their favorite books. A week later I polled another 10 kids at an informal author’s visit. They mostly named books like the Fablehaven and Harry Potter series and, for the older kids, the Hunger Games books. I did hear a few Anne of Green Gables and some dragon books. One girl staunchly listed a couple of contemporary realism titles. A younger girl liked the Magic Tree House series. You will find that most kids, and in fact most readers, are fans of (1) sci-fi/fantasy or (2) contemporary realism, historical fiction, and nonfiction. Even the little omnivores tend to lean more one way than another. It’s important for you to find out which of the two directions your children or students are leaning.

Many boys are drawn to nonfiction. You may have heard talk about boys who are reluctant readers and the importance of meeting their needs. You’ve surely noticed that boys are often outside playing sports or inside playing video games. These activities create fierce competition for reading, which can seem passive by contrast. Another issue is that there’s such as big push for fiction in schools that boys who aren’t sci-fi/fantasy fans may not know about the availability of appealing nonfiction and action or sports fiction. Sports and science magazines and books like the Eyewitness series can be very satisfying to this group. You can also try books such as Grossology. These are disgusting but fascinating—and they’re really just science in disguise.

**Levels.** Readers fall along a range of motivation. We don’t usually worry about avid readers, and with good reason. But even they can benefit from being introduced to new authors, titles, and series. One of my nieces simply read the Twilight books over and over until I introduced her to Sarah Dessen’s books and other YA options.

At the other end of the spectrum we get reluctant readers. A lot of time is cheerfully, hopefully wasted on trying to get them to read at all. This time tends to be wasted because, even with all our good intentions, we often try to force these kids to read books that are a little or a lot too hard for them. Let reluctant readers choose simpler books! Not boring ones, simpler ones. It’s easy to overshoot on the reading level. Don’t forget that kids need to know 95% of the words on a page to be able to read independently. Not 70. Not 80. But 95. So please, dial it down. A tactic that also helps is to read together: “I’ll read the right-hand pages, and you read the left-hand ones. If you get stuck on a big word, just tell me and I’ll help you.”

A secret weapon to use with reluctant and less interested readers is graphic novels. Once I was talking to a teacher named Lydia in the resource room, and she told me her worries about her own daughter, a 10-year-old who was struggling in school and basically hated reading. I grabbed one of Jennifer and Matthew Holms’ Babymouse graphic novels off the shelf and said, “Try this.” My friend made a face and said that it wasn’t a real book. “Trust me,” I told her. So she gave it a
shot—and came back ecstatic. “She loves them!” Lydia said. “She's never even *liked* a book before!” I've had similar results with giving Jarrett Krosoczka’s *Lunch Lady* books to second-grade boys (and some first graders). Graphic novels, in addition to their inherent value as stories, are less intimidating than regular prose books and act as a great steppingstone into reading. They do this by calming down kids who don’t trust books to be kind to them.

Of course the majority of kids fall somewhere in the middle of this spectrum. They may enjoy a good book every so often, but they don’t seek out books. They can usually find something to do other than reading, such as texting. I see this group as being at high risk when it comes to reading because the potential is there, but it’s just not happening. So the crippling effects, while they are more subtle than those of reluctant readers, are nonetheless real. Such kids read enough to keep teachers off their backs, but their general apathy about reading is a problem for our society and its hopes.

**Only the Best**

What you do when you give children books is *define* the idea of a book. Let that definition be wonderful!

**Boring? Confusing?** Kids sometimes want to read the dreck known as TV and movie tie-ins. They do need to choose what they read, but keep your eye on the prize: Provide kids with the best books you possibly can. One mother told me that she just buys her kids books at the thrift store so she doesn’t have to deal with library due dates and fines. I was not happy to hear this. I’ve seen the selection at thrift stores, and it isn’t outstanding. Don’t define books for your children as “boring” or “low quality.”

I once used a reading program with first graders that came with a set of little phonics-based books. I took one look and refused to use them. Somebody had decided to allow *no* sight words in those things. None. Unfortunately, this decision resulted in books that didn’t even make sense to me, let alone to my students, who were English language learners. “But those are just for decoding practice,” the teacher next door said. “No,” I told her. “When we hand these to beginning readers, we’re telling them that this is what a book *is*, this strange, unpleasant, incomprehensible little thing.” They were terrible representatives of their species.

Now if you're not sure what books are great, read some of the publications for librarians and booksellers. For example, I take the *Horn Book* to keep current.

**Whose classics?** Even some of the Newbery Award books, especially the older ones, can be stodgy. And while I personally love *Charlotte’s Web*, I remember giving it to an athletic fourth-grade girl who said plaintively, “I’m sorry, Ms. Coombs, but it’s kind of boring. Do you have another one like *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*?” Roald Dahl’s books are pretty timeless.

There’s a term they’ve been using in children’s book publishing for the past 10–15 years: *quiet*. A quiet book may work for the avid reader and for the quiet child, but it can feel draggy to many of today’s children. Sure, you can do some read-alouds with the most striking of these books, but don’t hand them out for individual reading except to those children who truly have the interest and personality to match. I just heard about a short summer reading list that included *Number the Stars*, *Trumpet of the Swans*, and others like them. No choices given: just read these. They may be admirable books, but they are not destined to make every kid in the class a more enthusiastic reader. They’re an especially poor selection for most boys. In general, fast-paced is a better idea for today’s kids. It’s one of the reasons for the popularity of Rick Riordan’s *The Lightning Thief* and other adventures of Percy Jackson.

**Love them, share them.** If you don’t love books, you’re in real trouble. It’s like those celebrities who used to pitch soft drinks they never touched in real life. They are now required to use those products—and so are you. Be a reader. Live the dream. Your missionary zeal will shine as you share your love of the printed page (or Kindle) with your students. I once had a first grade student write in her daily journal, “Ms. Coombs doesn’t just like books. She *loves* books.” I read that particular class the best books I could possibly find every day after
lunch. Filet mignon, not hamburger. I bought a wildly cool classroom library and kept the books in baskets on my students’ desk clusters, rotating the baskets every week. I made books seem like the best thing in the universe. It wasn’t too hard because I’m a believer. The next year a baffled second grade teacher approached me and said, “I don’t get it. Our class had a scheduling conflict, and we had to choose between going to the computer lab and the library. The kids who were in your class last year banded together and said, ‘Let’s go to the library! It’s way more fun!’”

Matchmaking

Help children find the books that will enthral them and sing in their hearts for years to come. It’s not quite as hard as it sounds.

Find. First, find out what books kids have liked best in the past. Don’t worry if these are picture books. If students can’t think of any, ask them what movies and TV shows they like. Humor? Action? Horror? Is this child mostly a sci-fi/fantasy fan, or perhaps a reader of contemporary fiction, historical fiction, and nonfiction?

Do your homework—or find a librarian to help you. You can google lists of good books in specific genres. Certain bloggers specialize in children’s books, usually librarians or teachers (e.g., Watch. Connect. Read, or A Fuse #8 Production, or Jen Robinson’s Book Page). Find out which books are popular with kids right now. Take a poll of your class or even of your school. What books do children tell each other about?

Introduce. When you’re ready, give students a pitch and some choices. I always try to hand a child six books I think she will like, six books that fit her profile. I tell my student a little about each book or just have her read the jacket copy of each one. Then I encourage her to take the two or three she likes best and try them out. Not just one. “Read a little of each one and see how it goes.” The message is “See how it is with books? You have options. You have opportunities!”

Engage. Don’t forget the follow-up. “What happened?” It’s like gossip. “What did [main character’s name] do since we last talked? Did he solve that problem with his friend or make things worse?” I don’t mean quiz the young reader; I mean take a sincere interest in the events of the book—whether you’ve read it or not. Let students tell you, or at least tell their book groups, what’s going on in their books. What’s the scoop? This is just plain fun, and it makes the books matter more. It gives them heft and presence in children’s lives.

Try some of these. Now I can’t leave you without some recommendations. Here are a few more secret weapons—books that grab a lot of kids. Along with the Lunch Lady books, a good pick for first and second grade boys is the Dragonbreath series. Then hit the second- and third-grade boys with Captain Underpants. For boys ages 9 to 13, the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series is usually a winner. Second and third graders who are less fantasy inclined may also get hooked on the Magic Tree House books (more historical fiction than fantasy) and the Boxcar Children. And yes, the Goosebumps series is still a real draw for young fans of the shivers.

Roald Dahl’s books are also beloved, though they are a little harder to read if kids are struggling. Many upper grade readers love the Harry Potter and Percy Jackson books, while many readers in middle school and high school thrive on the Hunger Games trilogy. For reluctant and struggling readers in fourth through ninth grades, I recommend Gordon Korman’s adventure series (e.g., On the Run and Island). See also sports books by Tim Green and Dan Gutman, though these aren’t quite as easy to read.

Then there are a myriad of titles and series that are not as well known, but have great appeal for individual children. For example, I was finally able to hook my cousin’s fifth-grade son on a book called The Fourth Stall. And I just loaned a 10-year-old girl Ella Enchanted.

You can do it. Give the right book to the right child, and watch the magic.
References


Children’s Books Cited
Only the recommended books are listed. Those mentioned briefly to contrast have not been included.


Kate Coombs received the 2013 Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award for her book Water Sings Blue. Her other books include The Runaway Princess, The Runaway Dragon, The Secret Keeper, Hans My Hedgehog, and Goodnight Mr. Darcy. Her seventh book, The Tooth Fairy Wars, is due out in July. She lives in Utah, where she works as a curriculum developer.
What’s the Argument?
Mentoring Readers of Argumentation in Disciplinary Texts

Doug Buehl

Abstract
As a pervasive strategy in informational texts, argumentation occupies a prominent place in the Common Core literacy standards. This article defines and exemplifies explanations, conclusions, generalizations, interpretations, hypotheses and propositions—common forms of argumentation that students will encounter as readers of complex disciplinary texts. To learn effectively within each discipline, students need to understand the nature of its argumentation and be able to recognize and practice its patterns of development and support. This article models three literacy practices that teachers can use as scaffolds to prompt and support the analysis of argumentation: claims/evidence charts, proposition/support outlines, and argument/question/response charts.

Argument—this word evokes a variety of images. Perhaps a spirited back-and-forth debate between unyielding parties. Or the ongoing, seemingly endless, frequently acrimonious exchanges of political adversaries. Possibly a contentious person whose conversation quickly becomes disputation. Or perhaps an intense disagreement among family members or friends. Some recall an old adage: “There are always two sides to every argument.”

Of course the these images are all apt for one primary definition of argument, a common usage familiar to our students as well: people who differ about something disputing with each other. This understanding of argument—an expression of disagreement—can readily trigger connotations of entrenched opinion, competition, irritability, emotion, discomfort, even negativity. However, it is an alternate usage of the term “argument”—a proposition, arguable statement, or position supported by credible evidence and analysis—that occupies a central role in our teaching. Argumentation, the development and presentation of reasoning about some facet of our curriculum, is the foundation to learning within a discipline (Graf, 2003).

