COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Reading Workshop

GRADE 4

LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM
THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT

firsthand
HEINEMANN
DEDICATED TO TEACHERS™

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Each year, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project gathers together the members of our community—the teachers, coaches, schools leaders, and staff developers—to reconceptualize the curricular calendars so that they reflect the latest research and innovations in the teaching of reading. This year, you'll notice most dramatically the effect of the Common Core State Standards in the emphasis, across the year and within each unit, on analytical thinking and reading skills. This community has merged its expertise to create curriculum, and to link that curriculum to tried and true teaching pedagogy so that children may rise to the highest levels demanded by the Common Core State Standards. This is demanding work, and as you study the curriculum, you may find that colleagues will want to form some study groups, to ensure that teacher leaders in your school are developing the expertise needed to truly teach children to be powerful readers of complex texts.

Of course, the suggested order of units and the teaching points offered with each unit are only one way this work could go. You'll want to, and need to, collect and study your data on your readers, and then sit together with colleagues to plan your on-site adaptation of the curriculum. It felt important to offer teaching points for as many units as possible this year, as the level of teaching demanded is so high. In response to teacher requests, we have provided wherever possible a menu of teaching points, so that there is more time to assess children and use this knowledge to differentiate. As always, we encourage you to have these conversations collaboratively—both across grade levels and across the school. To teach in such a way that children become extraordinarily skilled, it's crucial that teachers in a grade level can depend on children moving up from the prior grade with the highest possible level of shared practices. If teachers on a grade do devise a new unit of study that you are willing to share with other teachers, please send it to Lucy Calkins at: rwproject@tc.columbia.edu.

The curricular calendar will be supported by a calendar of full-day conferences available to participating Project schools who sign up in advance. Some of these days will support reading and writing work linked closely to these units, and some days will be on special topics that will help teachers support their students across the year. Still other days will support our new content calendar. The conference days, and the units of study, put a special emphasis this year on assessment-driven instruction and on Common Core State Standards, and the TCRWP will continue to provide the latest research and expertise on these subjects. Another resource for teachers, that these units depend on, is the *Units of Study for Teaching Reading: A Curriculum for the Reading Workshop, Grades 3–5*.

You'll find, below, brief descriptions of the units of study for fourth-grade reading. In each unit, we want to teach new skills while simultaneously building up children's repertoire of prior skills. We also want to maintain readers' stamina and volume. So always, in every unit, we're recommending that children read for at least forty minutes in school and as much time again at home—and to read with engagement, fluency, accuracy, and meaning.

Changes from Last Year to This Year

Throughout the curricular calendar, across all units of study, you will see increased emphasis on the skills of synthesis, interpretation, and critique. The Common Core State Standards raise the expectations for children across all grade levels, making higher-order thinking skills a priority and an emphasis. The curriculum reflects this call to action, embedding teaching points that will support children in accessing each of these skills and revisiting these skills across genres and units of study so that children have multiple opportunities to practice each one, strengthening their reading muscles.

Then too, the Common Core State Standards research reinforced something that our research at Teachers College was already telling us—that children need more practice with nonfiction reading. They also need more expert, explicit instruction in nonfiction reading skills. Therefore, both November and December are nonfiction units, with November focusing on using text structures to comprehend expository, narrative, and hybrid texts, and December focusing on nonfiction research projects. For both units of study, you'll want to look at your libraries and do what you can to buy, borrow, and share books so that kids have enough to read. They'll keep reading their chapter books during these units as well. Unit Four, on nonfiction research, is closely tied to the concurrent unit in writing, Informational Writing: Building on Expository Structures to Write Lively, Voice-Filled Nonfiction Picture Books.

The May unit, Informational Reading: Reading, Research, and Writing in the Content Areas, builds nicely off this nonfiction work. This unit ratchets up the level of work. Children will spend more time exploring primary and secondary sources, critiquing texts, and being analytical readers and researchers. Then too, there is an increased emphasis on using multiple media to learn and convey learning throughout the unit. This year we have developed a Content Area Curricular Calendar, which outlines a possible curriculum of reading and writing in social studies. The work that is outlined in the Content Area Curricular Calendar is carried into the May unit, pulling on skill sets that children have been building from September.

Finally, Social Issues Book Clubs will end the year in reading. This unit has long been a favorite of teachers and children alike. The increased engagement that builds during this unit is the perfect send-off to summer. It will build an excitement for reading that will motivate kids to continue reading throughout the summer months. Then, too, during this unit children learn how to create text sets, putting books together based on a topic of interest and reading through those books to explore that interest. This is the work that we want them to do over the vacation. Providing them with a chance to do this during this school year will set them up to do this independently during the break.

Assessment

We all know the joy of finding a book that is "just-right" for us. When we are well matched to a book, reading can be one of life's greatest joys. On the other hand, when

a book is "all-wrong" instead of "just-right," reading can feel interminable, humiliating, and tedious. There will never be a single litmus test that can accurately match a child to books, but as teachers we can make some progress toward this goal if we provide each child with four things: (1) The opportunity to choose books that he or she wants to read, (2) a community of other readers (including especially the teacher) who promote, summarize, and talk about books with enthusiasm, (3) books that are easy enough for the reader that he or she will be given lots of opportunities for high-success reading, and (4) encouragement to occasionally read a text that is just a little challenging with the scaffolding to make the experience fruitful.

Assessing reading is enormously complex. Reading is every bit as rich, multilayered, and invisible as thinking itself. Anyone who aspires to separate one strand of reading from all the rest, and then to label and measure that one strand or aspect of reading, must approach this effort with proper humility. No number, no label, no indicator is adequate for the task. Still, as responsible people, teachers need to assess children's reading in ways that give us as full a view as possible. New York City teachers have all been asked to track each child's progress in reading and to send the results of those assessments home at regular intervals throughout the year.

Some NYC schools may opt to use an assessment tool patterned after the state test. This assessment instrument contains passages of widely varying difficulty levels, followed by multiple-choice questions that aim to ascertain whether the child can infer, synthesize, predict, and so forth. The TCRWP's position is that this assessment alone is not sufficient unless a teacher knows the text difficulty of the passage in question; a wrong answer in a multiple-choice question may not in fact say anything about a child's ability to infer, for example, or to determine importance. A teacher will not know whether the error reflects a problem with inference, or whether it suggests that the child couldn't read the passage in the first place.

Therefore, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, in concert with many NYC schools, developed an alternate way to track readers' progress. This system has been accepted by NYC's Department of Education as an option for all schools. This assessment tool is available on the TCRWP website: www.readingandwritingproject.com. This tool contains two passages at each text level, A–Z, ranging in length from 20 to 400-plus words, followed by literal and inferential comprehension questions for each passage. Level A–K readers read books from one or two small sets of leveled texts. The TCRWP uses collections of books that are described on the website. Children read the text at one level aloud to teachers, who record reading behaviors and miscues. Teachers record miscues for the first 100 words; if the child reads with 96–100% accuracy, then the child reads the remainder of the passage silently and then answers questions (ideally answering at least three of the four questions correctly). Through this assessment, a teacher can ascertain the general level of text difficulty that a child is able to read with ease and comprehension.

The truth is that using a short passage and a handful of questions in order to ascertain whether a child can read, say, a T or a V level text is not perfect. We've also been using some book-length assessment tools, and these are described in the Assessment Interludes within *Units of Study.* But the system of tracking readers' progress along a

gradient of text difficulty does provide an infrastructure to your reading workshop and allows a teacher to have some handle on kids' progress.

Following is a table of benchmark reading levels. These levels are recommended *independent* reading levels. They are derived from a study of data from AssessmentPro, as well as the state and city benchmarks. The chart is updated and available always at www.readingandwritingproject.com.

	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Apr	May	June
3rd	1 K 2 L 3 M 4 N	1 K 2 L 3 M 4 N	1 K 2 L/M 3 N 4 O	1 L 2 M 3 N 4 O	1 L 2 M 3 N 4 O	1 M 2 N 3 O 4 P	1 M 2 N 3 O 4 P	1 N 2 O 3 P 4 Q	1 N 2 O 3 P 4 Q	1 N 2 O 3 P 4 Q
4th	1* M 2 N/O 3 P/Q 4 R	1 N 2 O 3 P/Q 4 R	1 N 2 O/P 3 Q/R 4 S	1 N 2 O/P 3 Q/R 4 S	1 N 2 P 3 R 4 S	1 O 2 P 3 R 4 T	1 O 2 P/Q 3 R/S 4 T	1 O 2 Q 3 S 4 T	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U
5th	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 P 2 Q/R 3 S/T 4 U	1 Q 2 R/S 3 T/U 4 V	1 Q 2 R/S 3 T/U 4 V	1 Q 2 R/S/T 3 U 4 V	1 Q/R 2 S/T 3 U 4 V	1 R 2 S/T 3 U/V 4 W	1 R 2 S/T 3 U/ V 4 W
6th	1 R 2 S/T 3 U/V 4 W	1 R 2 S/T/U 3 V 4 W	1 S 2 T/U 3 V/W 4 X	1 S 2 T/U 3 V/W 4 X	1 S/T 2 U/V 3 W 4 X	1 T 2 U/V 3 W 4 X	1 T 2 U/V 3 W 4 X	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y
7th	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V 3 W/X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U 2 V/W 3 X 4 Y	1 U/V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z
8th	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 V 2 W/X 3 Y 4 Z	1 W 2 X 3 Y 4 Adult Lit	1 W 2 X 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X 3 Y/Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Z 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Z / Ad Lit 4 Ad Lit	1 W 2 X/Y 3 Z / Ad Lit 4 Ad Lit

** The numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 in this table represent the NY ELA test scores that would predictably follow from a student reading at the text level named, at the grade level named. There is no text level that predicts a 4, because a score of 4 generally only allows for one or two errors—and is therefore unpredictable.*

Because a score of 4 generally only allows for one or two errors, it is hard to assure parents or students that a correlation will exist between level of text difficulty and a score of 4.

A word of caution: Our data also suggest that running records on a 200-word passage give a teacher only a little window onto what a child can do as a reader, and we strongly suspect that reading a lower-level passage with great depth and thoughtfulness and attentiveness to details, using high-level comprehension skills, is extremely important. It could be that children should *be able to* read the levels listed above with accuracy and basic level of comprehension, but that in fact they'd be well advised to spend most of their time reading easier texts with deep levels of comprehension—that is a judgment call that schools and teachers need to make.

You'll also want to track each child's reading rate and note the way this changes across time. Here's a table that shows *targeted* oral reading rates (words per minute) by grade level:

General Range of Adequate Reading Rates by Grade Level

Grade	WPM	Grade	WPM
1	60–90	6	195–220
2	85–120	7	215–245
3	115–140	8	235–270
4	140–170	9	250–270
5	170–195	12	250–300

**Harris and Sipay (1990)*

Reading Level Bands of Difficulty

The TCRWP thought collaborative is convinced that as readers learn how to process a variety of increasingly challenging texts, the work that readers need to do changes somewhat. We do not think that it is advantageous for you to attempt to keep in mind a score of tiny characteristics for each and every level of book difficulty, nor do we think that it holds true to try to specify the characteristics of any one level of text difficulty. On the other hand, we have found there are some general characteristics of texts that one will tend to find at different *bands of text difficulty*. If you grasp the general characteristics of any one band of text levels, this provides you with a sense of how to differentiate your instruction for readers according to the band of text difficulty in which they are reading.

Many children may enter your class reading in the N–Q band of text difficulty. These readers will find that the texts they are reading are more multidimensional than they were when they were in the earlier band of text difficulty. The texts will not follow a straight narrative structure, such as the character encountering a problem and coming to a solution. For example, the problem itself may be multidimensional. If a teacher asked the reader of texts in this band of difficulty, "What's the central problem

in this story?" the reader would be wise to stall a bit over the question, and to suggest that there is more than one problem, or that the problem has different parts of different layers. The character's traits will tend to be ambivalent—Amber Brown wants to be nine and wants to be thirteen. But on the other hand, the character will come right out and tell readers how he or she feels, what he or she is like. So characters will be a bit complex—but this will not be subtle.