Argumentation as Represented in the Common Core

Standards. The Common Core literacy standards prize “the special place of argument in the standards” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers [hereafter
Arguments vs. opinions. This focus in the standards presents a definite contrast to how many students would conceptualize “argument” in the classroom—a vigorous offering of their opinions about something under discussion. Indeed, as teachers we often solicit students’ “opinion” about some element under study, and students are generally very eager to weigh in with their personal takes. Unfortunately, opinion may very likely be the extent of what we get from our students. However, the emphasis in the standards on argument—the argumentation we wish to mentor in our classrooms—involves a more rigorous set of expectations than merely articulating an opinion. As the Common Core Appendix A explains:

Arguments are used for many purposes—to change the reader’s point of view, to bring about some action on the reader’s part, or to ask the reader to accept the writer’s explanation or evaluation of a concept, issue, or problem. An argument is a reasoned, logical way of demonstrating that the writer’s position, belief, or conclusion is valid. (CCSS, 2010, Appendix A, p. 23)

A significant requirement in the standards is for students to present text-based evidence to support arguments—extending a stated position beyond mere opinion, which may be based primarily on personal beliefs and experiences. When students reach beyond reliance on personal beliefs and experiences, learning to cite authority and use textual evidence to support their thinking, they have progressed from expressing opinions to practicing argumentation. Similarly, recognizing and tracking how authors develop arguments is essential for analysis of complex disciplinary texts.

Arguments in informational texts. Argumentation can appear in a number of guises in texts students read for information in the disciplines. Basically, an argument can be construed as an assertion of “something that is so”—a way of summing up an understanding that is supportable by accepted facts and scholarship and consistent with logical reasoning. Proposition uses an argument as an overall text structure. Essays, reviews, appeals, editorials, advocacy pieces, and other such expressions of viewpoint are examples of these texts, and the author’s argumentation can be relatively easy to spot.

But argumentation is far more pervasive than these overt displays. In disciplinary literacy, students frequently encounter the following less obvious forms of argumentation, illustrated here by arguable statements that might be made regarding Utah’s professional basketball team:

1. Opinions, which are based on personal ideas and experiences

   The Utah Jazz play boring basketball.

2. Explanations, which are arguments positing that a particular way of understanding—usually “how” or “why” something happens or happened—is valid based on an examination of what we know or can observe

   The Utah Jazz overturned their roster, have not drafted particularly well, and
3. **Conclusions**, which argue that, given what we know, certain conclusions can be justified that pull the specifics together into a coherent understanding (i.e., “given all this, we can say it means this”)

*If you examine the achievements of their current players, you will see that the Utah Jazz does not have a player of superstar abilities.*

4. **Generalizations**, by which authors guide understanding through detecting patterns within what is known that can be summed up as relationships, interconnections, or trends

*Teams that lack a superstar, like the Utah Jazz, have difficulty becoming consistent winners in the NBA.*

5. **Interpretations**, which present an individual or group’s “take” on what can be understood or revealed after due examination and analysis

*After a disastrous losing season, Dennis Lindsey, the Jazz general manager, characterized recent decisions as a step back in order to “take three or four forward” (Melnick, 2014).*

6. **Theories or hypotheses**, which are argued as consistent with what is known and thus should provide a foundation for further investigation and exploration:

*Sports history shows that it is significant decisions over time that eventually result in a “significant team”; thus current Jazz efforts will result in a significant team for the State of Utah (Lindsey cited in Melnick, 2014).*

The opinion really does not stray beyond personal beliefs and preferences as a basis for justification. But each of the other statements is predicated on making a case for understanding that can be supported through an examination of known specifics. Of course, other observers could examine the specifics and suggest a variety of alternative arguable statements.

### Argumentation Throughout the Disciplines

As the above discussion and examples show, argumentation can be almost ubiquitous, especially as a part of informational (expository) texts. Certain forms of argumentation are especially prevalent in the texts of different disciplines.

#### Arguments typical in various disciplines.

Table 1 provides a sampling of typical forms of argumentation that students will encounter as learners in specific disciplines.

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Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disciplines</th>
<th>Argumentation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>Explanations, generalizations, conclusions, and interpretations of the past based on historical evidence; proposition/support argumentation representing perspective/point of view, such as in primary documents or essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Scientific claims (explanations, generalizations, conclusions, theories) supported by evidence derived through scientific methods; interpretations of scientific data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>Interpretations of literary texts; implicit author arguments that relate to possible themes of literary texts; proposition/support argumentation representing perspective/point of view, especially through essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Explanations of logical mathematical concepts and relationships derived from mathematical “givens”; justifications of problem-solving methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Texts</td>
<td>Presentations of a case (often implicit) that specific steps or procedural methods will lead to desired results and likely successful completion of a task, as in “how-to” texts, instructions, or manuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Fitness</td>
<td>Explanations of cause/effect relationships regarding physical activity or aspects of personal health; recommendations for fitness actions or lifestyle choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Music</td>
<td>Aesthetic judgments related to articulated criteria; explanations of how specific actions, procedures, or methods can achieve certain artistic or musical results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If students are to become accomplished with articulating arguments in their speaking and writing, they need to become practiced in analyzing the various arguments presented by the authors they study. Certainly as a foundation for their comprehension, they need to recognize when they are reading argumentation, as mandated by the expectations in Reading Standard 8.

**Argumentation requiring new viewpoints.**
Some disciplines may require students to shift their habitual approaches to facts and arguments. History and literature, which are among the disciplines most studied in schools, require students to deal with argumentation that may not seem on the surface to be argumentation.

Wineburg (1991) found significant disparities between how students and historians approached the reading of texts central to the study of history. Students tended to read history as a series of statements of truth, while historians read the same texts expecting to encounter arguments. As Hynd, Holschuh and Hubbard (2004) related, “Students view history reading as fact collecting” (p. 142). Clearly instruction is needed that mentors students to perceive that reading history transcends mastery of a litany of facts. Ways that historians relate understandings about the past through argumentation should be a central focus for learning from texts of history.

Texts in literature also require new approaches and viewpoints where argumentation may be involved. Generally argumentation in literary texts is more subtle and implicit, as possible author arguments are embedded in storytelling or in forms of poetry and personal essays. Readers explore these arguments as they interpret conceivable themes of a story, novel, drama, or poem. For example, one can certainly argue that George Orwell was making arguments in both *Animal Farm* and *1984*. In “Auto Wreck,” one of the most powerful pieces of poetic persuasion students encounter, Karl Shapiro described the grim, gruesome details of an automobile accident, concluding,

For death in war is done by hands;  
Suicide has cause and stillbirth, logic;  
And cancer, simple as a flower, blooms.  
But this invites the occult mind,  
Cancels our physics with a sneer,  
And spatters all we knew of denouement  
Across the expedient and wicked stones.

The surface theme of “drive safely” is only surface; the argumentation in the poem extends into critical concepts of life and death.

Although there is no Reading Standard 8 on argumentation for literature, with the emphasis focused on detecting theme (Reading Standard 2) and point of view (Reading Standard 6), students can learn to perceive and respond thoughtfully to the persuasion of authors like Orwell and Shapiro.

**Strategies to Mentor Argumentation in Disciplinary Texts**

Following are three disciplinary examples of literacy practices that can mentor student analysis of argumentation as readers of complex texts in science, health/physical fitness, and history.

**Science—Claim/evidence charts.** A claim/evidence chart is a graphic organizer that prompts students to examine arguments presented by an author and evaluate the specific evidence and reasoning that support a claim. Although this strategy is appropriate for a variety of texts across disciplines, it is particularly applicable to science texts, as scientific thinking emphasizes this claims/evidence dynamic (i.e., Hand, Norton-Meier, Staker, and Bintz, 2009). As with all strategy instruction, using a claim/evidence chart needs to be sufficiently modeled, with teacher think alouds and guided analysis.
before the task is turned over to students for application. This strategy is especially valuable for engaging students in a second read of a text they have initially sampled, enabling more in-depth examination of an author’s argumentation. The process works best when partners collaborate to evaluate the text together and discuss the elements of argumentation that emerge in their analysis. The first step involves identifying the overall argument presented by the author, which is briefly outlined in the “Explain the Claim” box (see Table 2).

### Table 2
Evidence/Claim Chart: "Trees"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explain the Claim—scientific argument—presented by the author (in your own words):</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trees play an essential role in the health of our environment. The loss of trees due to droughts, insect damage, and widespread cutting is doing significant harm to our planet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes (What the author says trees do):</th>
<th>Effects (Why the author says this matters):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Trees turn sunlight into food through <em>photosynthesis</em></td>
<td>• Trees provide food needed by insects, wildlife, people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Microbes in soil around tree roots break down toxic wastes like chemicals, solvents, organic wastes</em></td>
<td>• <em>Trees are nature’s water filters: they are important for clean water</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Trees can also filter out pollutants in the air</em></td>
<td>• <em>A study showed more trees in urban areas lead to less asthma due to cleaner air</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Trees release clouds of beneficial chemicals</em></td>
<td>• <em>These chemicals seem to help regulate the climate &amp; some of them are antiviral, antibacterial, or antifungal; one of these chemicals is now used for cancer treatment; aspirin comes from willows</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Trees capture carbon dioxide</em></td>
<td>• <em>Carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas that makes the planet warmer, so trees combat global warming</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Trees provide cover from the sunlight</em></td>
<td>• <em>Tree cover can make the earth’s surface ten degrees cooler and protect animals from UV sunrays: water vapor from forests lowers temperatures</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Trees absorb excess chemicals that run off farm fields</em></td>
<td>• <em>Degraded water systems (like Gulf of Mexico) can be brought back to life from the damage caused by nitrogen and phosphorus</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Decomposing tree leaves leach acids into the ocean</em></td>
<td>• <em>The acids help plankton thrive, which benefits the entire food chain: forests planted next to streams &amp; oceans have revitalized fish &amp; oyster stocks</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the “Trees” example, the author’s overall argument is a conclusion, that trees play an essential role in our environment. The author offers a number of supporting arguments with accompanying evidence, following a consistent cause/effect pattern. Students use the chart to dissect these various explanations, generalizations, and conclusions to form a strong visual outline of the author’s line of argumentation in the text. The chart provides an excellent template for summary writing and further investigations. This method provides students with in-depth practice for realizing Reading Standard 8 for Science and Technical Texts, Grades 9-10: “Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author’s claim or a recommendation for solving a scientific or technical problem” (CCSS, 2010, p. 62).

Health and physical fitness—Proposition/support outlines. The proposition/support outline (Buehl, 2014) is a graphic organizer that guides students in tracking the nature of the evidence presented by an author in an analytical manner (see Table 3).

Table 3
Proposition/Support Outline: “Sitting”

Proposition (Author’s Argument—conclusion, explanation, generalization, interpretation):

*Sedentary behavior, like long stretches of sitting, is harmful to a person’s health.*

Support—Evidence presented by the author

1. Facts:
   - *Electrical activity in our muscles drops when we are sitting*
   - *Harmful effects on our metabolism result—calorie burning goes down to 1/3 compared to walking*
   - *Insulin effectiveness drops within a single day—risk of Type 2 diabetes goes up*
   - *Enzymes that “vacuum fats” from bloodstream plunge, causing good cholesterol (HDL) levels to drop*

2. Research & Statistics
   - *Young thin fit subjects saw 40% reduction in insulin ability to process glucose after 24 sedentary hrs*
   - *Death rate of American men who sat 6 hours/day 20% higher than those sitting 3 hours or less*
   - *Death rate of American women who sat 6 hours/day 40% higher than those sitting 3 hours or less*
   - *Australian study found each additional hour of sitting to watch TV increased risk of death 11%*
   - *Mayo Clinic study found subjects who unconsciously move around more burned more calories & didn’t gain weight compared with those who ate the same food & portions but gained weight*

3. Examples:
   - *The author worked with Mayo clinic researchers to monitor his own physical movements & calorie burning rate for a 24 hour period*
   - *Obese people averaged only 1500 physical movements recorded by motion-tracking device & sat 600 minutes per day; Jamaica farm workers averaged 5000 daily movements & sat 300 minutes per day*
Several forms of evidence are highlighted. In the text on which this organizer is based, the author supports an argument by citing accepted facts, referencing relevant research and studies, elaborating with specific examples, accessing credible authorities, and developing a logical, well-reasoned synthesis of this material. The graphic outline enables students to examine closely the balance of types of evidence the author presents and to set up analysis of the argumentation. Questions emerge:

- Are the facts generally accepted as valid?
- Do the studies seem to justify the conclusions?
- Are the examples typical?
- Does the author rely too much on examples rather than other forms of evidence? (A common fault of student argumentation)
- Do the authorities seem sufficiently credible?
- Would other authorities concur?
- Do the logic and reasoning seem consistent with the evidence? And so forth.

In the text on which the example “Sitting” is based, the author presents evidence that encompasses all of these forms of support. The author's overall premise—that research demonstrates the harmfulness of prolonged sedentary behavior—is developed through citations of experts and research studies as well as presentation of known facts about our physiology; illustration is provided by the author's participation in some of the research activities. The outline brings all of these lines of evidence into sharp focus, providing an opportunity for health and fitness students to examine in depth the author's case about the need for regular physical activity in our daily lifestyles.

This lesson provides students with systematic practice in deconstructing how an argument is developed and evaluating the case presented, as expressed in Reading Standard 8 for Informational Texts, Grades 9-10: “Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning” (CCSS, 2010, p. 40). Similarly, Science and Technical Texts, Grades 9-10 states, “Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claim or a recommendation for solving a scientific or technical problem” (CCSS, 2010, p. 62).
Proposition/support outlines can be especially useful as a tool for gathering evidence for students’ own inquiry about topics under study, as they are prompted to seek evidence from a range of possibilities and to balance the types of evidence they display. The outlines provide a strong framework for presentation and analysis in student discussions—especially in debates—around a topic. Similarly, the outlines can be valuable as templates for student argumentation through writing, as outlined in Writing Standard 1, Grades 9-10: “Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence” (CCSS, 2010, p. 45).

**History—Argument/question/response charts.** The argument/question/response chart (Buehl, 2014) is a variation of a graphic organizer that engages students in questioning and summarizing arguments (Harvey & Goodvis, 2007). It can be a particularly effective strategy for texts examined in the study of history, given the central role of argumentation in historical thinking, as related earlier in this article. The strategy sensitizes readers to track arguments that are central to an author’s message (see Table 4).

### Table 4
*Argument/Question/Response Chart: “President Grant”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Grant was one of the greatest Presidents of his time and one of the all-time greatest Presidents</em></td>
<td>Why do we always hear about what a bad President Grant was . . . doesn’t he often come out as one of the worst Presidents?</td>
<td>The author says Grant’s reputation will be restored to being positive; I wonder if this is really going to happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Grant was a rigorous supporter of the rights of black Americans</em></td>
<td>How did Grant’s actions help the people who were formerly slaves?</td>
<td>We always hear about Lincoln as a great civil rights leader, but maybe Grant’s achievements have been overlooked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Grant was greatly admired by the public during his lifetime</em></td>
<td>Shouldn’t the viewpoints of the people who lived during the time Grant was a general and the President count a lot?</td>
<td>It is interesting that Grant should go from being admired to later on being regarded in a very negative way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Grant’s reputation was later damaged by historians who had a pro-Southern view of history</em></td>
<td>Does the author have a perspective that influences the way he regards history?</td>
<td>It seems the author thinks Grant was a victim of a “smear campaign”; we’ve seen that happen to other politicians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After students have completed a first read, they return to the text, working as partners, for a second read, this time to tease out the arguments they detect the author is making: explanations, conclusions, generalizations, interpretations, theories, and so forth. Once they have identified the arguments, the partners prioritize them and settle on the three to six (depending on the text and teacher instructions) that seem predominant. These are recorded in the Arguments column of the chart, although the teacher may decide to have the whole class “argue” which are the most important arguments and decide which should be listed as preeminent. This exercise emphasizes Speaking/Listening Standard 3, Grades 9-10: “Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence” (CCSS, 2010, p. 50).

As a third read, partners return to examine the portions of the text that are relevant to each of the most important arguments. Their task is to raise a significant question relevant to the argument; in essence, they “continue the conversation” through a more in-depth analysis which includes questioning the author’s evidence or reasoning. The questions are recorded in the middle column and then shared and discussed by the whole class. The final phase—summing up understandings—is accomplished by students working individually; these summary statements are recorded in the third column.

In the example of President Grant, four major arguments were targeted and discussed. In this essay, the author argues that Ulysses S. Grant is an under-appreciated President who made significant contributions, especially in civil rights. The author’s point of view, as well as his case, clearly emerges through this analysis.

This lesson provides students with an analytical template for identifying and further exploring an argument, which addresses Reading Standard 8 for History and Social Studies Texts, Grades 9-10: “Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author’s claims” (CCSS, 2010, p. 61).

Summary

Argumentation and analysis are two terms that surface repeatedly in the Common Core literacy standards—as they should. Understanding the nature of argumentation in addition to various ways arguments are developed and supported in different disciplines can be essential in learning within the disciplines. Literacy practices that prompt and support the analysis of argumentation can be especially valuable scaffolds for mentoring students in examining and developing argumentation. And by the way, you probably noticed as a reader that this article is an argument.

References


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**Doug Buehl** was a teacher, literacy coach, and district adolescent literacy specialist for 33 years in the Madison Metropolitan School District, Madison, Wisconsin. For the past several years he has worked with schools and districts with professional development in disciplinary literacy and has taught adolescent literacy courses at Edgewood College. **He is the author of two IRA books:** Developing Readers in the Academic Disciplines (2011) and Classroom Strategies for Interactive Learning (4th ed. 2014).
A Tale of Two Schools: Preparing Teacher Candidates to Support All Students in Literacy

Lisa Laurier and Lori Johnson

Abstract

To strengthen the abilities of pre-service teachers to meet student needs in classrooms with high levels of cultural and socio-economic diversity, the authors adapted their university's residence model practicum experiences with two pilot programs. Pilot A trained traditional undergraduate teacher candidates in highly diverse classrooms with university instruction on site and application guided by the university instructor. Pilot B involved teacher certification/master's degree students participating in low socioeconomic urban classrooms, with on-campus instruction supported by professional learning communities at the school. Benefits and some weaknesses of both programs are described.

“I didn't know how to figure out why my student was failing.”
“I wasn't prepared for so many unmotivated kids or kids below grade level.”
“None of my team members were using the same methods I was, and I felt pressure to go ‘old school.’”
“I had these great plans for literature circles and a class of kids who could barely read, no trade books, and a scripted curriculum that I was required to follow. What am I supposed to do?”

These are representative of just some of the comments that used to be offered by graduates from a small teacher education program at a liberal arts university.

Our university has three paths to certification: a traditional undergraduate day program, a Master's in Initial Teaching (MIT) Program that typically takes 13 months to complete, and an evening teacher degree program for working adults seeking teacher certification in conjunction with a BA or MEd. All three of our programs have substantial field experience components. However, those
experiences have candidates placed in a variety of sites, usually alone, often supervised by adjuncts, and with assignments designed by a university instructor who may have had minimal exposure to the actual classroom where the candidate is located. Graduates reported difficulty transferring their training to their practice. It is these factors that we believed we could address through piloting two different designs for modified “residency” models in our traditional day and MIT programs.

Relevant Literature and Program Goals

Classroom experience. As conversations regarding teacher performance turn their focus to the quality of teacher training, schools of teacher education (SOEs) are reviewing their practices as they prepare to defend their programs and their graduates. New models emphasizing increased field experience time have caused SOEs to revisit the notions of apprenticeship learning, “residency” models, and situated learning that were popular during the professional development school movement of the early 1990s.

A report from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) issued in 2010 calls for all SOEs to make supervised structured time in classrooms the main component of their teacher preparation programs, with coursework as supplemental or complementary training. Candidates are expected to document evidence that they have made a positive impact on student learning as part of their program requirements. This report stresses the teacher-residency model and is pushing SOEs to examine carefully how they can best adopt or modify existing successful residency models for their own programs, a position also adopted by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (Sawchuk, 2010).

Placements. Professional development schools (PDS) have been widely researched for their impact in preparing teachers who are able to address the needs of students in diverse settings (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Jagla, 2009; Haston & Russell, 2011; Murrell, 1998; Petrie, 1995; Teitel, 2004). Not all teacher education programs are able to fully implement the PDS model, but the core principles and structures can be adapted to fit within and enhance any training program. In many PDS programs resident candidates are placed for a full year in a low-income setting, and their university coursework is often taught on site to facilitate direct transfer of training to practice.

Peer teacher candidates, university instructor, mentor teacher, and children are all directly involved in candidate training. Research shows these experiences increase the amount and quality of K-12 student-to-candidate interactions, peer conversations about teaching practices, and focused observations that transfer directly back to practice. Because the university instructor is at the school site, assignments and feedback tend to be more relevant and directed specifically to methods to increase learning of actual children. Research also shows symbiotic benefits in providing mentor teachers with new ideas and exposure to cutting edge practices. In turn, actual classroom needs inform the university instructor’s inclusion of training components (Haston & Russell, 2011).

Apprenticeship. In a recent conference entitled Learning Without Leaving the Workplace, Dr. Gordon Caldwell of Worthing Hospital discussed his implementation of apprenticeship learning in training medical students. The apprenticeship model, which originated in Ancient Greece and Rome, is based on the idea that by working alongside a master the apprentice can learn to think, act, evaluate and respond in complex situations (Caldwell, 2011). Caldwell criticized recent movements in medical training that echo educational trends in considering both kinds of practice as “standardized, reproducible and measurable” (p. 273). A lot of what effective teachers do is differentiated, individualized, or tailored to one child or small group. To
learn these skills, candidates must be confronted with real-world complexities alongside mentors and supervisors who can explain and model the processes leading to the decisions that lead to the most effective instruction.

Beginning teachers often report in survey data that they feel unprepared for the many challenges they face in the classroom. This is especially true for beginning teachers in lower income or higher needs schools. Considering this data along with statistics that show that teachers in these schools generally score lower on tests of literacy content and pedagogical knowledge and tend to struggle more with classroom behaviors, we do not find it surprising that despite long-term national attention to shrinking the achievement gap, this gap persists (Ferguson, 1998; Joshi, Binks, Hougen, Dahlgren, Ocker-Dean, & Smith, 2009; McCombes-Tolis & Spear-Swerling, 2011; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Piasta, Connor, Fishman, & Morrison, 2009; Spear-Swerling, Bruker, & Alfano, 2005).