Most of your students will move into books in the R-S-T band of text difficulty at some point across the year. They will find that holding onto the central plotline becomes increasingly difficult because seemingly minor characters may end up as important to the plotline. This means that readers need to hold minor characters and subordinate plots in mind. Children's predictions, for example, might include the expectation that a character who made a somewhat fleeting appearance or a plotline that seemed unrelated to the main story line could return, playing a more important role than expected. At this level of text difficulty, readers need to follow not only the evolving plotline, but also the evolving setting. The setting becomes a force in the story, influencing characters and the plot just as, say, an antagonist might. In historical fiction, for example, readers need to construct a time line of historical events as well as a time line of the protagonist's main events, and more than that, to see the two time lines intersect. An event happens in the world, and that event becomes part of the chain of cause and effect that motors the story's plot. In books within this band of difficulty, characters continue to be complex, and now their character traits are often not explicitly stated. Readers need to infer these from their actions. Often in books at this level, readers may realize something about a character that the character does not know about himself or herself. Also at this level, a character's changes are often left for the reader to infer (whereas in the earlier band, the character's inner thinking essentially told the reader those changes).

Consider the Results of a Spelling Inventory–Synthesizing Data across Assessment Measures

Another window into students' reading is the spelling inventory designed by Donald Bear and others. This spelling inventory is not about getting the word right. It indicates the *spelling features* that students control, such as beginning and ending consonants, long and short vowels, the variety of suffixes, and so on. The spelling inventory reveals a child's developmental level on graphophonics and also suggests the level of text at which a student will be successful. You can use this as a source of information to draw upon when determining students' reading levels. More importantly, this information will suggest the word study work that will most benefit this reader. It is the act of reading across this information that is most important. You may refer to the assessment section of the TCRWP website (www.readingandwritingproject.com) to access more information about spelling inventories.

Maintaining Reading Logs

We recommend that schools establish and implement policies so that each child in the school (grades 2–8) maintains a daily record of the books he or she reads in school and at home. This log must contain the title, author, the level of difficulty (for example, Level P), the number of minutes the child spent reading, and the starting and ending page number. Some people question whether it is necessary to include the level of difficulty. Our response is that this provides the teacher with vitally important information—information that exponentially increases the usefulness of the tool. For example, if a child devotes a week to reading *The Stolen Pony*, and we know that book is Level M (the level of the *Magic Treehouse* books), then we know that the child has done an alarmingly small amount of reading during that week. On the other hand, if the book is Level Z, then we would draw a different conclusion.

These logs are not places for responses to reading, nor do children write book summaries in them. They are simply records of time spent reading and volume of reading accomplished. You may ask, "How can a teacher be sure that the log accurately reflects the reading that the child has done?" We've found that if both logs and books are out on the table every day, this transparency brings a huge amount of accountability to logs.

We suggest that every day during reading time, every child should always have his or her log out on the table. The first thing the child does at the start of reading is to enter the starting time and page number. The last thing the child does before moving from reading to talking is to enter the ending time and page number. We also encourage teachers to refer to logs often in reading conferences: "I see you have been reading this book especially slowly. You galloped through that last book—why is this one progressing so differently for you?" "You seem to be skipping between books a lot lately—why do you think it has been hard for you to stay engrossed in one book?" "I notice this book is easier than the ones you have been reading—do you find your reading process is different now, when you are reading a lighter text?"

After a few weeks, we suggest you encourage children to study their own reading logs in order to articulate their reading habits. Children can work analytically with their partners to notice and think about changes in the average number of pages they've read. Children can also notice the genre choices they have made across time and the relationship between genres or levels and volume. They can discuss patterns by studying the time they spend reading at home versus at school. The logs provide an irreplaceable window into students' reading lives. It is helpful to gather logs across one grade after a month, or across several grades, to compare how much students are reading and how they are moving through books.

- School leaders, as well as teachers, must collect, save, and study these critical records. For example: A general rule of thumb is that a child should read approximately three-quarters of a page a minute. (This rule of thumb works across texts of varying levels because generally, as the pages become denser, the reader's abilities also becoming stronger.) A teacher and/or a principal will want

How Long Should It Take a Child to Read a Book According to His or Her Reading Level?

Title	Level	approx # of words	Reading rate	# of minutes per book
Henry and Mudge (Rylant)	J	800–1000	100 WPM	10 minutes
Horrible Harry (Kline)	L	4,500	100 WPM	45 minutes
			200 WPM	25 minutes
Magic Tree House Series (Osborne)	M	6,000	100 WPM	60 minutes
			200 WPM	30 minutes
Henry Series (Cleary)	O	25,000	100 WPM	4 hours
			200 WPM	2 hours
Howliday Inn (Howe)	P	30,000	100 WPM	5 hours
			200 WPM	2 ½ hours
Stone Fox (Gardiner)*	P	12,000	100 WPM	2 hours
			200 WPM	1 hours
Hatchet (Paulsen)*	R	50,000	100 WPM	8 hours
			200 WPM	4 hours
Missing May (Rylant)*	W	24,500	100 WPM	4 hours
			200 WPM	2 hours

**Allington (2000)*

to take notice if a child is reading a book at a dramatically slower rate than this. For example, alarms should go off if a child reads eight pages in thirty minutes. Why is the child not reading closer to twenty-four pages in that length of time? There may, of course, be good reasons.

- If a child reads, say, thirty-four pages during a half-hour in school, then brings that same book home and claims to read a much smaller amount—say, eight pages—within half an hour of reading time at home, alarms should go off. Is the child actually making enough time for reading at home?

- If you suggest the child reads books that are Level T, and she instead reads many books that are far easier, this discrepancy must be researched and addressed. Perhaps the easier books are nonfiction texts and the child has wisely found that when reading nonfiction, she needs to search for books she can read with meaning. Perhaps the child recently completed a very taxing book and wants some easier reads. Then, too, perhaps the child simply can't find other books that are more challenging and needs your help.

- It is crucial to let parents know if the volume of reading their child is doing is high, fairly high, quite low, or very low. The wonderful thing about this information is that parents can do something about it. Progress on this one front will have enormous payoff for every aspect of a child's reading development.

Above all, student logs are a way to be sure that everyone—teachers, principals, and students—keeps their eyes on the volume of reading that children are doing. Dick Allington's research suggests that it takes four hours for a student who reads 200 words per minute to complete *Hatchet*. The chart above shows how long it should take students to complete different-leveled books. Assuming that your students read for thirty minutes in class and thirty minutes at home, at a rate of 200 words per minute, then you should expect a student to finish reading *Hatchet* in eight days, which seems reasonable. You may find that a particular child takes twice as long to read *Hatchet*. This should prompt some research. Why is this child reading especially slowly? (If the child is reading below 120 accurate words per minute, then alarm bells should go off. This child should be reading easier texts! Or perhaps the child is sitting in front of a text, rather than reading it.)

Getting Time to Assess at the Start of the Year

Years ago, the Project suggested that a teacher start the year by putting crates of mixed-level texts at the center of each table in the classroom, then asking kids to graze through those crates, reading whatever appealed to them while the teacher circled quickly about the room, assessing. Once a child was assessed, the teacher would give that reader a magazine box for his or her books. This child would no longer read from the mixed-level bin but would instead choose a few just-right, leveled books, storing the short stack of these books in his or her private bin. Visitors to the room in mid-September could see at a glance the percentage of kids who had been launched into just-right reading because these children had magazine boxes containing their books. The aim was to get everyone to this point within two weeks from the start of school.

By this time, however, the entire school has been working for a year or two to match readers to books. Therefore, it should no longer be necessary for you to begin the year with children in the holding pattern of reading through a random collection of books from a crate at the center of the table. Instead, your class roster will convey the level of just-right book that each child was reading at the end of the previous school year. Ideally, children will also keep logs of the books they read during the summer so you can estimate whether a child's reading progressed or took a dive during those crucial months. If a child did not read over the summer, she will lose several levels during the summer, and so if you ascertain from the summer log that this child read only a few books, then you will move her back two levels from where she ended the previous school year. If a child did a lot of just-right reading during the summer, that child can resume reading at the level he or she was reading in June. In this way, you can rely on reading records to start the year off with each child reading from a short stack of appropriate books.

Of course, the fact that you start children reading books you've been told will be just-right for them does not mean you won't reassess their reading; you will. But you can weave this assessment into your reading workshop once it is going full-swing. You could either do running records a week or two after school starts and then again

right before your first report card or, if your school agrees, you could rely on informal assessments for now, watching kids with leveled books rather than doing running records, relying on June assessment levels and these informal observations. You may find that after two or three weeks with tons of reading, summer rustiness wears off and kids are already ready for another level of text difficulty. You could, then, wait to do your more formal assessments prior to fall report cards. This, of course, is a decision your school will need to make.

No matter what, it will be a huge priority to assess any reader who seems to not actually be reading. Watch for signs of disengagement: the head that revolves, the child who is always losing his or her place in a book, the youngster who uses reading time as a chance to get a drink of water or go to the bathroom.

When you do begin to do running records, we suggest you call three children over to you at a time, each carrying a book. Get one child started on the TCRWP formative assessment. While you listen to his or her reading, the other two can read independently. The assessed child needn't finish the passage before you ascertain whether it is too hard; and if it is, move to another passage right away. Once one child has read aloud 100 words and you have recorded the child's miscues, he or she can read the rest of the passage silently while you get the second child—who will already be right beside you—reading aloud to you.

The Components of Balanced Literacy

The term "balanced" literacy comes, in part, from the recognition that readers need a variety of different opportunities to learn. The reading workshop provides children with time to read, with a mentor who is a passionately engaged reader and wears his or her love of reading on the sleeve, with opportunities to talk and sometimes write about reading, and with explicit instruction in the skills and strategies of proficient reading. All of this is incredibly important, but alone, it is not sufficient. Children also need the opportunities to learn from other components of balanced literacy.

They need, above all, to write. We assume that the reading workshop, as described in these pages, is balanced by a daily writing workshop, and we assume Teachers College Reading and Writing Project teachers will refer to the writing curricular calendar for help with writing. Children also need to study the conventions of written language, including writing with paragraphing, punctuation, and syntactical complexity. Either as part of this or separately, children need time to learn about spelling patterns and to study words—both their meanings and their spellings. Then, too, children need daily opportunities to hear wonderful literature read aloud and frequent opportunities to participate in book talks around the read-aloud text. We expect teachers to read aloud and to lead interactive read-aloud sessions several times a week. Children need opportunities to read texts within content area disciplines and to receive instruction in reading those texts well. Finally, children who struggle with fluency (that is, children who read slowly and robotically), need opportunities to participate in shared reading and in repeated oral readings.

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is crucial even in instances where the teacher does nothing more than read spectacular literature aloud in such a way that children listen with rapt attention, clamoring for more. The payoff for reading aloud becomes even greater when teachers read from a wide range of genres, which generally happens when teachers comb reading aloud into all parts of the days, including science, social studies, math, and so on.

The best way to tap into the potential power of reading aloud, however, is to use the read-aloud and book talk time to explicitly teach the skills of higher-level comprehension. To do this, a teacher first reads the upcoming section of the read-aloud book to himself or herself, noticing the mind-work that he or she does while reading. Then the teacher decides whether to use the upcoming read-aloud to help children draw upon their full repertoire of reading strategies, or whether to angle the read-aloud in such a way as to support the development of a particular comprehension skill. Based on this decision, the teacher decides to demonstrate and then scaffold children in using either one or many skills and strategies.

For example, if you decide to highlight envisioning, then insert Post-its in a couple of places during the first pages of the read-aloud as a reminder to pause as you read, to lower the book, and to muse a bit. Perhaps you can say, "I'm just picturing this. I can see Artie in the lead, walking down the path in the woods. It's a narrow path, so Cleo is a few steps behind—there's just room for one of them. The sun is filtering through the canopy of leaves overhead." Of course, the teacher's envisioning could spin on and on and on—it is important to stay brief! After demonstrating in such a manner for thirty seconds, tuck in a comment that names what has been done, like "Readers, I don't really know that the path is narrow—the book hasn't said that. But I draw on all the forest trails I've ever seen, adding details from my own experiences. When I read on, though, sometimes I need to revise my picture. Let's see." Once the teacher has demonstrated the skill (in this case, envisioning) a few times, across perhaps three or four pages of the read-aloud, the teacher is apt to pause in the midst of reading and scaffold the children in envisioning. "I can just see the river, can't you? I'm picturing it—the colors . . . I'm hearing stuff too, aren't you? Use all the rivers you've ever stood beside to help you imagine the river." Sometimes these pauses are followed with, "Tell the person beside you what you are seeing, hearing . . ." and sometimes they lead to the prompt, "Stop and jot what you see, what you hear." Either injunction can, a moment or two later, be followed with specific tips: "Make sure you are talking/writing in details. Are you using specific words to make your mental movie real?"

Of course, you could alter the sequence just described to show children how to develop theories about characters, think across texts, predict, or a host of other reading skills.

If you choose carefully, the read-aloud text can support the independent reading work your students are doing. For example, if the class is engaged in the unit of study on character (and students are thinking about characters as they read independently), you'd be wise to read aloud a chapter book with strong characters who change over the course of the text. If, on the other hand, the class is working on nonfiction, and

some of the children's independent reading involves nonfiction texts, you will want to read aloud nonfiction texts that allow you to show children how nonfiction readers talk and think about (and between) texts.

Whatever skill you aim to teach, it's essential that you read in ways that not only demonstrate skills, but that above all bring stories to life. Read with expression, fluency, intonation, and good pacing so that children feel like they are a part of the story and understand that this is what good reading sounds and feels like.

Supporting Children's Vocabulary

Teachers are wise to recognize that we need to model not only a love of books and of writing, but also a fascination with words themselves. If you wear your love of language on your sleeve, exuding interest in words and taking great pleasure in them, you'll help your children be more attentive to vocabulary.

Research is clear: the single most important thing you can do to enhance your children's knowledge of words is to lure your children into lots and lots and lots of reading. If children read a diverse range of books, they'll encounter a wider range of words. The vocabulary in historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, and nonfiction will often be richer than vocabulary in realistic fiction and mysteries.

Teach children that when they come to unfamiliar words in a text, it really helps to pronounce the word as best the reader can, trying it out one way and then another to see if any pronunciation sounds familiar. Then ideally, the reader reads on past that word for just a bit before pausing to reread the section, thinking, "What might this word mean?" The good reader substitutes a reasonable synonym—thus, the "ominous" clouds become the "rainy" clouds—and reads on. Some teachers tape an index card to each child's desk so that children can collect a few such words throughout the day, with page numbers for references. The children and teacher should aim to use these same words in conversations with each other and the class.

There will also be times for a teacher to lead the whole class into word inquiries, and that work will certainly involve the class exploring prefixes and suffixes and using these to alter the meaning of a base word. The key word is *explore.* Word study will be vastly more helpful if it is engaging to youngsters.

Finding Great Literature to Refresh or Fill Up Libraries

One of the key factors in helping to make any reading unit of study exciting, rigorous, and independent is the interface between the unit and books. This year we interviewed wonderful educators across the country in order to develop booklists of recommended books. We understand the responsibility involved in this work, and did not put a single book on the list unless that book was recommended by more than one person, and unless these were people's judgments we trusted. The lists are carefully organized—for historical fiction, for example, there will be a time (say, Colonial America) and leveled

books we recommend around that time. Similarly, the social issue list is organized around social issues and leveled books we recommend for each social issue. All the books on the lists are leveled, either with Fountas and Pinnell's levels, if those exist, or with Scholastic Book Wizard levels. If neither source existed, we noted the Lexile level, which you can use to create levels by converting this Lexile level to an approximation of Fountas and Pinnell levels (take those with a special grain of salt). The books are all available through Booksource, and we're assured that their price is the lowest available price for books of comparable production quality.

The following booklists have been created to support the different reading workshop units of study: Anthologies, A Special List of Mentor Texts to Use when Teaching Writers which Also Make for Great Read-Alouds, Books Students Want on the Shelves Now, Biography, Expository Nonfiction, Fantasy, Historical Fantasy, Historical Fiction, Multicultural, Mystery, Narrative Nonfiction, and Social Issues.

For more information about these lists, along with many others, please visit our website at www.readingandwritingproject.com. To order from the lists referenced above, choose from one of the following options:

1. Call Booksource Publishing at 1-800-444-0435 and reference Lucy Calkins' TCRWP booklists.
2. Visit www.readingandwritingproject.com to download the lists and mail your orders to 1230 Macklind Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63110.
3. Email Booksource Customer Service at service@booksource.com

The Logistics of the Workshop: Establishing Routines and Expectations

Reading is a skill that requires practice. Just as a student learns to swim by swimming, and to play the piano by playing the piano, students need protected time to read in order to get better as readers. In every classroom, teachers will probably want to spend a bit of time at the start of the year stressing the importance of stamina and encouraging students to read for longer stretches of time, both in school and at home. Just as runners have goals to reach, readers also have goals. Students may learn that when they begin to lose stamina in their books, they can reread or look back over their Post-its for a moment before continuing. Readers can take brief breaks to think, and then continue reading. They can set goals for themselves, as runners do. If students worked last year to develop stamina, you may make student testimonials central to your teaching. You may want to speak about the transformation of a particular reader from the previous year or invite past students to come in and speak about their growth and attitude shift in reading. Consider the role of your past students as transformational speakers. You may also emphasize the power of finding stolen moments throughout the day to read by highlighting that the readers carry books with them everywhere they go.

During the first few days of school, you will want to establish clear routines and expectations. You'll want to remind (or teach) students to gather quickly and efficiently

for whole-class instruction, teaching this bit of management in a way that upholds the joy of reading. "We won't want to waste one precious moment of reading time, so this year, let's get really good at gathering efficiently for the minilesson." Similarly, if you want to emphasize the importance of students listening (and not constantly interrupting) during the minilesson, you could say, "This year, I want to be sure you have lots and lots of time to read the incredible books we have in this room, so let's try to keep our minilessons efficient. How about if you save your questions until the minilesson is over?"

This is a good time, too, for you to consider whether you have planned minilessons that are too long or complicated, usurping too much of students' reading time. Most teachers use the strategy of demonstration and, more specifically, of thinking aloud, in reading minilessons. If you do this, try to make the reading and thinking *feel* like *reading*, which usually means holding the book in your lap, reading aloud from the book, not from the overhead projector. You will want your thinking-aloud to be very brief—usually no more than three sentences. Avoid rambling; if you see students start to tune out, take this as a cue! After watching you once or twice, students get the idea of what you are trying to show them, and they'll want a chance to try whatever you have demonstrated. You'll see the written story of scores of minilessons in *Building a Reading Life*, as well as a DVD containing four hours of snippets from classroom life, so you may want to lay your teaching up against that resource. Teach students to expect that although the minilesson will be an occasion to learn a new reading skill or strategy during any one day's reading time, they will draw on *all* the skills and strategies they have been taught up to and including that day.

Of course, at the heart of your teaching will be the work that students do. Your teaching of reading won't amount to much until students are choosing just-right books and reading them with stamina. Unless students are reading books they can read with *at least* 96% accuracy, fluency, and strong comprehension, it is superfluous to worry about minilessons that teach strategies for identifying with characters or developing theories!

As mentioned earlier, if students have not yet been assessed and matched to books, and if you do not have the previous year's records to draw upon, you may need to put a bin of easier, high-interest books at the center of each table and set to work assessing your readers. Increasingly, though, teachers are sending students into classrooms with zip-lock bags of books in hand, selected in June of the previous year. If your students come to you with books they selected, with input from their last teacher, you may want to bypass the start-of-the-year formal assessments for all but your strugglers. Even if you do assess readers now, they tend to be rusty and they can probably progress pretty soon. You may, then, instead devote these first weeks to rigorous teaching and intimate conferences, keeping kids reading books that either were selected with support from their last year's teacher or books that match those, and then conduct in-book running records by the end of September to see if you can perhaps already move kids up a notch.

Most of you will conduct formal running records in October, before parent-teacher conferences and before data need to be entered into software that tracks student growth over time.

Either way, once you've determined books that are just-right for a particular reader, you'll give that student a personal bin or bag in which he or she can keep a few just-right books. It helps to get the student started enjoying these books if you rave about a few you believe will be perfect for that student.

The books a student keeps in his or her bin will all be equivalent in level, except in two instances. First, an English language learner who is literate in his or her first language will read difficult books in the native language and easier books in English. Second, when a student is transitioning to a new book level, that student's book bin will contain books at both the comfort level and the new instructional level. Ideally, the latter will be books the teacher has introduced to the student; this works especially well if you introduce the first book in a series of two or three books because one book provides an introduction to the next. If a reader is working with a slightly more difficult text (96%, not 98% accuracy) this is an important time to be sure that the student's partner is reading the same slightly more challenging book, so the two partners can support each other.

You will also want to teach students procedures for keeping track of their volume of reading. Earlier we described the cumulative reading log, which is absolutely essential for you and for the reader. You will need to make sure these logs become integral to the reading workshop. Every day during reading time, each student needs to get his or her log out along with his or her book. Many September conferences will reference these logs. You might say, "I notice you've been reading faster. Has it been hard to hold onto the story as you read faster?" If a student's pace has slowed, you might ask, "What's slowing you down? I notice you read less today. What got in the way?" The log will also influence your observations. If you see from a glance at a student's log that the student is making slow progress through a book, observe the student as she reads silently, checking for any noticeable reading behaviors that might be slowing the student's pace. Does the student move her lips while reading, move her head from side to side, point at words as she reads, use a bookmark to hold her place as she reads, or read aloud to herself? If the student does any of these things, you will want to intervene. Tell her that she has graduated and no longer needs to engage in those behaviors. You may need to tell students that they should only read aloud when they come to tricky words. Or devise other strategies to help them get into the habit of reading silently.

It's helpful to know how many pages a student can actually get through in half an hour of reading time. If we know that a student can read twenty pages of a 120-page *Amber Brown* book in half an hour of reading time, then we'd expect that student to read that much at home each night. At this rate, the student should finish this book after three days and nights of reading.

Usually teachers design systems for take-home reading. If nothing else, each student has a take-home book bag. The important thing is that the student needs to read the *same* book in home and at school, carrying the book between places. Often teachers suggest that in a partnership discussion, students give themselves assignments in school, such as: "Let's read to page seventy-five."

Few things matter more in teaching reading than students progressing through books. To encourage slow readers, you might walk around at the beginning of the reading workshop, marking kids' starting page numbers. Then you survey again during the middle of the workshop to jot down how many pages students have read. Lean in and encourage students to push themselves by saying, "Push your eyes across the page," or "I love the way you read seven pages. See if you can read eight more." Mostly, make sure they have books they love, that they can understand. Kids who are holding books they adore get a lot of reading done.

UNIT ONE

Building a Reading Life

SEPTEMBER

(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: P/Q)

It is time to begin, to set your reading workshop into motion for the year. The biggest work, the work that unites and underlies everything you will do as a teacher of reading in this upcoming year, is to help all your children become avid readers. To do this, you will wear your own love of reading on your sleeve. You will help your readers fashion a literate identity for themselves. You will create a social life in your classroom that revolves around shared books. But most of all, to launch a lifelong passion for reading in your students, you will empower your readers to develop a sense of personal agency about their own reading. This means starting the year with a lesson on ownership. "You are responsible for building your own reading life" is the powerful message you want to send out at the very start of this yearlong collaboration. Research (such as that described in John Hattie's *Visible Learning* 2009) backs the fact that the most effective teaching practices result from the collaborative effort between students and their teachers in setting, and striving to meet, meaningful goals.

This unit follows the book *Building a Reading Life* from the *Units of Study for Teaching Reading: Grades 3–5.* As you read this unit of study you will notice how it is aligned with the Common Core State Standards. If you have children reading Levels K–M, you might find this work a bit sophisticated, and you will likely want to refer to the launching unit in the third-grade curricular calendar.