**Our pilot program.** In designing our pilot programs, we addressed the above needs with the following goals:

- **Build teacher candidates’ competency, self-efficacy, and effectiveness in delivering differentiated instruction and intervention to meet the needs of every child in the classroom**

- **Place teacher candidates in collaborative learning situations with peers, mentor teachers, and strong principal leaders who are open to sharing ideas and innovative practices**

- **Provide direct linkage between university classroom instruction and practice opportunities with children with real learning needs; collect, analyze and utilize assessment data to evaluate instructional effectiveness and adapt in real time**

- **Prepare candidates to close the educational opportunity gap and improve student learning for at-risk and low-achieving students (Collaborative Schools for Innovation and Success Grant, 2012)**

**Pilot A**

Pilot A was designed for the traditional day students who normally complete a three-semester extended field experience, most often in one classroom. The benefits of this model included greater knowledge of school culture, familiarity with daily routines and procedures favored by the teacher, and greater acknowledgement and integration into the faculty.

**Setting.** A weakness of the chosen model was that candidates would gain exposure to one classroom in one building and see only one approach to literacy instruction. To address this need, a partnership site was chosen in the local school district. The school is a Title 1 suburban school, with 10 languages represented among 63 English language learners. It is the only elementary school in the district with a dedicated instructor for English language learners. It is also one of two schools piloting full-day kindergarten in an effort to increase school readiness for these youngest students. The school has three full-time Title 1 teachers who focus on support for two grade levels each. Each grade level has between two and three classes.

The school adheres to district and state assessment policies and administers the DIBELS, using the data to establish quadrants for student intervention. The quadrants are high fluency, high accuracy; high fluency, low accuracy; low fluency, high accuracy; and low fluency, low accuracy. Typically, the Title 1 faculty tend to focus on the lowest quadrant of students, but with the high numbers of children qualifying for services, most Title 1 instruction is offered in small groups, and individual intervention is rare.

**Procedures.** The pilot began the spring before implementation with the assigned
faculty member and the SOE’s associate dean in charge of teacher preparation and school partnerships meeting with the principal, staff, and district representatives to collaboratively plan. The final model included a dedicated space for university instruction three hours a day, twice a week. During each visit to the site, the group met for 80 minutes of instruction to talk about the pilot and address concerns. The traditional content of the literacy block was taught, including (a) varied diagnostic assessment strategies, (b) data analysis and application, (c) instructional methods for balanced literacy across the five domains identified in the National Reading Panel Report, (d) evaluation and creation of learning materials, and (e) use of research-based strategies for effective teaching. The final 60-minute segment of each site visit was used to work with children.

Candidates were assigned in teams to a grade level. Initial work included assessing the children. Data analyses were done by the candidates under the guidance and modeling of the university instructor; their recommendations for areas to focus intervention were shared with school faculty, who either agreed or offered additional information and guidance. Candidates began working with individual children twice a week in a regular schedule of 15-30 minutes per child per day. Each child had a specific goal that was used to monitor progress and determine when a new goal was needed.

**Results.** After six weeks, teachers and candidates were surveyed for impressions. Results showed that candidates’ experiences varied greatly, particularly by grade level. Those assigned to a grade level that was new to them reported learning at a faster rate than those assigned to a familiar grade level. Those who met with and received feedback from the mentor teacher twice a week felt their children were progressing faster and their time was being used more intentionally than those who did not.

Teacher comments were similar. Those who spoke with their candidates before and after each intervention session felt the pilot was going well and their students were benefitting. They reported learning from their candidates’ ideas and, in some cases, were using the materials designed by their candidates and the progress monitoring tools and diagnostic assessments their candidates had shared.

As a result of the surveys, two changes were made: (1) Candidates were re-assigned to an unfamiliar grade level, and (2) all teachers and candidates agreed to weekly feedback either in person or via email. All parties were again surveyed at the end of the semester, and the comments were almost unanimously positive, as shown in these specific responses.

**Students**

“I could see how to use the data we collected to plan for what a student needed.”

“I understand how to profile my class at the beginning of the year to create groups and plan for differentiated instruction.”

“I liked it when we would learn something in class, like how to use multi-sensory instruction, and then I could practice it with a real kid right away. I also liked being able to share what I was learning with my teacher and see some of the methods from our class in the first grade classroom that I was assigned to.”

**Teachers**

“I definitely want this to continue.”

“One-on-one time practicing with another adult is priceless.”

“I didn’t realize that the reason ___’s fluency was so low was because of hidden phonics issues until my candidate showed me the tests.”
Pilot B

Pilot B was designed for Masters in Initial Teaching (MIT) candidates, who had completed bachelor's degrees and were working towards their teaching certificate and master's degree in a full-time 13-month program. They began in June and were matched with a mentor and classroom for the school year. They spent two days a week at their school site and three days a week in course work at the university. The benefits of this model were that the candidates knew the culture of their buildings, knew the daily routines and procedures favored by their mentor teacher, and were more fully acknowledged and integrated into the faculty. However, not all candidates were being prepared with adequate instructional experiences in culturally responsive teaching practices and equity pedagogy to meet the needs of learners from diverse cultures and low socio-economic areas, where they were most likely to begin their teaching careers.

Background. The pilot began the year before its actual implementation with the Collaborative Schools for Innovation and Success (CSIS) partnership project that had been undertaken with three entities: (a) the second largest public school district in the state, (b) one elementary school identified as an emerging priority school based on student achievement indicators, and (c) two universities. The project had two goals:

1. Developing and implementing research-based models of instruction that have proven to be successful in closing the educational opportunity gap and improving student learning in low-performing schools

2. Developing and implementing research-based models of educator preparation and professional development programs that have proven to be successful in building an educator workforce with the knowledge, skills, and background that align with the characteristics and needs of students in low-performing schools.

OSPI/PESB, 2012

Pilot program candidates were matched to mentor teachers and received extra coursework for co-teaching, opportunities for professional learning community (PLC) involvement, and classes to help them obtain their English language learner endorsement. Monthly questionnaires were completed to check progress towards the aforementioned goals. The teachers were interviewed individually at the beginning and end of the fall.

Setting. The elementary school is a Title 1 urban school with levels of ethnic/cultural diversity and socio-economic diversity that exceed the district average. It has both a special education pre-school program and full-day kindergartens as efforts to increase school readiness for these youngest students. The school has from two to four classrooms in kindergarten through sixth grade. The school's support team includes a reading interventionist Title 1 teacher, two Reading Recovery teachers, and a full-time literacy coach. The school adheres to district and state assessment policies and administers the DRA2, MSP, and MAP, using the data to establish intervention support.

Procedures. The university faculty member offered instruction for a total of two and one half hours a day, twice a week at the university. This time was used to teach the traditional content of the literacy block, as outlined earlier in the article. The candidates shared real student literacy work, learning to deliver and analyze a variety of assessments. Data analyses were completed under the direction and modeling of the faculty member, and recommendations for intervention areas of focus were generated.

Results. There were many benefits of having MITs use authentic student work to learn about best practices in literacy. These included exposure to a multitude of literacy
curricula, resources, assessments, and support. Drawbacks included the variance in collaboration with mentor teachers, including whether or not the candidate was seen in the fall as a co-teacher able to assist in this work, as well as the location of the literacy methods course without direct access to elementary students.

At the end of Pilot B the teacher candidates were asked the following questions, which had also been asked at the beginning of the study.

1. What are the opportunities/experiences that have helped to move you/us closer to actualizing these goals?
2. What are the barriers that you are experiencing?
3. What professional behaviors do you feel you need to learn and practice to be successful in this current setting and in future work settings?
4. What are ways with which your schedule, at your university and here, has been helpful toward your coursework and fieldwork and ways that it hasn’t been helpful?

Representative feedback included the following:

“This process has required a great deal of introspection.”

“It is a good way to collaborate.”

“We can get to more kids, not faster, just better and more effectively.”
Discussion of Pilots A and B

The university instructors, co-authors of this article, saw several benefits of the pilots. Candidates were better able to see connections in the assessment data they collected and learn to match it to strategies specific to the needs of a child and to use progress monitoring to adjust teaching to maximize impact. Many now feel more comfortable teaching the entire K-6 range and are excited to do so in the future. They advocate for themselves when they are confused and recognize the importance of ongoing communication to a successful collaboration. They appreciate the role of peers and specialists in creating a support network for a struggling student and are better able to utilize the strengths of their colleagues. They take more responsibility for their learning. Every candidate worked with at least one ELL child, and candidates no longer fear they will not know how to meet that child’s needs. They feel more competent and more capable as a result of the residency experience.

Overall, highlights of the first semester of the pilot programs include the following:

- Development of intervention materials and master sets of assessment instruments that can be used in candidates’ first classrooms (Pilot A)
- Better articulation of the causes of reading difficulty and ways to intervene using research-based practices (both pilots)

Both pilot programs found symbiotic benefits in the conversations among candidates, teachers, specialists, and the university instructor. Ideas and materials were shared, professional conversations occurred throughout the building, and everyone involved learned. Candidates got to see what lifelong learning and meaningful professional development can look like so that when they graduate and become members of faculties across the country, they will bring that expectation for dynamic, meaningful professional development with them.

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Lisa Laurier is an associate professor of education at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate literacy courses. She also teaches classes in the English Department and graduate courses in school counseling and in social and emotional learning. She has personal experience in all of these areas, having been a classroom teacher, literacy specialist, and school counselor.

Lori Johnson coordinates the elementary Master’s in Initial Teaching Program, at Whitworth University described in this article. She is a National Board Certified Teacher in Early and Middle School Reading, Literacy, and Language Arts, currently pursuing her doctorate at the University of Washington.
Take-Home Book Bags: A Motivating Strategy for Home Support

Deb L. Marciano

Abstract

As recreational reading is decreasing as a chosen activity for young children, pleasurable family reading experiences can contribute significantly to students’ literacy motivation and skills. This article suggests that teachers can promote effective home literacy support with motivating, creative, and interactive take-home book bags. The author shares processes and strategies for creating these bags, which she used successfully in her own classroom for many years and now shares with teacher candidates and workshop attendees.

“Students need opportunities to stretch their reading abilities but also to experience the satisfaction and pleasure of easy, fluent reading.”

(Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010, Appendix A, p.9)

Children constantly stretch their reading abilities with texts across ranges of complexity that are part of their daily lives: They are fluent in watching movies and TV, using mobile devices, and playing video games. They can talk easily with friends about plots, sequences, characters, problem resolution, protagonists, and heroes, and they draw thoughtful and meticulously detailed conclusions with no prodding from adults or laboring over worksheets. Totally engaged, these young consumers of pop culture display confidence, excitement, enthusiasm, and incredible recall of information, using extensive vocabularies, making countless conceptual connections. But when children are expected to read at home, do they “experience satisfaction and pleasure of easy fluent reading” (CCSS, 2010, Appendix, p.9) through books? Can we provide opportunities for enjoyable literacy opportunities that benefit all family members?

This article suggests that teachers enhance recreational literacy through providing take-home book bags. During my elementary classroom teaching years, I utilized these bags to encourage motivating and authentic homework which included creative thinking experiences. It was enjoyable for me to create and share the bags with my students, their families, and other teachers in workshops I conducted for statewide professional...
development. Now as I share some of those bags with the pre-service teachers I currently teach, I am drawn to the possibilities these materials hold for a new generation of young readers and new teachers. My goal is to suggest ways to make reading satisfying and pleasurable. Home literacy activities may counteract the feeling in some young students that “reading is something you do in school,” as I was told by a second grader in a local school during a recent classroom visit.