Rally Your Students around This Year's New Goals

You are the leader of your class, and the leadership advice from Hattie pertains to you. Before the year begins, you need to decide how *you* will tap your readers' talents and

energies, and rally them to a common cause. Each year, many of you launch both a reading workshop and a writing workshop. You will want *this* year, *this* reading workshop, and *this* writing workshop, to be full of new hope and promise. How will you do this? Just as your children need a clear vision of what a powerful reader looks like, you, too, will want to have in your mind a vision of what a powerful reading workshop looks like. So much of our teaching is related to the tone we set in our classroom, as much as the specifics of any particular reading strategy that we teach. *A Guide to the Reading Workshop,* from *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* is a valuable resource that provides help with creating a vision of what an effective reading classroom looks and feels like; it allows a box seat view of several classrooms where kids and teachers are actively engaged in teaching and learning about reading.

In the series *Units of Study for Teaching Reading,* Calkins and Tolan suggest that at the start of the year, you would be wise to put a spotlight on each kid composing his or her very own independent reading life, a life contoured according to that particular reader. You'd also be wise to begin the year with renewed emphasis on children turning around along the path to study themselves as readers. If a child lists five beloved books he or she has read (or heard read aloud), then the child can look back on that list and think, "What does this list of favorite books reveal about me as a reader? What do I feel passionate about as a reader?" If a child reads and collects Post-its or jottings in a reader's notebook, then that child can look back on what he or she has written, thinking, "So what sort of thinking do I tend to do as I read? How am I unique, among all these other readers?" Readers may be accustomed to conducting author studies, and we hope that at the start of the year you might consider asking kids to engage in *reader* studies.

Establish Partnerships that Will Support Conversation across the Year

During this unit, you will launch reading partnerships, telling readers that we do not travel alone through books. You'll also establish reading partnerships, which will eventually serve as the fundamental support for book clubs later in the year. You'll teach into the structure of partnerships in the third part of this unit, but you won't want to wait long to anticipate the work that readers will do in their partnerships. At the outset of this unit, you'll want to think toward the long-term partnerships that you will help establish and foster. As suggested in *Units of Study for Teaching Reading: A Curriculum for the Reading Workshop, Grades 3–5,* you'll want to create opportunities for partners to get to know each other in a special way, as readers. You will want to teach that partners pay attention to each other's reading histories, reading interests, and reading hopes. In teaching these important skills, you will teach partners to become a positive influence in another reader's life. Clarify also that each day readers will be doing some on-the-run writing, probably on Post-its. This writing will then be brought to the partner conversations. This writing work (brief though it must be) and the partner conversations (which will again be brief) are absolutely essential elements of a reading workshop. Classrooms often do not have enough duplicate books for partners to read in sync all the time, but even a little of

this is tremendously helpful. If partners can't read the same books, they can, and should, *swap* books. It is often helpful for readers to sit beside their partners during the reading workshop so the transition from reading to talking doesn't usurp valuable reading time (although sometimes this leads students to talk/read/talk/read throughout the reading workshop, which is not what you have in mind).

Partners can support each other in a variety of ways, and you'll want to let partners know they can often choose the work they'll do together. Readers will have placed Post-its in places where they had strong reactions to the text, and now partners can share and discuss these passages. Partner talk works well if one partner rereads a short passage aloud, one that elicited strong feelings in that reader, and then both partners can talk about why that reader reacted so strongly to that passage. After discussing the passage, it is helpful to reread it again, this time evoking more feelings in the read-aloud. Partners can also share books, retelling what happened so far and thinking about what might happen next. When partners do this retelling work, you can teach that we can skim the book as we retell it, holding the book as a concrete prop to scaffold a sequential retelling. Also, partners can summarize in big steps across an entire story, rather than retell in a fashion that inches across the text. If a partner retells his or her book, it is important for the other partner to really grasp the story and to be ready to ask clarifying questions. All of this work supports the speaking and listening standard for fourth graders outlined by the Common Core State Standards.

Part One: Making Reading Lives—Creating Reading Resolutions, Finding Just-Right Books, Reading Faster, Stronger, Longer, and Awakening Ourselves to Text

If the big goal of the year is to turn kids into avid, lifelong readers, then it is essential that from day one you create an environment that fosters a love of reading. As adults, we know that at its very best, reading is wonderful—it lures us to new worlds and allows us to live vicariously through characters we come to love, whose adventures we share. But reading can also be tedious—when the book we hold in our hands is too difficult, for example, or when it is about people and topics that just don't hold our attention. The very first thing you'll want to convey to children, then, is that *this year*, reading is going to be the very best that it can be.

Of course, each of us has our own unique experiences of reading and ideas of what makes reading go smoothly and what makes it drag. So you might begin by asking children to think back on times when reading was the best it could be and times when it was the pits, and then reflect on what made each of these times one way or the other. As children recall such times, suggest that they can create reading resolutions for themselves that draw on their experiences. That is, if one child recalls that the time he spent reading in the quiet of his grandmother's backyard was particularly special, he might decide to recreate a quiet reading spot for himself both in the classroom and at home. Another child may enjoy reading most when she has a stack of books by her

side or when she's reading about characters who are similar to her. Each child will have a specific sense of when reading works and when it doesn't, and these "times when" can inform the resolutions your children make.

As you lead children to talk about their reading histories and hopes, you will have lots of occasions to talk up goals you know will be important in the year ahead. Perhaps children will sketch pictures of one time or one book that really mattered to them, and then you will ask them to write or talk about these. You might ask kids: "What was it about that one reading time that made reading work for you?" and, "How can we be sure that reading is just as magical in the year ahead?" Channel these discussions so that you end up highlighting what you plan to emphasize during this first month of your year.

Once children are armed with new reading resolutions and class goals, you'll share the big news: "You're the boss of your reading life," you'll say. "*You* get to make the decisions." Of course this isn't entirely the case. You'll assess children informally during these first few weeks to match them to books, and then steer them toward ones they can read. But for children to feel invested in reading—and to come to be independent readers—it's essential that they feel a sense of ownership of their reading lives, that they feel they have agency—and that you support this. As children browse the books you've compiled in bins, you'll have a chance to encourage this independence. You might tell them that books aren't "one size fits all." Only they can know when a book fits them. "If a book doesn't feel right for you, choose another," you might say. Remind readers of ways to check that the books they select are just-right for them; they should be able to read smoothly, with expression, to read most words without stumbling and, above all, be able to hold onto the story.

Just as you build up children's autonomy as readers, you'll want to build up their reading identities. You'll quickly come to know what children especially love as readers, and also what they do well. The Common Core State Standards place great emphasis on independence—helping children become self-directed learners. The goal is to bring out the uniqueness of each reader, and then to build upon each reader's strengths, inclinations, and passions. The kid who loves mysteries may help decide which new mysteries to buy for the class and may promote mysteries with book-buzz talks. The child who loves a particular author may gather books by that author and create a basket for the classroom library. Your job will be to take each child's habits and interests, and forge those into resolutions. In part, this emphasis both on reflecting on one's own skills, strategies, and passions and on developing one's own identity as a reader is meant to muffle the effect of the reading assessment work, which puts focus on a student's reading level. More importantly, however, this identity work is also meant to help readers develop a sense of personal agency in reading.

You'll want to roll out the reading tools that accompany the work of this unit. The most obvious tool would be a reading portfolio of a Reading Life, a place where readers' "stuff" accumulates. In this portfolio, readers would keep their reading logs of titles, levels, pages, and minutes. You'll also want to ask kids to keep occasional stop-and-jots in this portfolio. For example, at the start of a string of minilessons on

determining importance, you might ask readers to stop-and-jot at three intervals during the read-aloud, recording what they regard as especially important. You would definitely want to collect the work each reader did that day (with the child's name on the work) and sort it. You'll want to ask yourself, "Who is particularly strong at this, and what exactly did those strong readers do?" and "Who seems to struggle with this, and what do those students tend to do when asked to determine importance?" You'll no doubt want readers to look between their work and the work of their classmates, asking similar questions. This sort of work needs to accumulate in a student's reading portfolio and be juxtaposed with similar work the student does several weeks later.

As the part progresses, you'll continue to support children's independence, teaching them specific ways to grow as readers. You might, for example, teach them that readers who are aiming to read faster, stronger, and longer have little tips we can draw on to accomplish these goals. Some teachers give kids bookmarks that list tips such as: "Follow the words with my eyes, not my finger, while I read," or "Remember to read with feeling, so I hear my 'read-aloud' voice in my head" (for more examples, see Session IV of *Building a Reading Life*). You can also invite your readers to help set class goals, such as reading for a particular stretch of time each day, and aiming to read even more by a specific later date.

Of course, all the reading strategies in the world won't help if your children aren't engaged by their reading—and a large part of engagement comes from the way in which we choose to read a text. Just as readers make choices about what to read and where to read, they can also make choices about *how* to read. Spotlight for children the importance of reading alert to the text, ready to be moved by the story—and even a little bit swept away. You might tell children that some people read themselves to sleep. As they get tired, they read the same lines again and again. Their eyes start to close, they lose their grip on the book, and soon they are fast asleep. "Let's be the kinds of readers that do the opposite," you might say. "Let's be the kinds of readers that read ourselves awake!" You might demonstrate what it means to do the opposite kind of reading—to read on autopilot. Read aloud a bit of text, racing through the words and reading them with a blank face and little expression. Then model for children what it looks like when you read yourself awake. Read the same bit of text out loud with lots of expression and pause to react to the text now and then, sharing your excitement and your thoughts.

So, if you are reading *Stone Fox*, you might open the book and read these lines with a rambling voice: "It was now the middle of September. The potatoes they had planted in early June took from ninety to one hundred twenty days to mature, which meant they must be harvested soon." Then, you might pause to say, "Whoa! I was racing past the words. That wasn't even reading!" Reread the section of text, this time attentive to it, using gestures and pauses to emphasize that words aren't passing you by. For example, you might read the lines, "Little Willy pleaded with him. But grandfather repeated, 'No, no, no!' The situation appeared hopeless," and then shake your head sadly and sigh.

You might even pull out a Post-it and mark the spots in the text that call to you and teach children that they too should do the same, they should mark places that speak

to them, places where the text stands out and calls to them as though it was written in large, bold print. Then, they can meet with a neighbor to share those places, reading the section aloud and discussing why it called to them.

By the end of this first part, you want to see children taking control of their reading lives, thinking about their reading identities, tucking into books they love and reading these with passion. Be sure to celebrate moments when you see children doing this work.

Part Two: Making Texts Matter—Holding Tight to Meaning, Building Relationships with Books, Creating a Buzz about Books, and Choosing Texts that Matter

In the first part, you taught children to select just-right books, to choose books with words they can read, and stories they can hold onto. In this second part, you will want to build upon this work, emphasizing the importance of holding onto the story. Even in just-right books, readers hit confusing spots, losing the meaning. When this happens, we don't throw up our hands and give up. We don't just plow through without any sense of what we are reading. Instead, we recognize that we have lost the story, and we go back to the text to figure out what is happening. The Common Core State Standards note that fourth graders should "refer to details and examples in the text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text."

At this point, children should be reading themselves wide awake, attending to the details on the page and building mental movies. Now you will want to teach them that they have to recognize the moments where they have gotten confused, the moments where the movie has gotten blurry. You might say: "Readers, our mental movies help us to know if we are following the story. When it's a clear picture, when we see it in high definition, we are holding onto what we are reading. When our picture gets blurry, like the cable is scrambling, we have lost the text. When this happens, we need to recognize it and we need to fix it."

You will want children to own several strategies in their personal toolkits of reading strategies, so that when they do encounter difficulty, they have a range of ways to handle it in a way that will be most successful in getting their reading back on track. Teach them that sometimes readers keep reading, thinking, "What's going on here?" and sometimes readers need to go back and reread to see if we missed something. Then, too, you might teach them that readers can slow down and look carefully at the details in the text.

Of course, you will want to teach children not only how to read well, but also how to love reading. You will want to convey to children that reading is more than seeing the words and holding onto the story. Reading is finding a way to make a story matter, and, to make a story matter, readers must open our hearts and our minds to the text, reading the text like it's gold. You might say: "Readers, when we approach a text, we have a choice. We choose the relationship that we have with a text. We decide if we will be a curmudgeon, reading the text in a cranky way, or if we will let the text matter,

reading it like it's gold." Open your read-aloud to a section and read part of it like a curmudgeon, yawning, looking around the room, and reading with a distressed voice, hemming and hawing as you go. Then, you might say, "Let me try that again," and return to the text, this time reading it as though it's gold, savoring every word, reading every word with gestures and facial expressions that reflect rapt attention. Grab your chest, shake your head, pause, and let the words linger in the air as your jaw drops.

When you teach children that it is we who choose our relationship with a text, you are teaching them to be proactive and to feel optimistic as they build a reading life. Another way to achieve this goal is to teach children to recommend texts to each other, creating a book-buzz in the classroom. In the first part, you encouraged children to play off their strengths, contributing to the makeup of the library. Now, your library is brimful of books that children are eager to read, and you have experts about these texts in your room—use these wonderful resources to build agency and engagement. Teach your children that readers everywhere recommend books to one another. As suggested by the Common Core State Standards, you might also want to teach that readers summarize the text, read part of it aloud, and, above all else, that readers say why the book is special, and, in doing so, we entice others to choose those books from the library and read them as though they are gold. Of course, children will be apt to give the whole book away. You will want to teach them that when enticing a reader, we don't tell everything. Instead, we tell them just enough to make another want to read it.

With book-buzzes humming about the room, next you will want to teach children that readers stock our baggies with books we are excited to read, that readers keep a stack of books beside us, on deck, waiting to be read. Now that we have heard lots of book recommendations, readers may ask ourselves, "Who is good at recommending books for me?" Or, we think back on times we have found a great book and ask ourselves, "What did I do to find that book?" Then, too, we go to a section of the library, or to a basket in the library that is labeled with a topic, author, or genre we are interested in, and we look through the books it holds. To support this work, you will want to make sure that your library is accessible to children. Baskets should be clearly labeled, and you will want to create baskets that are leveled, as well as baskets that are unleveled. You might create a basket for award-winning authors, sports, or family issues. Enlist children to contribute their ideas about what baskets could be available in the library based on their reading interests. Ask kids what they think should be added to the library so they are eager to pull books off the shelves and create a collection of books that matter to them.

You will likely find yourself reminding children that as readers select books we are excited to read, as we select texts that matter to us, we must also make sure they are just-right for us. At times a text will be highly recommended, and we might be excited to read it, but we need to see if it is a just-right fit. As we mentioned in Part One, this means that a child can read a text smoothly, with expression, that he or she can read most of the words without stumbling, and hold onto the story. The Common Core State Standards suggest that students are able to "determine meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text." Even in just-right texts, children will encounter words that are hard for them. For some children, a word will be hard because it is

unfamiliar, and they may have to sound it out. For others, the word is tricky because they do not know what it means. Teach children that when we encounter a word we do not know the meaning of, we can read forward, asking ourselves, "What might this mean?" Once we think we have a synonym for the word, we substitute the synonym and reread, asking ourselves, "Does that make sense? Could this word work?"

As the unit progresses, you will want to personalize your assessments. At the start, the main focus of your assessment was to match children to just-right reading levels. By now, that work should be done. Therefore, you will want to turn your assessment toward the big goals of the unit and the big goals that you believe are important for readers at this time of year. Up to this point in the unit, you will have focused on building reading engagement. So, take time to assess children's engagement as they read. Then, too, this unit—and this part in particular—has helped children to find texts that matter to them, texts they want to read like gold. Take time at this point to check in with that reading goal, asking yourself: "Are children reading books they are apt to like? Are they reading them faster, stronger, and longer than at the start?" Use the data that you gather to inform the work that you do. During the next part, you will launch reading partnerships. The information that you gather at this time can inform the partnerships you establish. You might think about each child's strengths and struggles and then pair them with partners who are apt to be supportive.

Part Three: Bringing Together Reading Lives, Texts that Matter, and Partners

Independent reading is, in fact, not independent at all. It is actually interdependent reading. Readers recommend books to others, we lend books to others, we talk about books with others. The books that often matter most to us are books we have shared. Conversations about books and the relationships we build with other readers through conversations are combed through our reading lives. You will want to teach your children that they, too, can foster relationships with one another, and they can hold conversations that will comb through their reading lives. You will want to teach them to share texts, to hold conversations with partners that mirror the internal conversations you want them to have with themselves as they read.

The best way to start reading partnerships is to make time and space for kids to get to know each other as people, as readers. You will want to teach your children that readers pay attention to each other's reading histories, reading interests, and reading hopes—and by doing so, we stand a chance of being a good influence in another's reading life. You might begin by teaching children to interview each other, to ask questions of their reading partners, questions that will help them gain insight into each other's histories, interests, and hopes. Partners might study each other's reading logs and ask, "How much do you read at home or at school? Are there times when you read more or less? Why do you think that is?" Then, too, partners might ask, "What goals do you have for yourself as a reader? What are you doing to meet those goals?" or, "When books tend to be a perfect fit for you, what do those books tend to

be like?" Remember that the interview is a time to listen and to learn, to get to know your partner much like you know your best friend. Therefore, it will be critical for your readers to listen intently, let the person being interviewed lead, and to ask follow-up questions when they wish to gather more information. Children might jot notes on the important things they learn about their partners so they can hold onto and refer to that information in future meetings.

With a strong relationship established, partners will begin talking about books they are reading. You will want to teach children that partners often begin their conversations by telling each other what happened in the book they read. This helps partners to catch up—as they have not been reading the same book, they have also not shared the same experience that day. Then partners may share how they felt and what they thought about the events in the text, pushing their thinking about their reading.

When emphasizing retelling, remember that this level of comprehension is *necessary* but absolutely *not sufficient* for success in reading. Most children who struggle on state tests are readers who read too slowly, children who keep their noses so close to the ground that they can only retell in a very literal, bit-by-bit fashion, often without even grasping the sequence of the whole story line. Therefore, you may teach children that readers use retelling to help us grasp the whole of the story, to see the big picture of the story. The Common Core State Standards note that fourth graders should describe in depth and both explain what the characters are like and determine the story's theme.

One way you might teach children to retell is this: start at the beginning of the story and take big steps through the time line of events, telling only the key parts of the text. That is, readers step over the details and small events, and touch down on the big, important events. So, if you are retelling *Stone Fox*, you might say: "Willy and his dog, Searchlight, can't wake up Grandfather. Willy gets Doc Smith, who tells him his grandfather is depressed. Willy finds out his grandfather owes a lot of money in taxes. Willy and Searchlight enter a sled dog race to try to win the prize money to save the farm and his grandfather."

Then, too, you might teach children to conduct "synthesized retellings," in which we start retelling the section we read last and then reference prior parts of the text to synthesize all the pertinent information we have read. You might say: "Readers, at times we start retelling at the beginning. At other times, we start retelling the part of the book we just finished reading. When we do this second kind of retelling, readers start out only retelling the section we just finished reading. Whenever our retelling gets to a part that has meaning that comes from earlier in the story, we add a reference to that earlier bit into our retelling to bring in the relevant background. So, as you go through the retelling, you pull together all the big important parts of the story."

You will want to emphasize to children that when making a reference to prior text, readers speak parenthetically. We want our partners and ourselves to know which information came first. So, if you are demonstrating a synthesis retelling with *Stone Fox*, you might say, "In Chapter 8, Willy rode his sled to the edge of the town on the day of the race. He stopped—amazed to see so many spectators. (This is the race he entered so he could get money to save the farm from tax collectors and his grandfather from depression.) Willy saw that one of the people who had come to cheer him on was

Doc Smith. (Doc Smith is the person who told Willy he was nuts to try to find a way to help his grandfather pay the tax money.)" Of course, as you do this, you will want to alter your voice so that they can hear the parenthetical comments and throw your arm backward to emphasize that you are accessing information from earlier sections. Then, too, you will want to be sure to highlight that when doing this kind of retelling, readers constantly go back and forth between the past and the present. That is, there is not one reference to prior text, but multiple references to critical information from earlier sections. After all, we do this work to make meaning of the whole book, not only that one chapter.

As children grow stronger at retelling, you will see partner talk grow stronger as well, because both the reader and the partner will have a strong understanding of the text and will be able to more deeply discuss their thoughts and feelings about that text. To support this work further, you will want to teach children to listen well. That is, you will want to teach them to be still when someone is speaking, to allow time for partners to share all thoughts, to nod their heads to show they understand, and to ask questions when they are confused. It can be helpful for children to see this in action, and so you will likely want to demonstrate this for the class. You can select a child to be your partner and model listening to him as he speaks in front of the class. Then, partners can practice what they have seen you do in both the lesson and their conversation that day and in future days.

Celebration

You will want to end by celebrating the rich work your children have done across the month, helping them to savor all they have experienced and take ownership of all they have learned. Your aim during the celebration will be to invite children to pack their identity kits and their strategy toolkits so that they go forward into the upcoming unit with a sense of personal agency, convinced that they can author reading lives that matter. Teach children to think back on the unit, recalling memories they want to hold onto forever. Children can look back through logs and Post-its and think back on the read-aloud, their conversations with partners, and their independent reading books. Then, they can talk with a partner, discussing how they have changed and what they want to remember as they continue to read. Then, too, they might think about the big discoveries they made about themselves as they read during this unit. After a few minutes of discussion, children can write down what they want to hold onto, recording their memories and hopes on paper so they are not fleeting. You might choose to have children share what they wrote as a class to end the celebration.

Additional Resources

The biggest work, the work that unites and underlines everything you will do as a teacher of reading in this upcoming year, is to help all your students become avid read-

ers. Remember that the end-of-the-year benchmark for third grade is Level P, meaning that even with a little bit of slide over the summer, your new fourth graders will come to you ready to read books like *Encyclopedia Brown, Geronimo Stilton,* or *Time Warp Trio.* Of course, there may be a number of children who actually come back to school ready to read even harder books—perhaps they read during the summer, or attended a summer program, or simply grew in age and maturity. We invite you to adapt some of the teaching points below by referring to later units of study to find strategies for children doing work at higher levels.

On the other hand, if you have had a chance to look over your children's reading levels from third grade, and you know that you have a large number of students who ended third grade reading below grade level, you will need to make plans for doing some intense catch-up work. In fact, if you have children reading Levels K–M, you should refer to Unit One in the third-grade curricular calendar for appropriate work for those students. You will need to match up kids to books as best you can until you've had a chance to conduct formal running records so that you can begin supporting readers through book introductions, coaching, guided reading, and small-group work. The sooner you begin this work, the better. You may need to revisit some of the teaching points from last year's third-grade units, maybe even borrowing some of the charts from third-grade classrooms if you can, to help kids remember all of the great work they did at the end of last year.

If you are concerned about your children's reading levels, you might want to do extra read-alouds, perhaps two or three sessions each day instead of one, highlighting strategies like predicting and then revising or confirming predictions, stopping and thinking as you read, retelling important parts of the text, thinking about character motivations and how they react to problems. You may want to use shared reading to model how readers use a combination of strategies for figuring out unfamiliar words, never relying on just one, and model strategies for reading fluently and expressively. You can then revisit those shared reading texts during reading workshop with small groups of children who need the extra support so that they can catch up. You will probably want to provide as much time as possible for independent reading, too, if you are concerned about your students' reading levels—perhaps extending reading time by structuring your workshop so that children read as long as they can, then take five minutes to talk with partners, then return to reading independently for another stretch of time. Perhaps you'll even provide a second time for reading each day, borrowing five to ten minutes from other parts of your day, or recruit parents or after-school care providers to ensure that extra reading is also happening outside of school.