**Review of Related Research**

While the goals of CCSS include deep thinking and problem solving, engagement in pleasure reading activities is minimal. Rebora (2011) notes that recreational reading is at high risk due to over emphasis on academic reading focused on improving scores on high stakes standardized testing. More than 125 children’s book authors and illustrators recently petitioned President Obama, calling attention to overtesting with a statement of British author Philip Pullman: “We are creating a generation that hates reading and feels nothing but hostility for literature” (as qtd. by Neill, 2013, n.p.). If children do not have opportunities to read quality children’s literature for enjoyment in school, how will they choose recreational reading as a home activity?

Programs in British (Ward, 2013) and Canadian schools (Murphy, 2012) cite successful, creative ways to enhance children’s reading for pleasure both in and out of school. While we cannot assume that all parents read with their children at home—or that they even know this is helpful—educators can provide examples to try to get the conversation started. Organizations such as Reading is Fundamental (RIF) offer tips, provide resources on choosing good books, and help families establish a motivating literate home environment. Paired reading (MacDonald, 2010) extends home literacy, as children share books with family members, building on school experiences, with the potential to improve overall literacy behavior in easy, enjoyable ways. Rasinski (2012) suggests three of “the essentials” for developing reading fluency: (1) reading real literature, (2) getting real-time word recognition support, and (3) participating in assisted reading activities. These are included as families are encouraged to participate in book bag activities on whatever level they are able.

The concept of home-school literacy activities is not new, but in these times of scripted one-size-fits-all classroom instruction, there is a need to find more engaging recreational reading opportunities for children. Paired reading literacy interactions with family members may connect school with much needed parental involvement (Compton-Lilly, 2009; Compton-Lilly, Rogers, & Lewis, 2012; Topping, 1987), while supporting developmental reading skills. Ada (2003) urges teachers to connect students’ two worlds—home and school—in meaningful ways. Ordonez-Jasis and Ortiz (2006) specify that home-school partnerships should be respectful, building on strengths of parents and other family members. Morgan, Nutbrown, and Hannon (2009) focus more particularly on ways children’s academic achievement is enhanced when their fathers are involved in their development. Take-home book bags can help make those connections, not only presenting books to share, but reinforcing literacy strategies.
Benefits of Take-Home Book Bags

Sometimes called “story backpacks,” “take-home literacy kits,” and similar names, these take-home bags include a piece of children’s literature, a notebook for family responses, a book for the participating student’s activity, and some type of literacy extension activity for the family to complete at home. Activities might include writing, drawing, or making something related to the book. Borrowed from the classroom and returned in a day or two, the bags include all materials necessary to complete a project and simple directions for families to follow. Tasks reflect a variety of reading levels and interests, providing opportunities for children to develop and refine fluency, while helping parents better understand what their children are learning in school and how they can support those approaches. Grande (2004) highlights similar benefits of literacy bags as enjoyable involvement for families, effective communication tools between school and home, and a means of providing parents with awareness of the literacy skills their children are learning in school. But the most important purpose is to engage families in pleasurable literacy activities in a relaxed, comfortable environment.


Children may feel they are in control of this literacy experience as they lead family members (Galbraith, & Alexander, 2005). Paired reading allows children to share books they have experienced at school, to lead literacy activities familiar to them (similar to those done in class), and thus to take a comfortable leadership role in the family activity. As they interact with their family members, children can experience firsthand how parents or older siblings may grapple with text complexity and make connections among themes, characters, unknown vocabulary words, or story concepts (Newkirk, 2012).

Larrotta and Yamamura (2011) remind us that as the Latina/Latino school-aged population
increases, educators need to find materials that appeal to all children and help them feel comfortable and represented among the wide range of book characters and stories. Being able to identify with book characters may increase children’s motivation to read. Using bilingual picture books and associated activities may help fill this need for some students, particularly those from minority backgrounds.

Steps for Organizing the Project

**Assistance and objectives.** Make a list of book titles, goals, and developmentally appropriate tasks you may want to include in bags. If you need help, you may ask others to make the bags and gather associated materials. You may ask local community groups and clubs for volunteers to create bags and fund materials. For more extensive funding, you may apply for grants, PTO monies, or support from business partnerships. Keep in mind, however, the bags need not be fancy or elaborate. Plan at least four for your first year, one per quarter. Using a backwards design approach (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011), define your purpose for each bag (e.g., increasing comprehension, writing a letter, using puppets to retell a story, sequencing story events), and decide what you want parents and children to do.

**Book choices.** Use books you already have, with which children have some familiarity. Use quality children’s literature: for instance, books recognized by the Caldecott and Newberry Medals, the National Book Awards, the Coretta Scott King Award, or the Children’s Notable Books List. Liang (2013) provides a helpful list of awards given annually. Book reviews are available through the Hornbook and on blogs like *A Book or Two: Children’s Literature Reviews* (Marciano, 2011), written by my teacher candidates. Parents struggling with their own reading ability might find shorter books more accessible. Avoid choosing books tied to a season or holiday, so you do not limit bags to a specific time of year. Fiction, especially fairy tales, can provide many interpretations and may be familiar to parents. Look for books that lend themselves easily to a literacy extension activity. For example, Henkes’
Chrysanthemum (1991) has 13 letters in her name. Families might enjoy listing each member’s name, counting the letters, and then creating a simple bar graph representing the family’s information. Jumpstart your own brainstorming with sites like Pinterest.com and Readwritethink.org. Choose books the students have enjoyed in class. Finally, use books you personally love! Your enthusiasm will increase as you create your backpacks, and that excitement will be contagious for your students!

Material choices. Make sure all materials necessary to complete the project are included in the book bag. Providing materials helps remove stress for families who might not have needed items at home or the means for purchasing them. Remember, you want to easily engage families in the activity, to help them feel comfortable and invited—not stressed and uncertain of how to proceed. Due to potential for loss or breakage, do not send home expensive items or large equipment.

Considerations for Assembling Bags

Bag and contents. If you are crafty, design the front of the bag to resemble the book cover. I’ve used canvas bags, mostly collected at teacher conferences or purchased at local fabric/craft stores on sale. Solicit gently used backpacks at the end of the school year to contain next year’s new kits. Fabric paint or markers, simple appliques, or sewing right on a canvas bag can make it immediately recognizable. An easier method is to use craft bags that have clear pockets on the outside, inserting a photo or copy of the book cover in the pockets. You can replace these as you reuse the bag for other books; however I find it more convenient to designate one bag for each kit. All materials stay in the bag for later storage.

Along with a copy of the book, I include a welcome letter, a student activity book, and a family response journal, with instructions to parents to write a message to the class about their experiences with the book bag. I include all craft materials, puzzles, game pieces, etc. that will be involved in the activities. I replenish as needed such items as glue stick, scissors, cardboard, paper, pencils and sharpener, colored pencils, erasers, dice, tape, and whatever else you think families might need. You may also include an appropriate theme-related toy or puppet. Make two facsimiles of
the book cover, one for the student activity book and one for the family response journal.

**Additional provisions.** Add a list of similar books, links to author websites, facts related to the story, etc. (e.g., see *Chrysanthemum* at Henkes’ site: kevinhenkes.com/book/chrysanthemum). Keep in mind, however, that many families may not have Internet access. Provide the links and materials in additional languages if appropriate for your student population. Remember to keep the whole bag simple—within your own and your students’ comfort levels.

Since children’s artwork most often consists of drawing with crayons or markers, make a concerted effort to use other activities for your book bag. If drawing is the best means of achieving your goal, however, include different materials, such as textured paper, colored pencils, or pastel oil crayons. Attempt to use a wide variety of materials and activities, but be sure they are simple enough for non-educators to use with children. Give directions for paper bag puppets or use pre-cut shapes to create a mosaic. You might include a set of finger puppets or sequencing props to manipulate during the reading or retelling of the story.

**Processes for Implementation**

**Management.** Have a kick-off introducing the book bags and activities. Discuss with students the responsibilities they must assume to make this a positive experience for everyone, including respect for materials and the need for returning the bags and materials in a timely way. Organization for borrowing the book bags is as easy as posting a class list with names numbered in alphabetical order. Children use the materials in the bag according to their class list number: Child #8 on the list completes her activity on page 8 of the student activity book, and her family writes their note in the family response journal on page 8. In both books, students use the table of contents to write their names on the appropriate pages. Keep a chart with the book bag titles written at the top and check off as children each have a turn. Eventually all children will have had a chance to take the bag home. A classroom aid might check the bags upon return to restock materials as needed, and families can note if something is
missing or broken. Children with multiple households may borrow the bag again after all classmates have had a turn.

**Follow up.** The main purposes of the take-home book bags are to elicit communication between school and home and to provide authentic literacy activities for use at home. The family response journal, which includes one or two simple prompts, can focus on level of enjoyment, “ah-ha” moments, questions related to the story, and/or appreciation. These responses will give you feedback on usefulness, understandings, and areas needing adjustments. Students share their own page in show-and-tell manner the day they bring the book back. This provides them the spotlight, expanding their social and oral skills while sharing information about their families. Their excitement often inspires their classmates.

![Image of a child's drawing]

**Conclusion**

Take-home book bags provide outstanding learning and social opportunities. This is a win-win-win project: Parents learn about their children, children learn about their families, and literacy skills taught in school are reinforced at home in authentic ways. Children experience a sense of ownership and involvement, evidenced in Zeece and Wallace's study (2009) when they asked a preschooler, “What’s in your bag?” Her enthusiastic reply was "Books and good stuff" — thus giving the name “Books and Good Stuff” to their literacy take-home bag project (p. 36).

For me, making the bags has been a relaxing extension of my love of crafts and literacy. I have created many bags, using different books, activities, and goals. Doing this does not need to require a great sacrifice of time if you ask others to help. Wilson (2013) outlines a project conducted with pre-service teachers as a class assignment: They learned how to match standards and exercise creativity, while involving parents—an effective combination for learning.

Take-home literacy bags are easy for families to work with, since book choice, materials, literacy extension activities, and directions are provided for their use. Families have no need to search for paper or craft supplies, choose a book, or spend any money on resources to participate in the activity. Tasks reinforce literacy skills learned in school, which are open ended enough for families to personalize while making
connections with their children as to how they use literacy in their own daily life. Remember, we want our children to be real readers: "A real reader is someone who approaches reading with heated passion, who talks with others about books, seeks out books, compares and devours books for enjoyment and for information, and passes judgment on issues in books" (Oczkus, 2012, p. 43). Let’s ask families to help us ignite that passion at home and keep it burning. Keep Calm and Book Bag On!

References


### Cited and Suggested Children's Books

**Note:** Books suited for readers theatre and fairy tales make excellent take-home books. Send a set of props or puppets for family members to use.


++ Wordless Picture Books bridge language gaps.

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Deb L. Marciano, PhD, is an associate professor of ECSE at Valdosta State University in Valdosta, GA, where she teaches literacy and teacher preparation courses. Formerly she was an elementary teacher in Cranston, RI. She has served on the IRA’s Children’s and Young Adults Book Award Committee and on the board of the Children’s Literature Assembly for NCTE.
Teaching Idea

Children’s Literature as a Bridge of Understanding For Classmates With and Without Autism

Jane E. Kelley, Teresa A. Cardon, and Dana Algeo-Nichols

Abstract

Because the number of children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is increasing rapidly and these children are attending general education classes, teachers need to find ways of helping students with and without ASD to better understand each other. This article considers challenges of developing understanding relationships, suggesting two books that are beneficial to read aloud and discuss in classrooms.