The teaching points listed below are provided as a guide, based on the book *Building a Reading Life* from the *Units of Study for Teaching Reading, Grades 3–5.* You may want to adapt these plans, depending on the particular needs of your own fourth graders. If you decide to forge your own pathway, think about how to make the parts of your unit seem coherent and logical, so that readers feel as if they are on a pathway that will inevitably help them emerge as more powerful and independent readers and thinkers.

Part One: Making Reading Lives

- "Readers don't just read, we also build reading lives for ourselves. To do this, we stop to reflect, 'When was reading the pits for me?' and 'When was it the best it can be?' And then we figure out how these times can help us learn how to change our reading lives for the better."

- "People who take care of themselves—as athletes, as musicians, and as readers, too—know that it is important to sometimes stop and say, 'From today on, I'm going to . . .' and then we name our hope, our promise, our New School Year's resolution. After that, we try to let it change how we live in the future."

- "Reading researchers have found that all of us need tons and tons of 'high success' reading in order to grow as readers. We need tons of time to read when we are not fussing over hard words, when we are not stopping and starting and stopping again, when we don't need to furrow our foreheads. We need lots of mind-on-the-story reading. Today I want to teach you to recognize the kinds of books that are at our own personal level—ones we can read smoothly, with accuracy and comprehension."

- "Today I'm going to teach you a few tips that you can use to become readers who read faster, stronger, and longer. Readers take off the brakes as we read, picking up our reading pace a bit at times, so we can take in what we are reading more fully—both the details and the whole."

- "We need to guard against just whipping through the words, reading on autopilot. Instead, we need to pay attention, making sure we are reading in such a way that we let the words matter."

Part Two: Making Texts Matter

- "Readers sometimes pause when we become confused in the text we're reading. We'll be reading along and then the text turns a corner and suddenly we're not quite sure what's going on. It's as if the film breaks in the mental movie we're making. When that happens, readers say, 'Huh?' and we continue reading, asking, 'What's going on?' The details sometimes help, and sometimes we need to reread."

- "Readers must choose what our relationship toward books will be. We can be a curmudgeon toward books, or we can let books matter to us, reading them like they're gold."

- "Strong readers create a buzz about books we love. To do this, it helps to tell others the sort of readers who will like a book, to summarize the book, to read a little bit aloud to those others, and above all, to tell them why the book is special."

- "Today I want to teach you that readers make sure we always have a stack of books beside us—and that the books are ones that can turn us into the readers we want to be. To find books that are just-right for us, we need systems that can help us find those books."

- "Today I want to teach you that the best readers are like the monster tractors that climb over the hurdle of the hard word, and read on, never taking a detour from the trail of the story."

Part Three: Bringing Together Reading Lives, Texts that Matter, and Partners

- "Today I want to teach you that having a reading companion makes all the difference in the world. And reading friendships start with people getting to know each other in a special way—as readers. We pay attention to each other's reading histories, reading interests, reading hopes—and by doing so, we stand a chance of being a force for the good in another reader's efforts to author a reading life for himself, for herself."

- "You know what, readers? I'm realizing now that reading a book is a lot like going to the movies—a lot of the fun part comes after reading time is over, when you get to talk about what you've read."

- "Readers often retell our books (up to the part where we're reading) as a way to lay the story out for others so we can talk it over. But we also retell our books as a way to lay the story out for ourselves so we can think it over. And that process of retelling and rethinking keeps the whole story primed in our minds."

- "I call this third kind of retelling (and of recalling) a 'synthesis retelling,' because although you start out just retelling the section you just finished reading, whenever your retelling gets to a part that has meaning from earlier in the story, you add a reference to the earlier bit into your retelling, almost using parentheses to bring in the relevant background. So as you proceed through the retelling, you have to synthesize, fit together, all the parts you've read that are pertinent."

- "When we are reading and also when we are listening to other readers' ideas, we need to make sure that we're listening with our minds and hearts open. We don't want to listen like curmudgeons. We want to listen reminding ourselves that there are deeply brilliant ideas about to be made, ones that just need a little listening to grow."

UNIT TWO

Following Characters into Meaning

Envision, Predict, Synthesize, Infer, and Interpret

OCTOBER/EARLY NOVEMBER

(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: P/Q/R)

Whereas September put a spotlight on helping students author independent reading lives, this unit will challenge students to think deeply about their characters—making inferences, building theories, and learning life lessons. During the first portion of the unit, you will invite readers to dive head first into the worlds of the books they are reading—and to do so wearing the shoes of the characters who inhabit those worlds. By doing this work, readers will develop their skills at predicting, envisioning, and reading with fluency—and you'll develop skills at using assessment to understand where each reader is on a pathway of skill development and at using performance assessments and feedback to move students along that pathway. In the next portion of the unit, you will help students notice characters' personality quirks and habits, inferring to develop ideas about characters' traits, motivations, troubles, changes and lessons. By encouraging readers to think deeply and with nuance about characters—considering what a character holds close, that character's complexities, the way that secondary characters act as mirrors of main characters—you'll be supporting inference, interpretation, and the development of their abilities to talk and write well about reading. The third portion of the unit will focus on interpretation work, with children shifting from inferring about characters to growing theories about them. The goal here will be that children's theories build in complexity. If your children are having difficulty building theories and gathering the text evidence to support these, you may want to linger a little longer in this part before moving on to the fourth. During the final portion of the unit, you will help readers think between books, noticing characters who play similar roles across several books and thinking about ways those similar characters are nevertheless different as well. This is particularly important work, as the Common Core State Standards emphasize the importance of comparing and contrasting.

The book *Following Characters into Meaning* from the *Units of Study* series will support the work of this unit. You will want to use the two books alongside this write-up to guide your teaching. The unit uses Kate DiCamillo's beautiful book, *The Tiger Rising*, as the touchstone text. If your students have already heard that book in a read-aloud (or if you don't love it as we do), then by all means, select a different read-aloud to weave together your unit.

You may want to design your unit so that it has the following parts:

Part One: Envisioning, Prediction, and Inference (in the books we call this part *Walking in a Character's Shoes*)

Part Two: Building Theories, Gathering Evidence (in the books we call this part *Building Theories about Characters*)

Part Three: From Inference toward Interpretation

Rally Your Children around This Year's New Goals

At the start of any unit, it is important to clarify the unit's reading goals. Children will hear that this is a unit on "characters," and that topic will seem so concrete and clear to them that they'll be ready to get started, no question. You, on the other hand, will probably want to give the focus of the unit a bit of thought because although characters are crucial in any story, there is no reading skill called "characters."

The *children* will think this is simply a unit on characters, but *you* will know that this is a unit on a set of reading skills that you'll bring forth as children read fiction, thinking and caring about characters. Those skills can be chosen by you, the teacher. However, in this write-up and in the Unit of Study book we support you in the teaching of the complex analysis of characters using envisionment, prediction, inference, and interpretations.

From the get-go, you will want to rally children around the big exciting work ahead. If children are to embrace a new unit with resolve and enthusiasm, then they must have a sense that the work of the unit offers a new slant. You will want to figure out how to differentiate this year's work from the work children have done in previous years. Will you say that last year they studied *characters,* and this year you hope they study relationships, friendships, or struggle? The journeys that characters experience, both externally and internally? Or how to at first live as a character and to later step out of that character's shoes to reflect and grow big ideas about that character?

Meanwhile, although you will rally children to do *new* work, you'll also need to remind them to continue doing all you have already taught. That is, your teaching must be cumulative. On Day Three or so of this new unit, remind children that they should be carrying all that you taught last month with them now. If students have abandoned skills and strategies that they learned in the last unit, show students that

you are utterly and completely shocked that they aren't using what they already know. If you emphasized keeping daily logs, it is crucial that *you* don't forget those logs now! If you emphasized that each child in the class make it his or her goal to author a unique reading life, and that it is important to learn from each other's lives as readers, you will want to continue to thread that emphasis throughout this upcoming unit. The goal is that children don't abandon reading habits or skills they acquired in Unit One as they learn new skills. Another important word of caution is this: No matter what, you will want to make sure that the work of the unit does not overwhelm children's reading. Make sure that your children continue to actually read, eyes on print, for forty minutes each day in school and for close to that same amount of time at home. The introduction to the Common Core State Standards talks about independence. As always, we are teaching toward independence, but, especially early in the year, we set the stage for the habits our children will acquire across the year. Goal setting is an important step toward supporting our students to be independent readers.

Thinking about Structures You'll Rely on in This Unit (and Others)

The unit is easier to provision than some because children can grow ideas about characters when reading any fiction book at all, so you do not need a specialized library. Although your teaching may emphasize different skills and strategies from part to part, throughout the whole unit, children will be engaged in one consistent habit: reading, reading, and reading more fiction books. The number of books you'd expect students to read a week is different according to the levels of the books in their hands. For example, readers in Level K should be reading eight to ten books per week; readers in Levels L/M, four to six per week; Levels N/O/P/Q, two to four per week; and in Levels R/S/T, they'll read from one to three per week, depending on the length of the book. In all cases, they'll be reading a lot—and this matters more than anything else in their reading lives.

It also matters that your children meet with a partner for five minutes or so at the end of every day's reading workshop. Depending on the availability of books in your classroom library, partners can be reading the same books or, alternatively, different books they swap when they're finished. If partners have a character in common, the conversation can focus on the shared character, which will invite discussion of what sort of person the character is, what things she might do, or how she responds to changing situations, learns lessons, and grows. This work aligns with Standard 3 in the Common Core State Standards for Literature, which asks readers to "describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events." To scaffold student conversations, you may want to teach partners to ask each other questions such as:

- "What kind of person is the character?"
- "Do you like him (or her)? Why or why not?"
- "Why did the character do that?"

- "How come the character is feeling that way?"
- "Do you think he (or she) did the right thing?"
- "What do you think will happen next?"

Notice that these questions are pushing your children to do some of the reading skill work of the unit. They are not questions that can be answered with one word and they support students in developing ideas about their characters, rather than just retelling what happened in their books.

To help sustain partner talk, push students to build more ideas, and perform complex analysis, you may encourage students to prepare for conversations with partners by rereading whatever jottings they have made thus far. Those jottings may be in a reader's notebook or on Post-its and theory charts. Teach partners to listen to and extend each other's remarks, perhaps using conversational prompts such as, "What in the text makes you say that?" or "I thought that too because . . ." or "Another example of that is . . ." (for additional prompts, read the chart "Conversation Prompts to Keep Partner Talk Going . . ." on p. 158 of *Following Characters into Meaning*).

Whole-class conversations are also a wonderful way to support children's partner conversations. You can provide high amounts of scaffolding, and with this help, students can grow a conversation by sticking to an idea or two. This means that when you finish reading aloud a chapter you may want to ask, "Can someone get us started in a conversation about this chapter?" Teach readers that great book talks begin with ideas that are central to the text and provocative enough to merit conversation. Once a child makes a comment, give everyone time to mull over that comment for a moment, and even to look at the text or jot notes. Then you might ask, "Who can talk back to this idea?" Students can then try sticking to that idea, using evidence from the text to support their thinking. Coach them to listen and then talk back to each other. The Common Core State Standards suggest that children this age should be able to report on a text, drawing on descriptive details to support a main idea or theme. Whole-class conversation will give them an opportunity to do so with your support.

As you prepare for the unit and think about structures you'll put into place, be sure you keep in mind that readers who were assessed a few weeks ago could well be ready to move up to more challenging books. Some of them will have entered the year rusty from a summer without reading, and after just a few weeks of reading up a storm, be ready to move up to another level of text difficulty. The good news is that they'll continue to read fiction books this whole month—so now is a good time to think about moving students up reading levels while they are in a genre that is comfortable for them. You needn't do fancy running records on assessment passages in order to move kids up. Instead, ask them to read aloud bits of a leveled book and listen for fluency and accuracy, then talk to determine comprehension. If their speed at moving through books has increased, that, too, can be a sign they're ready to move up. You will probably want to put readers into "transitional baggies" containing some of the easier books at their new level, providing support to adjust to these more difficult texts.