The national report of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; 2014) has estimated that 1 in 68 children are currently diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Recently a National Health Statistics Report surveyed parents and found prevalence reported by this population closer to 1 in 50 children being identified with an ASD (Blumberg et al., 2013). In the State of Utah, 1 in 54 children are being diagnosed with an ASD (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). The ability to meet the needs of this increasing population is quickly becoming a concern for public health and education.

The rate of ASD is trending upward, and schools will continue to serve an increasing number of children with this disorder. Although many children with ASD qualify for special education services, there is a strong impetus to include students with ASD in regular classrooms; with current statistics reaching 1 in 68, it is estimated that every classroom in America could have a child with ASD (CDC, 2014). We recommend that classroom peers learn to understand their classmates with ASD, particularly to be aware of the challenges that are part of their lives.

Reading books that authentically depict characters with autism is one way teachers
can help bridge the gap in understanding that may exist between students with autism and their neurotypical classmates. In this article, we provide an overview of awareness and adjustments that might be needed and suggest two books to read aloud with students.

**Awareness and Adjustments**

In preparation for the reading experience, children should be introduced to characteristics they might notice in their classmates with ASD.

**Autism characteristics.** Autism is classified as a disorder that presents with social communication deficits along with restrictive or repetitive behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Symptoms appear in early childhood and range in severity from mildly to severely affected. Social communication deficits may include difficulties in expressive or receptive communication, verbal or non-verbal communication, and social interactions. Restrictive and repetitive interests may include repetitive movements, strict adherence to routines, highly fixed interests, and atypical reactions to sensory stimuli.

These deficits and behaviors may seem strange and even disturbing to children who do not learn to look beyond them. You might want to introduce the characteristics or symptoms of autism using an informational text, such as a short article titled “Autism” from *KidsHealth* (2012). The information presented in this kid-friendly article gives an overview about the challenges a child with autism can experience.

**Shared perspectives.** Currently, no specific curriculum has been identified as best practice for educating individuals with autism, and additional information to better support autism in education is needed. Behavioral interventions have been recommended as the most beneficial treatments for individuals with ASD (National Autism Center, 2009). Currently there is a strong impetus to teach children with ASD to learn neurotypical behaviors and to accommodate their actions to match societal expectations through such interventions as peer mentors (Schmidt & Stichter, 2012) and social skill groups (DeRosier, Swick, David, McMillen, & Matthews, 2011). Embedded in these types of interventions is the notion that children with ASD must learn to understand their peers. It can take years, and in fact it is an ongoing process for children with ASD to understand how to act and behave in a neurotypical society.

We feel that understanding perspectives should work both ways and that the responsibility for understanding others should not fall solely on the child with the disability. Similar to using multicultural literature to promote understanding of cultural diversity (Evans, 2012), we recommend children’s books with characters who have an ASD to help peers understand neurodiversity. “Engaging in the simulation experiences of fiction literature can facilitate the understanding of others who are different from ourselves and can augment our capacity for empathy and social inference” (Mar & Oatley, 2008, p. 173).

We suggest selecting at least two books to read aloud. We recommend *Rules* (Lord, 2006) and *Mockingbird* (Erkskine, 2010) since they represent different ends of the Autism spectrum, as well as point-of-view narrators with and without autism. We urge you to put aside the reading guides and use these books to encourage earnest conversations about autism.
Mockingbird by Kathryn Erkskine

Summary. Caitlin, a fifth grader, always admired her older brother, Devon, and depended on him to help her navigate the challenges of Asperger's Syndrome (the highest functioning form of Autism). Unfortunately, Caitlin does not know how to cope after her brother is fatally wounded in a middle school shooting. While the community struggles with the calamity, Caitlin also struggles as she tries to understand how to grieve in this situation and bring closure. Caitlin's candid, straightforward comments like “Devon-who-is-dead” unsettles her widower father, who recently lost his wife to cancer, as he tries to deal with Devon's untimely and devastating death. With the help of her school counselor, Mrs. Brooks, and a new friend, Michael, Caitlin learns to feel empathy and bring closure for herself and her community.

Teaching moment. In many instances, Caitlin misinterprets what is happening in the classroom. For example, when Rachel is upset, Caitlin tries to help by moving Rachel's desk to the back corner of the room. “I decide to help Rachel. I'm a very helpful person. I look around the room but there is no place for her to hide... where she can be in her Personal Space and not have people staring at her.” However, Rachel and her classmates don't perceive Caitlin’s effort that way. “I hear voices saying, What is she doing? She's such a weirdo! She's finally cracked?” This is an example of Caitlyn, who lacks social skills and social sensitivity, misreading the situation. It could be a point of discussion for students in the class to discuss why Caitlyn thought she was being helpful.
Rules by Cynthia Lord

Summary. Catherine, a 12-year-old, is embarrassed by her younger brother, David, who has autism, because he has temper tantrums, only eats certain foods, and needs to be told how to behave in every situation. To help David function in society, or at the very least to make life easier for Catherine, she creates a list of rules for David to follow, such as “No toys in the fish tank.” When a new girl, Kristi, moves in next door, Catherine intentionally tries to keep David at a distance so he does not ruin a possible friendship. Unintentionally Catherine befriends Jason, a teenage boy at the clinic where David receives therapy. Jason, a non-verbal paraplegic, uses pictures to communicate. Wanting to help Jason, Catherine creates new picture cards so that he can express himself, and throughout the process she learns how to accept her feelings about her brother’s disability.

Teaching moment. While Catherine and her brother, David, are waiting for their father to go to the video store, Catherine worries that her dad will be late again. “In exactly six minutes and thirty three seconds, there is going to be a scene. I know it as sure as I know the window next door is open, and David’s scream will travel from my porch across our yard, and through that open window… ‘Remember the rule.’ I flip to the back of my sketchbook and show him Late doesn’t mean not coming.” This is an example of David’s insistence on sameness and predictability. Recognizing this as a symptom of autism is a first step in understanding how people with the disability perceive things differently. This would make an interesting discussion point.
Additional Teaching Ideas

Here are some guiding questions to consider when reading the books.

- What are some daily challenges people with autism experience?
- How are family members of people with autism affected by this disability?
- What can you do to help a peer with autism adapt to the class community?
- Are there any strategies that might help a student with autism in the classroom? In the lunchroom? On the playground?

Overall, using literature with characters who have autism creates an awareness of inherent characteristics and challenges of people with ASD and begins to foster understanding. Used thoughtfully, these books can create effective bridges to help students (and educators) relate to the needs and feelings of individuals who are neurologically different from themselves.

References


Jane E. Kelley, EdD, is an associate professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Washington State University. She was an elementary teacher for 10 years and now teaches courses in children’s literature and literacy education for educators. Her research and scholarly activities include critical multicultural analysis of children’s literature, reflection by teachers, and differentiation of instruction.

Teresa A. Cardon, PhD, CCC-SLP, is Director of Autism Studies in the Department of Behavioral Science at Utah Valley University. She has worked with individuals with autism spectrum disorders for over 20 years. Dr. Cardon has published her research on autism in peer-reviewed journals and presented at national and international conferences. Her current research focuses on video modeling with young children with autism.

Dana Algeo-Nichols, MA, CCC-SLP, has been a practicing speech language pathologist for seven years. She is currently pursuing a doctorate in the Language, Literacy and Technology Program in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Washington State University. Her research interest is literacy education for children on the margins.
Teaching Idea

Mind Maps: A Lesson In Creativity

Daniel Weinstein

Abstract

Teaching through mind maps can stimulate the visual learner in any of our students. The techniques of this art take ten minutes to learn and can be applied to nearly every aspect of education. Examples are included which show how my students have utilized these innovative methods and creative techniques to foster introspection, take notes in class, reflect on an experience, brainstorm ideas, and set goals. I have also included one of the mind maps I made for a lesson on Macbeth, on which my students’ notes have been written over mine.

I’ve been teaching secondary English for the past 20 years and have made some headway with the challenge of teaching creativity. It is easier than you think, and most of my ideas, techniques, and philosophies can be found at www.thecreativitycore.com. For this teaching tip, I want to share with you one of the primary methods I use to unlock the creative mind: help students take better notes, design an essay, organize thoughts, celebrate an accomplishment, brainstorm ideas, or engage in a variety of other mental operations.

To teach your students mind mapping, all you have to do is require them to bring felt-tip markers to class, show them the "art gallery" at my website, and explain that "it is all based on having a central core and ideas radiating from the core." You can also emphasize the value of arrows (showing the direction of thoughts), the addition of artwork, and the importance of creating each individual’s own style.

Mind mapping is the antidote to soporific classes, boring outlines, and frustrating writer’s block. This technique can be transforming for any student—no matter the age, learning style, ability or disability. Let me take you through a few examples and explain what mind maps can accomplish.
To Foster Introspection

A student (or anyone else) who begins the mind-mapping process enters an introspective state and can learn a lot about him- or herself. My students have come up with all kinds of introspective mind maps, including "Career Options," "My Negative and Positive Attributes," and "Books to Read." This unique example of an introspective mind map is from a portfolio introduction.
To Take Notes In a Class

The mind-mapping techniques can be used to more effectively learn in any class. The classroom experience becomes more captivating when students take notes with colorful markers in a free-flowing and organic mind map. My students are encouraged to submit mind maps from any of their courses, not just English.
To Reflect On An Experience

Language arts teachers have the privilege of making student lives a central part of the curriculum through memoir, poetry, and varied narrative genres. A mind map can serve as a way to generate details for a story, or it can be the art form itself. This student helped raise money to fight cancer, and she celebrated the experience by committing the memories to brightly colored words on paper.
To Brainstorm Ideas

Mind mapping can be an effective strategy to collaborate with others on ideas or just brainstorm by yourself. This one was created during a meeting of school newspaper staff: The reporters were preparing an article on how Chinese classes had become more popular than Latin classes.
To Set Goals

I always lead students through a goal-setting exercise by asking them to mind map their "short-term, medium range, and lifelong goals." It is essential to set goals and to help our students learn to apply this vital skill. This one is a student’s "bucket list."
To Teach Literature

Why should students be the only ones to make mind maps? I break down all my literary units into mind maps, and the pupils add their notes on top of mine. For example, I teach *Macbeth* through a series of a dozen mind maps. On each one I write down some key quotes, questions, and information I want to get out to my students as we study or perform the play in class. Then the pupils are invited to add their ideas.
Daniel Weinstein teaches AP Language and Creative Writing at Great Neck South High School on Long Island. Most of his career has been devoted to student-centered techniques and workshop philosophies. His most important influences include the National Writing Project, the Leadership Academy at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and the New England Art program.
Dear Literacy Coach,

I teach at a school that includes several students from impoverished backgrounds. Recently I’ve learned that many of these students begin kindergarten with a 3,000-word vocabulary deficit compared to students from higher socio-economic homes. I know the importance of explicitly teaching vocabulary words, but I am unsure which words I should teach and how to teach them in order to have the greatest impact on my students. Do you have any suggestions?

Sincerely,
At a Loss for Words

Dear At a Loss,

Many teachers have the same concern you do. We know we should teach vocabulary words to our students but don’t know which words will make the biggest difference. Heibert and Kamil, (2005) suggest a number of ways to select words to teach:

- Choose words that are generally useful, words students are likely to encounter again.
- Consider the instructional potential of the words, particularly ways they connect to other words and concepts.
- Select some Tier 2 words, those more likely to appear in texts than occur in conversation. They are often synonyms of Tier 1 words (Tier 1= bug/Tier 2= insect). Many will not be completely new to students, but are still useful to emphasize and discuss.
- Select some Tier 3 words—words that are content specific. Tier 3 words are most often found in science, math, and social studies.
- Include words about story characters, setting, problem, solution, etc.
- Teach some words that have multiple meanings.
However, knowing which words to teach is only half the battle. You will also need to know how to develop a strong vocabulary program. This can be done by explicitly teaching specific vocabulary words by using descriptions and providing at least seven to twelve exposures to the word in different contexts. For every word you teach your students explicitly, many in the class will learn one to three connected words inadvertently. Vocabulary words should be taught before, during, and after reading.

Exposing your students to rich language through read-alouds and class discussion is another important way to help them learn new words. Read-alouds should be from texts two to three years above their current grade level. Students should listen with a purpose in mind and discuss what they have learned. Reading aloud to students increases their receptive language, and rereading increases their expressive vocabulary as well.

Word parts such as prefixes, suffixes, base words, and root words are important in a powerful word study program. This type of knowledge will easily transfer to other words. Students will also need to learn how to figure out words in context. Finally, teaching cognates, words with a Latin base that are similar to English words, can be particularly helpful for our English language learners.

It is important to remember that learning vocabulary words is not like an on/off switch, but more like a dimmer switch that makes things brighter and clearer with each exposure to the word. Therefore, the more opportunities you provide using words in different contexts, the better the understanding the students will develop.

Strong vocabulary instruction is a powerful way to build word knowledge and comprehension. Knowing which words to teach and how to teach them will provide a great advantage for your students. Best of luck in designing and implementing your program!

Sincerely,
The Literacy Coach
Gerri Hixenbaugh

Gerri Hixenbaugh is currently a BYU intern facilitator with a passion for literacy and learning. She has served as an adjunct professor at the University of Utah as well as a Jordan School District literacy specialist. She has also been president of UCIRA.
The year 2013 has contributed varied and high quality children’s books. We chose to review some of those that we loved that did not receive much formal recognition (with one obvious exception).

We have arranged and labeled them by approximate grade level; however we recognize that leveling is only an approximation and that many children’s interests and abilities do not correspond with what might be expected of their grade in school.

Preschool-Grade 2


While David waits eagerly for snow to fall, his mom tries to distract him by asking him to help around the house—baking cookies,
cleaning bathrooms, and changing sheets. Each activity is cut short, however, when David rushes outside to check the weather, leaving his mom with a mess to clean up. The falling snow echoes David’s activities in the house, giving the story structure and pleasing predictability. “But then the flour, white and fine, made David think of snow. . . . Small flakes fell softly, white and fine” (n.p.). A series of double-page spreads show the neighborhood from a bird’s-eye view, establishing a distinct sense of place, while following the progression of the storm from the first flakes to the “big snow” blanketing the town. Light spilling from street lights and glowing through windows reflects off the snow’s surface, suffusing the final spread with warmth as David and his parents walk through the deep snow hand in hand. (Danyelle Leach)


As the title suggests, If You Want to See a Whale offers advice on what to do and what not to do if you want to see a whale. While ostensibly instructing readers “not to notice” the wonders around them, both text and illustrations subtly direct readers’ imaginations to those very distractions. Julie Fogliano’s poem flows with elegant ease, pointing to “possible pirates,” a “pelican who may or may not be smiling,” and “things that are smaller than most small things.” Alliteration, repetition, and delicate rhythms sparkle when read aloud. Uncluttered illustrations of a barefoot boy observing nature invite reflection, and readers will enjoy lingering over the pictures to spot the bird and dog that accompany him. The final illustration extends the text, rewarding watchful waiting with a silent appearance by the long-sought whale. (Danyelle Leach)


While the other animals are happy with subdued, calm, and boring lives, Mr. Tiger is looking for change. As he grows wilder (and sheds his clothes), his friends drive him out of town. He happily goes to the wilderness and enjoys climbing trees, running through grass, and doing pretty much everything tigers are supposed to do. Gray/brown hues cover the pages, while a punch of orange represents the non-conforming Mr. Tiger, and the drab colors of uniform city life are a dramatic contrast to the colorful lure of the wild as Tiger finds a place to let loose. The story resolves in an unexpected, happy ending that proves that it is always better to be yourself. (Tara Merrill)
Grades 1-3


The curiosity and big ideas of Albert Einstein changed the world. *On a Beam of Light* tells the story of a man who, even at a young age, wasn’t afraid to embrace his uniqueness and think for himself; he “wanted to discover the hidden mysteries in the world.” Abstract gouache illustrations with loose line work bring to life the personality of a fascinating man who loved playing his violin, riding his bike, and walking barefoot around town eating ice cream. Red topic sentences in a large font jump off the page, and playful speech bubbles engage the reader with each page turn. This non-fiction gem is a glimpse into the life of Albert Einstein that will be enjoyed by budding scientists and history lovers alike. (Tara Merrill)


As everyone knows, the best part of your birthday is being able to do whatever you like—and Dana does! This story for beginning readers teaches natural consequences and anti-bullying with humor and a surprising twist. On her birthday Dana *likes* to call Anthony an “ickaborse,” pinch him, and take his dessert from his lunchbox. But when Anthony surprises Dana with the perfect birthday present—a big white elephant with toenails painted Dana’s favorite color—Dana’s attitude starts to change. The offbeat cartoon illustrations complement the unconventional text, and together they are sure to elicit a few giggles from independent readers. (Tara Merrill)
Grades 2-5


Flora, a spunky farm pig, longs for adventure outside her pen. When she is taken from her family and sent on an expedition to the South Pole, the (nearly) perpetually positive pig convinces herself that she is an important member of the expedition, despite being chained in the ship’s hold and referred to as “bacon maker” and “little pork chop” by the cook. Flora believes she can pull the sled with the dog team, and she maintains her irresistible optimism as the adventure turns dangerous with thieving rats, a sinking ship, and a hungry crew. Along the way, the pig befriends an independent cat and a veteran sled dog, whose distinctive personalities reflect their natural dispositions, resulting in delightful and humorous interactions. Dialogue energizes the story and makes this a superb read-aloud. (Danyelle Leach)

Grades 5-8


Eleven-year-old Annie lives two miles outside the small town of Sunshine, with her younger brother, Rew, and her mentally unstable Gran. Since the most exciting thing she has done recently is watch ABC’s television report of the Iran hostage crisis, Annie plans to spend an uneventful summer climbing trees, telling stories, and listening to the “uncluttered quiet” of the Zebra Forest—a stand of white birch and chocolate oak behind her home. Annie’s life and expectations change when a riot breaks out at the nearby prison, and an escaped convict comes out of the Zebra Forest and into the family’s kitchen, taking them hostage. What happens next forces family members to face long-held secrets as well as their own imperfections. At turns suspenseful and thoughtful, this story deals with anger, mistakes, responsibility, and forgiveness with powerful honesty. (Danyelle Leach)

Don Brown’s illustrated account of the Dirty Thirties opens with an attention-grabbing depiction of Black Sunday’s “savage storm.” Brown then goes back in time to explore the factors that led to the dust storms on the American plains, never pointing a finger of blame, but instead letting readers draw their own conclusions. Gripping details and relatable comparisons underscore the magnitude of the disaster: barbed-wire fences glowing blue with static electricity, swarms of grasshoppers devouring fence posts, and dirt blowing “nearly twenty times higher than the Washington Monument.” Speech bubbles with brief quotations from eye-witness accounts deepen the emotional resonance. Golds, browns, and grays dominate the multipanel and double-page illustrations, emphasizing an unrelenting sun, inescapable dust, and the sagging shoulders of people struggling to survive. Perfectly-paced storytelling and dramatic illustrations recreate the sights, sounds, smells, and spirit of the time, giving readers a you-are-there experience. (Danyelle Leach)


Interlaced with humor and personality, *The Thing About Luck* tells of Summer, a 12-year-old girl who learns to navigate her first love and face her fears in this coming-of-age story. While her parents care for elderly relatives in Japan, Summer and her brother, Jaz, spend the season traveling with their grandparents as part of a wheat harvesting crew. Summer’s extensive knowledge of wheat and her intense fear of mosquitoes (almost dying of malaria can do that) set her apart from the average tween, but her relationships with an awkward brother, eccentric grandparents, and a faithful family dog make her sympathetic. Exchanges between Summer and her demanding, yet loving, grandmother
showcase a distinct cultural and generational divide that will keep you smiling at this quirky Japanese American family. (This book won the 2013 National Book Award.) (Tara Merrill)


This memoir of a Jewish boy caught in the horrors of the Holocaust is both poignant and inspiring, without being too graphic for a younger audience. Leon was only nine years old when his family was torn away from their home. He was forced to leave his youth behind as he endured separation from his family and the horrors of concentration camps; but with intuition, perseverance, luck, and the intervention of Oskar Schindler, a man who risked his own life to save nearly 1,200 Jews—Leon survived. This story of struggle and loss will show young readers the power of kindness and human decency in the face of evil. (Tara Merrill)

Danyelle Leach volunteers at her local elementary school, presenting weekly story times. She most recently served as a 2013 Cybils Award panelist for the Easy Reader and Early Chapter Books categories.

Tara Merrill earned a bachelor’s degree in English from Brigham Young University. She now shares a love of reading with her four young children.

Together they blog at http://bookshelvesintheculdesac.blogspot.com
Book Reviews

Don’t Overlook These Young Adult Books

Barbara A. Ward

Although much attention focuses on winners of the American Library Association Awards each January, among which many are happy to find their favorites, many other outstanding books that receive less attention are no less deserving of a place on the bookshelves. These reviews introduce some of the quality young adult literature of 2013.


Adolf Eichmann, the head of operations for the Nazis’ Final Solution, was a man whose name struck fear in the heart of any hearer. But as World War II came to an end in 1945, this powerful man somehow disappeared and went unpunished for his crimes against humanity. Incredibly, he managed to escape notice for 16 years, hiding in Argentina, until a team of spies brought him back to Israel where he faced justice. Readers will be fascinated at Eichmann’s ability to hide in plain sight and at the fact that a teen girl and her blind father provided information that would lead to his arrest. The involvement of an elite Israeli spy team, many of them with personal connections to the Holocaust, along with lesser-known heroic figures, takes the book at a breathless pace as readers will race through the pages to see if Eichmann manages to escape and go
underground once again. The book relates some of the mistakes and assumptions that could have spelled failure for the team and its mission, as well as its triumphs and its members’ dedication, with photos throughout the text. This factual narrative deservedly won the YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction.