Same-book partnerships help, as do book introductions. If you or a parent can read some chapters aloud to the reader, this, too, offers help. Series books are especially good for supporting readers as they move to harder levels. If you see some children who are not ready to move toward transitional baggies, then this should be a sign that they need some extra teaching and extra guidance. It is likely that as you enter this unit, more children will be in transitional baggies than not. You can do some whole- or small-group work on supporting oneself in harder books and talk up the purposeful goal-driven stance that can support acceleration.

Part One: Envisioning, Prediction, and Inference

It is essential that stories ignite a vital sort of imagination, one that allows readers to live inside the world of the story, identifying with the characters as they see and sense situations from inside the characters' minds. To enliven this sort of thinking, the first portion of the unit highlights personal response, envisioning, and empathy in ways that strengthen that connection between readers and characters. During the first portion of the unit, then, you'll teach toward that lost-in-a-book feeling that comes when one identifies with the protagonist in a good story. The easiest way for students to become caught up in stories is for them to listen to read-alouds of an absorbing chapter book as you help them imagine the world of the story and identify with the main character. During the preceding unit, you will have demonstrated and supported that lost-in-the-book work by encouraging empathy with characters during the read-aloud, and now you'll continue and extend this work, again reading aloud an enthralling text. You'll pause in the midst of read-aloud to say, "I can see, it, can't you?" and then paint a picture that is drawn from earlier information in the text, from identifications with characters, and from your own life experiences. Another time you might look up from the text and say, "I'm trying to imagine in my mind what this looks like. I've never been to this school, but I'm kind of picturing it is like our school—red brick, three stories tall—I'll read on and see." As you read on in the story about the school, it's likely that new information in the text will lead you to revise your initial mental pictures. "Oh, now I realize it's a *white clapboard* schoolhouse! And I'm getting the idea it's much smaller than our school, because . . ." You'll want to point out explicitly the ways in which close reading informs your mental pictures, helping you continually revise those pictures in light of new information. Often when we read on, the story provides details that nudge us to say, "Oops, I'll have to change what I'm thinking."

The point, of course, is not only to help readers picture the text, almost as if it was a film projected in the reader's own mind, but also to help readers read with a sense of identification. As you read aloud, then, you'll sometimes say, "How do you think he's feeling right now? Turn and talk." Or "I'm worried about him. Aren't you? Turn and tell your partner about your worries." Or you may say, "Show me on your faces what Rob is feeling *now*," or, a bit later, "Use your body to show me what's happening to Rob *now*. Things are changing, aren't they?"

Ultimately, the goal is for students to envision, losing themselves in the text, as they move through any story, whether during read-aloud or as they independently read. You'll want to teach children to envision through every means possible, constantly synthesizing their knowledge of the world with the words on the page. During independent reading and the follow-up partnership times, you'll probably encourage children to talk about their mental pictures. What do the places in the book look like? What has the reader seen before that can help him or her picture the character, the character's home, or the locale in which the book is situated? You might encourage a reader to quickly sketch a character or a setting as he or she reads, and then in his or her partnership conversation to talk through the reasons for this particular image. You can teach them that one way to get these conversations going is by asking questions like, "What's going on around the character?" "How is your character standing or moving in this scene?" "What do you see his face looking like in this moment?" "Who else is there?" "What's the scene like?" Let them know that sometimes their pictures will be a bit out of focus. They may run into parts they don't really understand. The reader's job is to draw on all we have read, asking ourselves and our partners many questions, then imagining as best we can.

Although these conversational and written supports will provide students with powerful scaffolding toward envisioning, they may become even further enmeshed in their stories if they physically take on the roles of their characters. Many teachers have found that incorporating a bit of improvisational drama, both into read-aloud and partner work, is another support for children's work with character. Some students learn best by doing, and drama may be a path these students can follow to truly step into their stories. Session II of *Following Characters into Meaning* describes the thin line between reading and drama. In classrooms that piloted these books last fall, again and again we saw children become more engaged and thoughtful as they went from reading to acting out small sections of texts and then back to reading. This informed not only their partnership talk, but also their independent reading and jotting. When children meet in partnerships, you may suggest that sometimes readers return to passages that matter in a text, acting them out as we read. To prompt more reluctant actors, you could suggest they try little bits of fast writing, letting them know, "Sometimes it helps to use writing to pretend we are the characters in a story we are reading. Try it, for just a second. What are you thinking right now? Jot your thoughts." When students have developed a clear idea in their minds to help them picture their characters' experiences, the transition into drama will serve to even further develop their ideas about their character.

With your support, different students will find what method or combination of methods of envisioning works best for them. You'll want your students to then think and talk about what they are noticing. Standard 3 in the Common Core State Standards for Literature asks readers to "describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events." By deeply living in their stories, students will have developed a wealth of conversation ideas that address this standard. Using the conversation prompts mentioned earlier

as well as those found in *Following Characters into Meaning*, students will engage in productive conversation.

At this point in the unit, you'll want to teach prediction with equal gusto to how you taught envisioning. You'll want to clarify in your mind what skilled predictors do so that you can lay out a learning pathway for readers. Then, you will want to conduct informal assessments to help you determine student proficiency with prediction. Having a clear goal of how students should predict will help you plan to move students up from their current ability. This work will be further informed by your knowledge of the level of text difficulty at which a reader reads. Children who are reading texts at Levels K/L/M can predict by relying on knowledge of simple, straightforward story structure. A character has a problem and tries, tries, tries to resolve that problem. Readers who are working with texts at Levels U/V/W will need to do quite different work as they predict, thinking, "How might all the subplots come together into something cohesive at the end? Which characters who seemed minor or subplots that seemed tangential at first might return to bring this story toward its conclusion?"

You may want to reference Session VI of *Following Characters into Meaning*. This session explains how readers can deepen their prediction work when they push themselves to see not just what the character will do next or what is yet to happen, but also *how* those events might unfold. Will the shy boy take small steps toward his dream of starring in a school play, even if doing so means risking embarrassment? Will the girl who longs to be accepted by a particular clique begin dressing in different clothes, talking in new ways, even disowning a friend that the group dislikes, all in the hope of being accepted? This sort of prediction work is essential to learning how to read books and characters with an eye toward complexity. People in books and in real life don't just do one thing, then another, then another in an automated way. There are reasons behind their motivations and actions, and usually these are linked to who they are as people. Readers who can anticipate what a character will do next and how they'll do it have a deeper understanding of that character. If students need another day of practice predicting in more detail, you might draw on Session V in *Bringing Characters to Life and Developing Essential Reading Skills* in *Constructing Curriculum*, which asks readers to "draw on all we know to predict in graphic detail."

As you teach prediction, you'll be teaching children to infer and critically analyze the text. They will build not only on their sense of how stories tend to go, but also on how this particular story is unfolding, and on all they know about a particular character. (Some of your more advanced readers will also draw on their sense of the lessons a character has learned or is in the process of learning, or has yet to learn, to predict next steps.) All of this goes into the work of growing a strong prediction. At the same time, you'll teach children that readers read expecting to be surprised, knowing that they will sometimes have to revise their predictions—or grow new ones—based on new information they learn as they read on. This is aligned with the Common Core State Standards, which state that children should be able to quote accurately from a text when explaining and drawing inferences from the text.

Part Two: Building Theories about Characters

During the second part of this unit, you'll shift your emphasis and teach readers to read closely, inferring to grow theories about the character, and then reading with those theories in hand, altering them according to incoming information.

We often launch this work by teaching children that in life, as well as in books, we watch how people act, noticing especially how they respond to events. From this we formulate tentative theories about them. You might say something like, "I noticed the way you all pulled together the other day when Jeremy was hurt. I saw Randalio making a bandage out of a paper towel, and from his actions I got the idea that he is quick-thinking and resourceful. And I watched the way Leo kept out of everyone's way and then found quiet ways to help, and I thought, 'That's just the way Leo acts during morning jobs, too.' I saw a pattern! So I thought, 'This gives me the idea that Leo is observant, and that his quietness helps him be especially thoughtful.'" Then you could debrief by saying something like, "Do you see how I made theories about Leo and Randalio based on their actions? Readers do that too." You can tell children that just as we grow theories about people around us, we can also grow theories about characters in books. Session IX in *Following Characters into Meaning* can help with this work.

Once you get students started noticing character actions to build character theories, it is important to emphasize that readers pay attention not only to *what* a character does but also to *how* the character does these things. Does the text give any clues about the character's gestures or the way a character walks or sits or closes the door? So, too, you might teach students to think about the reasons for a character's actions. If the text says that a character slumps in the chair, then the reader can not only envision this, but further push themselves to ask, "Why does she sit like that? Is she tired? Bored? What's going on?"

Readers also pay attention to the way characters talk and think. They may notice the words characters choose, their tones of voice, or the emotional cues the author adds with dialogue. All of these give hints about what kind of people live in the world of our story. At times, an even clearer picture of a character may be painted by their thoughts. You may want to point out to students that sometimes authors offer windows into a character's mind by including passages that show thinking or an explanation of a character's motives.

The techniques may sound fairly straightforward, but children often struggle trying to do this work. Many children need to be taught that readers glean information about a character from every possible source. Sometimes, readers must dig deep into passages that don't directly pertain to the characters they are investigating. They may study those telling about the character's home, for example, or the character's family. You may help students by saying, "Let's read this passage together and think, 'Which part tells me something about Rob?'" Then you may show that passages describing Rob's home provide windows into his character.

Once students have accumulated many strategies to think about their characters and have, thus, started to develop theories about them, they may begin to notice

inconsistencies or changes in characters. Children tend to rely on sweeping generalizations when talking about the ways a character changes or the lessons a character learns. Our goal is to teach children to grow grounded, accountable, and, especially, precise ideas. We can teach children to think precisely in part by teaching them to reflect when a character acts out of character. Teach children to think, "I wonder why the author might have made the decision to have the character do this?" and then to try to answer that question with some specificity. Teach them that characters are complicated; they are not just one way. Thinking about character complexity will lead them to develop more precise ideas about their characters. Then, too, note that characters change. Teach students that readers can move forward in their texts, thinking, "Do these new sections of the text confirm or challenge my ideas about the character?" You may teach children to think between several related sections of a text—say, a passage at the start, one at the middle, and one at the end—to talk and think very specifically about a character's evolution across the story line.

As children come to think about characters with an eye toward complexity, you'll teach them that the story will *tell* specific actions. From those, readers can *infer* specific meaning. If the story says that Robert started his essay five times, each time crumpling his discarded lead into a wad, then the author is expecting that the reader will infer meaning about this character. The author does not need to come right out and say, "Robert is a perfectionist." The reader may not find descriptive words in the text but must instead bring those words to the text. Many children will reach first for generic terms like *nice*, *mean*, or *good* to describe their characters. You may find it helpful to create a literary word chart so that children realize that a nice character might be *generous* or *encouraging* or *loyal* or *patient*. A mean character, on the other hand, might be *intolerant* or *snide* or *jealous* or even *malicious*. Some teachers have their kids rate the synonyms for *nice* along a gradient of niceness for children to begin to grasp the nuances of each synonym. A child who has marked passages in a story that reveal the character's traits can profit from being invited to reach for the precisely true word that captures the character's personality. Session XIII in *Following Characters into Meaning* shows readers how using more specific language to express thinking can help to evolve or deepen an idea.

You may want to show students that as they notice character change, they will be able to pick more precise words to describe their students. For example, children who are early on in *The Tiger Rising* might be tempted to label Sistine *snotty* or *rude* or the generic *mean*. Once they read a bit further, however, and push themselves to reach for more precise language to describe Sistine, they may find themselves saying that she is *tough as nails* or *brazen* or *prickly on the outside* but that she is also *passionate* and *easily hurt* and *soft on the inside*. You may also teach students that as they read on, the theory (or theories) they have developed will continue to become more and more complex and analytical. That means, the way they describe their characters will not only use more precise words, but will also use qualifiers. Instead of saying, "Gilly is mean," students may be moved to say "Gilly hurts others so they don't get close to her and don't matter to her, and so that they, like her mother, don't hurt her."