The citizens of Roswell Station are quite puritanical, dealing swiftly and severely with those who break the town's rules or deviate from the norm. When she is 14, Judith and her best friend, Lottie, disappear from town. Lottie's body floats down the river, while Judith doesn't return for two years. Judith's cut tongue makes it hard for her to communicate, and the villagers shun her because of what they assume happened while she was away. Because her mother fears what others will make of her, Judith remains mute, rarely speaking. Only when the village is threatened by outsiders does she enlist the help of her kidnapper. Thanks to an unexpected friend in Maria, she begins trying to speak and even decides to attend school. Ever since she was a child, Judith has loved Lucas, a handsome local boy. But he pays little attention to her, while she yearns for his attentions. Even Judith's mother shuts the door against her daughter when Judith most needs her help. Were it not for the horse and cow in the barn, her brother, and Maria, her lot would be, indeed, loveless. Her interest in Lucas is palpable, especially since the entire book is addressed to him through the author's use of second person. This title brings to mind The Scarlet Letter and Speak, while reminding teen readers of the power of finding and using one's voice, especially in righting a wrong. Judith's story of redemption is powerfully told.
This original and intriguing novel explores a future world in which vampires and those who may be infected by vampires live inside the walls of Coldtowns, alongside regular citizens who are trapped there. So fascinated are outsiders by these exotic places that the goings-on in those towns are broadcast to outsiders, contributing a hint of realism for the fantastic story. Teenage Tana awakens after a party to find that all the guests except her former boyfriend Aidan and a young vampire named Gavriel are dead. Since Aidan has been attacked by a vampire and Tana fears that she too has been contaminated, they head for the nearest Coldtown, where they hope to find sanctuary. During several twists, turns, and surprises along the way, readers will be as helplessly enthralled by Black’s prose as they are by the most innocent victim who might be lured by the charms of Lucien, the vampire who created Gavriel. Tana is an imperfect heroine, making costly mistakes but redeemed by her loyalty to her friends and her knowledge that everyone longs for those most human of all needs: acceptance, love, and compassion. Teen readers will be pleased that the book contains references to a well known short story about choices, "The Lady or the Tiger," a narrative which explores the bestial nature hidden within us all.
Reservation, is placed in advanced classes in his new junior high, where he is ignored or scorned by his classmates because of their prejudices about reservation residents. When new student George Haddonfield, the son of an Air Force officer, tries to befriend Lewis, the other white students try to discourage their friendship. As Lewis wavers between his mistrust for George and his longing for a friend, they spend time together, bonding over their love for music—in particular, the Beatles. Each of the chapter titles is a Beatles song or a Paul McCartney song associated with the musician’s time after the Beatles. The book’s title perfectly evokes the ineffable longing felt by those who dream of transcending their current situation. The clash between that longing for more and the prevalent need to stay close to the familiar is beautifully described in this book. The author explores many significant themes and questions through his characters: an individual’s cultural identity; the assumptions we make about others; the secret selves we reveal to no one; the relentlessness of bullies and the school system’s inability to see them as they are; the soul-numbing poverty that makes life’s little extras impossible for some; and the risks involved in becoming someone’s friend and accepting him on his own terms.


When Jane moves to Brookport, she eagerly soaks up the flavors and experiences of her new home. She meets Jack near the soup truck where he works. The attraction is mutual, and they begin to spend as much time as possible with each other. As a skateboarder, Jane often encounters sexist attitudes at work and when she’s on her board. Jack is not exactly filled with lofty ambitions and has had more than one unsuccessful relationship. When it turns out that Jack once dated one of Jane’s new roommates, another roomie suggests that she check out the opinions of the local Cute Girl Network, a group of women who share the dirt about their former lovers to warn other women that these men are not desirable as potential love interests.
Despite the negative information she hears about Jack, Jane is convinced that she is strong enough to deal with whatever comes her way. She decides that she likes Jack despite his flaws. After all, she too has plenty of skeletons in her relationship closet. Not only is the story itself delightful, but the artwork in this graphic novel contains all sorts of hidden treasures, such as the message on the needlework being completed by Rose, one of Jack’s roommates.

Despite its odd ending, readers will fall in love with both of this book’s main characters and the author’s pitch-perfect cultural and musical references from 1986 sprinkled liberally throughout. While it’s clearly a love story, exploring a first love that seems to be so special and thus never really leaves one’s memory, it’s so much more than that. The author’s decision to alternate the story between Eleanor and Park allows readers to watch the two of them falling in love and struggling with the challenges of being together as well as dealing with their own individual family dynamics. Also their separate ruminations reveal their own deep insecurities and fears, often hidden from others. Dealing with his biracial cultural identity, Park rebels in quiet ways through his musical choices, his wearing of eyeliner, and his refusal to use a stick shift when driving. Eleanor’s life is a bit more challenging. Along with her younger siblings and her mother, she barely survives the iron-fisted rule of her stepfather, Richie, and she suffers from the cruelty of her classmates, who take advantage of their physical education class to humiliate her. The taunting nickname of “Big Red,” shouted at Eleanor as the school bus riders cheer for the Cornhuskers, shows how impossible it is for her to fade into the background and remain unnoticed. While both Eleanor and Park are misfits in their own ways, they find a way to fit with each other, at least briefly. As the book draws to a close, many of Eleanor’s reasons for behaving as she does are revealed, and they are heartbreaking. This book provides plenty of opportunities for discussion about relationships and family dynamics, as well as the difficulty of mending something that has been broken into so many pieces.


Fifteen-year-old Rich Barber chafes from his parents’ over-protectiveness. His performance at a protest rally sparks an argument that leads him to willfully play a chord on his father’s prized guitar, which was signed by Jimi Hendrix. Rich’s spirit and body assume another form, Gabriel, and he goes back in time to the three days of the Woodstock Festival in 1969. He joins a group which includes his father (at age 15) and his uncle Mike (at age 18). The book alternates between the two time periods, particularly effective in describing the protagonist and his new friends’ reaction to the music being played and the large crowds attracted by the festival. Gabriel (Rich) is determined to prevent the heroin overdose that he knows will kill his uncle Mike a couple of months after the festival. While the author paints several scenes of hope and joy experienced at Woodstock, he also describes the abundance of drugs and free love along with the muddiness of the fields. Readers will feel as though they too are time travelers, visiting a place and time almost five decades in the past.


Although this book, intended for teens, doesn’t include anything new or startling about the JFK assassination, the author is dedicated to telling as much of the story as he possibly can for a younger audience. By introducing first Kennedy and then his assassin, with interesting details about their earlier and later years, the author
humanizes both men. In this treatment, Lee Harvey Oswald still remains something of an enigma, and readers will be able to follow his movements in the days before the assassination and wonder about his motives and the consequences of his actions. The author’s skillful attention to detail includes descriptions of what happened after the president had been shot, including the actions of Secret Service agents; surgeons; the new president, Lyndon B. Johnson; and Kennedy’s widow, Jacqueline, who refused to remove her blood-soaked clothing so that the world could see the results of the assassin’s bullet. The account keeps readers engaged and leaves them breathless, and it also prompts reflection about what might have happened had JFK not died. Along with several photographs, the book provides additional references for interested readers. This book is just as compelling in its own way as *Chasing Lincoln’s Killer* (2009), the author’s previous work.


Tenth grader Emma Karas loves her Japanese home and struggles when her family relocates temporarily to Lowell, Massachusetts because of her mother’s breast cancer. Emma desperately misses everything about Japan—her friends, the language, the food, her school. As she experiences stress-related migraines, she looks for ways to fit in and to keep herself busy. When she volunteers at a long-term care center, she bonds with a boy named Samnang, who spends much of his time working with Cambodian refugees, and with Zena, a woman whose physical limitations caused by a stroke don’t prevent her from enjoying life and crafting poetry. Emma enjoys writing poems and sharing stories with Zena, although Zena relies on a letter board and computer program to help her speak. This novel in verse contains several lovely poems created by the two of them, as well as references to many classic poems worth finding and reading. Emma eventually faces the question of whether to stay in the U.S. or return to Japan. This is not an unusual decision, but it is packaged in an appealing format with interesting, complex characters who remind readers of the universal need to belong somewhere. Anyone who has lived for a time in a country where his/her native language is not spoken will identify with Emma’s linguistic disorientation and her conviction that her true feelings are expressed in the language she keeps inside her. Emma’s physical and psychological journeys are described beautifully. Although part of her reason for staying has to do with her budding romance, readers will be pleased that she has many other reasons to do so,
which include providing support for the Tohoku residents who lost so much during the tsunami.


The power of written words, notably the connections they enable individuals to form, even when the words must be translated from one language to another, emerges in this remarkable book told from alternating points of view. Fourteen-year-old Nawra lives in a refugee camp in Darfur, Sudan, after fleeing from terrorists with her mother. An organization called Save the Girls brings food and hope to the refugee camp and pairs a small number of girls with sponsors from the United States. Nawra is paired with K.C., an American teen who is struggling with her parents' divorce and her own poor grades. K.C. hates school and avoids writing anything; although her mother continues to donate money each month for Nawra's use, the self-absorbed K.C. is uninterested in writing to Nawra. However, Nawra pours her heart out in her letters, offering thanks for the financial gifts that ease her situation slightly. Only when the charitable organization follows up to find out why no letters are coming from K.C. does she finally respond to Nawra. As Nawra reveals the horrors that she has endured, including rape and pregnancy, K.C. is inspired to face her own challenges and comes to care about the other teen so deeply that she considers her to be a sister. The journeys of both girls are, by turns, inspiring and heart-breaking. Because the book is so well written and realistic, reading it may spark interest in the world outside the front doors for many teen readers, who discover changes in themselves as they look for ways to make a difference in the lives of others.

*Boxers* and *Saints* are emotionally stunning and informative graphic novels about the Boxer Rebellion in China, available as a boxed set. *Boxers* begins in the Northern Shan-tung Chinese Province in 1894 before moving four and then five years later. Upset after witnessing two pivotal events concerning foreigners, Little Bao becomes angry enough to form a group called the Big Sword Society. Their goal is to push back against the foreigners who seem determined to overrun their country and replace their traditional beliefs with Christianity. Bao has good intentions, and he finds a way to harness the power of Chinese ancestors. But while others flock to join his forces, including Mei-wen, a woman whose mother was killed by some disreputable Chinese Christians, Bao finds little room for compassion. In one especially compelling scene, he orders his followers to burn the sanctuary where several Christians, white and Chinese, have sought safety, reminding himself of all the horrors of which they must have been guilty. The book’s images are stunning, and its messages about intolerance, power, and cultural treasures are worth considering since ignorance and intolerance are at the root of most conflicts. When he burns the famous library in Peking, with all of its literary treasures, to get to the foreigners on the other side, Mei-wen reminds Bao that in so doing he has destroyed China’s people and her stories. Like the characters in the companion volume, *Saints*, Bao is influenced in his choices by his visions and connections to individuals from the past.

In *Saints*, the author takes the other side of the Boxer Rebellion, representing Chinese Christians through the misadventures of the
unwanted Four-Girl, who converts to Christianity. This volume explores cultural identity through important historical events, plumbing the depths of how events affect individuals. In 1989 China, readers become acquainted with Four-Girl, whose name indicates her family’s bad fortune; her grandfather refuses to even name her. Four-Girl seeks friendship in the nearby woods, and when her grandfather dies, she is convinced that she has killed him. She is initially drawn to Christianity because she thinks it will make her seem more evil. But her new religion brings her friendship and a new name, Vibiana, and she leaves her village. While she finds some measure of happiness in her new home, the Society of the Righteous and Harmonious Fist is not far behind, and they murder the Christians. Vibiana is an appealing character because of her reactions throughout the book. The book’s provocative material will appeal to readers’ minds and emotions. The fine line between sinners and saints is pervasive in both volumes.

Barbara A. Ward taught in the New Orleans public schools for 25 years, working with all grades, kindergarten through high school. She is currently a clinical associate professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Washington State University, where she teaches literacy courses for both graduate and undergraduate students, including instruction, assessment, and psychological foundations. She is also president of the Children’s Literature and Reading Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association.