Students' development of character theories will be powerfully scaffolded if they are taking and keeping good notes. As you teach children to think about the protagonist's traits, motivations, problems (or struggles), lessons, and/or changes, suggest that they keep Post-its (and perhaps "theory charts") and that they meet for five minutes with a partner at the end of every reading workshop to "talk off their Post-its." By recording their thoughts on their character over the course of the book, students will be able to track their thinking and better unpack and support their theories. Subsequent conversations off their notes will strengthen, or perhaps change, their theories by adding another reader's perspective to their thinking.

A helpful structure for both note-taking and conversation is using "boxes and bullets" (see *Breathing Life into Essays* in the series, *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*). If children are accustomed to working within this structure, help them jot main ideas in a boxes-and-bullets form as they prepare for partner conversations. Once they meet with a partner, teach them that one child can get the conversation started by sharing something provocative and central to the text. The second partner can listen and extend the thought, perhaps using conversation prompts such as, "What in the text makes you say that?" "I thought that too because . . ." "Another example of that is . . ." "I thought something different because . . ." "I agree because . . ." "Wait. I'm confused. Are you saying . . ." "Have you found the same thing with the character in your story?" "Can you say more about that?" "Can you show me the part in the story where you got that idea?"

You will note that these are the same prompts we taught our students earlier. Reminding them to use moves they already have instead of always teaching the next new thing can help reinforce skills and build confidence in our students. You will want to encourage partners to "talk long" about an idea because what they are doing as they extend a conversation is learning to think in some depth. This work supports the first Common Core State Standard, which states that readers should be able to ask and answer questions that demonstrate an understanding of a text, explicitly referring to the text as the basis for the answers.

By giving students these prompts, we are teaching them to ratchet up the level of what they are already doing. As we move through this unit you should always be aware of how your students could be doing the work just a little bit better, and you should have some ways to help them do this more sophisticated work. You might also ask them to make simple moves, such as starring the Post-its they think did an especially good job of developing ideas, then articulating what it was that made that thought really powerful. Once they have collected strong notes and have described and analyzed their strengths, then use them as mentor Post-its. Children can continue to read, this time with the goal of producing equally thoughtful responses to reading. Yet another way to lift their thinking is to teach them that words matter—that by using exact language when they are writing or talking about their characters they can make their thinking more nuanced and complex. Children, too, need to be part of the conversation about what it means to grow theories about characters really well.

Part Three: From Inference toward Interpretation

The third part of this unit is a natural segue from inference work to interpretation. By now your students will have developed valuable skills that will carry them forward as they begin this new part. Now they will synthesize their thinking about their books and characters and push themselves to develop big ideas that they can support with inferences they have made earlier. So, too, they will make sure they are revising their thinking as they read. This work edges toward theme, and creates a strong foundation not only for interpretation, but for later reading units such as the Thematic Text Set Unit.

Your students' notebooks and books will be bursting with jottings and Post-its, reflecting their minds, brimful of ideas. You might want to begin, just as Part Four of *Following Characters into Meaning* begins, with a session on pausing in the midst of reading to organize one's thoughts. You can teach children that one way to do this is to build piles of related thoughts or Post-it notes. Not only will this help children get a handle on their many ideas, it will also lay the groundwork for the rest of this part, giving children practice at finding threads of thought. Children might sort Post-its into piles that are about one particular character, event, or relationship in the book. You might then teach your students that they can look for patterns and new ideas within this stack of related Post-its. Teach them that when we look at a series of ideas, we ask ourselves, "What do these have in common? What is different about these ideas? If I was getting to know someone and these were my observations of them, how would I think about them?" Once children have developed a couple of theories, they can revisit earlier parts of the text in light of their theories. They can also read forward, gathering more evidence to support their theories, making individual theory charts. You will find many ideas for this work in Part Three of *Following Characters into Meaning*, which guides teachers to move children from inference work toward interpretation.

Session XIV of *Following Characters into Meaning* shows a student who has grouped together Post-its from *The Tiger Rising* and has put together the following jottings:

- Rob's dad tells him he shouldn't cry or talk about his mom.
- Rob stood up for Sistine, which showed he isn't totally wimpy.
- Rob likes to whittle and make figurines.
- Rob tells Sistine his mother is dead after she shares her secrets with him.

You may want to demonstrate sorting and building theories off of these jottings. As you look at these Post-its together, first help students to sort this list further, looking for ideas that go together. Your children will notice that the first Post-it and the fourth seem to be about the same thing, as do the third and the fourth, and so on. You then can coach your students to think about what these combined ideas are showing us about Rob and Sistine and their relationship and struggles. They may say something like, "This is showing me that Rob's connection to Sistine will help him find a way to talk about his mom." And then when pushed to connect more and more of these

isolated ideas together, your students might realize that both the whittling and telling Sistine about his mom are examples of Rob opening up to someone else. Your students can write, "Now I am thinking Rob will be able to talk to her about his mom, instead of just thinking about her when he whittles."

At first glance, this idea may seem more like a prediction than a theory—and you'd be right to call it that. This doesn't mean it isn't worthwhile, though. In fact, with a little rewording, this child might easily turn this prediction into a theory about these two characters: By helping Rob open up about his sadness over his mother's death, Sistine helps Rob begin to heal. This, in turn, might become a more universal idea about the role of friends in helping each other through difficult times. That is, this child is well on her way to doing rich character theory work.

As students continue with interpretive work, you might have them consider some central questions: What does this character want? What are some of the obstacles that have been getting in the way? How does this character respond to those obstacles? What resources does the character draw upon, from deep inside, to meet the challenges and reach the goals? (Session XVI of *Following Characters into Meaning* talks about these questions at greater length.) The beauty of these questions is that they apply no matter the story because, after all, stories are built on a problem/resolution structure. *All* characters long for something. *All* characters face obstacles. *All* characters respond in some way. *All* characters rely on something in themselves when they face their challenges. Understanding this narrative structure and learning to look at characters through this lens will set children on the path to getting at the heart of *any* character they encounter, in *any* book. And asking these questions can lead any of us to rich understanding not only of characters, but of a book's messages or life lessons.

As children continue to move from making inferences to growing theories about characters, they may stop short at times, pronouncing a single idea *the* idea. They may, for example, stall out on "Rob is a wimp," and declare their interpretive work done. In many ways, these character theories do show evidence of interpretation. They are holding onto one big idea about their character and seeking out evidence in order to describe their characters with growing precision. However, you'll want to teach them ways to keep themselves going, producing more thinking, more ideas, more writing. At this point in the unit, they are most likely focusing their interpretation on just character traits (albeit in sophisticated and beautiful ways) and perhaps how they see their character changing in the books they are reading. You can push your students further by having them focus not just on new ideas that they have about their characters, but also on what lessons the character is learning in this story. By asking themselves, "What does Rob learn about friendship in *Tiger Rising*?" or "How does Rob learn to deal with loss?" students can, by standing on their strong inferences, begin thinking about big lessons the author might want you to learn. In this, they will be very close to studying themes.

You may want to demonstrate how to start thinking thematically by looking at the very same Post-its as earlier in this part of the unit:

- Rob's dad tells him he shouldn't cry or talk about his mom.
- Rob stood up for Sistine, which showed he isn't totally wimpy.
- Rob likes to whittle and make figurines.
- Rob tells Sistine his mother is dead after she shares her secrets with him.

This time, though, you will view these carrying the question, "What lessons does the character learn about these people, problems, or ideas?" Push students to generate even bigger thoughts about our books. You might push students to generate ideas like, "Rob learns that friendship can help you to deal with your problems," or "Rob learns that holding in pain is worse than letting it out," or even, "Rob learns that stuffing your feelings makes you feel wimpy." Sometimes it helps to first name the problems that a character faces in a book, and then to ask ourselves, "What lessons does the character learn about _____ (the problem)?" Of course, as students begin this harder thematic work, they may go back to simpler ideas, such as "Rob learns that friends help you." While for some students this may be an appropriate goal, for others we will want to go back to the prompts and partnerships that help students to think in bigger, better, more complex ways.

Even your strugglers will be energized by this work. There's nothing like making new connections, producing more and more thinking, and growing that thinking into something yet more significant, to motivate us to do our very best. You may find that while some kids do extraordinary work in partnerships, others are more inclined to come up with their best thinking on their own. These kids may benefit from writing entries in their notebooks that help them synthesize their ideas and land on new ones. Encourage children to keep generating ideas, whether it's on their own, in partnerships, in school, at home. Keep in mind, as students infer and interpret, that the Common Core State Standards emphasize the importance of reading and writing as well as speaking and listening to develop and express their ideas. Be sure to give all students a variety of methods to generate and assert ideas.

We can, of course, always scaffold the interpretation students are doing. As you near the end of this part, you'll want to teach children as they evaluate what they are reading that the things in books that recur—the parts that weave in and out of the fabric of the book—often turn out to be symbolic. They are what the author wants us to pay attention to. These recurring parts tell us something meaningful about the characters and about the story, too. You may want your students to keep track of the recurring things they see in their own books. Or as a class, you can keep track of the parts that weave throughout the read-aloud book. Then children can work in partnerships (perhaps two partnerships can pair up), noticing what these threads tell us about the book and the characters. The author might have threaded any number of things throughout her story, so why this one? Why that one? What is significant, for example, about the recurring image of a closed suitcase in *The Tiger Rising*? How about a locked cage? Rob's rash? What do these three recurring threads, taken together, help us learn about Rob and about Kate DiCamillo's intended messages for her readers?

Students will approach the end of this unit having thought deeply about the characters they have met and the lessons that authors, in hand with their characters, have taught them. One way to bring this unit to a close is by asking children to self-reflect. They can think back over the unit and review the work they've done, asking, "Who am I as a reader? What kind of thinking work do I tend to do? How can I use the goal I created to help me think deeply about what I am reading?" That is, you'll steer children to theorize about themselves as they have theorized about their characters, using strategies they have learned over the course of the unit. If we want children to carry the work of this unit to other units, other books, and even their lives, we'll want to show them that they now have the tools to understand who they are as readers and thinkers. Sharing this self-analysis may serve as a meaningful celebration for the children. You may have students create self-portraits that reflect their reading identities (see Session XXI). You may, too, give kids blank bookmarks and ask them to think about the books they've read and loved and ways in which they see themselves in the characters they've encountered. They can jot those observations onto their bookmarks and then add to these throughout the year. What is most important is that students exit this unit knowing that they are able to move through worlds, in books and in everyday life, learning constantly from characters, people, and themselves.

Additional Resources

This unit is organized into three *parts*. During the first part, students will step into the character's shoes, using the skills of envisionment, prediction, and inference to get to know their characters like they know their best friends. Then, in the second part, students will build upon what they have learned about characters, this time creating complex theories about their characters and following these theories throughout the text, gathering evidence to support their theories as they read. During the third part, students will move toward interpretation. This work is detailed in *Following Characters into Meaning* from the series, *Units of Study for Teaching Reading, Grades 3–5.*

The strongest units are assessment-based. Therefore, you will want to look closely at your students' work before and during this unit of study. Study their Post-its, thinking about the skills in which they are secure and the skills that need more attention. If the majority of your students seem to have trouble inferring, then you may want to linger a little longer in some of these lessons on envisioning, prediction, and inference. Perhaps you'll plan a series of lessons that will help ratchet up children's inferring skills. Or maybe you'll save some days for teaching repertoire lessons—lessons that explicitly teach kids to use everything you've already taught, all the time, referring to charts and other tools in the classroom that help kids remember and use all of the strategies you've demonstrated.

If you decide to spend additional time on prediction, you will want to make sure your kids are not only predicting, but also comparing their predictions with what actually happens in the books they read. You may find that you need to coach them to jot down their predictions, marking places in the book where they come upon clues, and

to hold onto their Post-its so that they can reflect on how their thinking matched what happened in the book. These Post-its will serve as a great assessment tool for you as you tailor your instruction to your class's specific needs. If you notice that the predictions are vague and generic, you might teach students to be more specific about their predictions, using character names and detailed events. If the students' predictions name a specific outcome of the book, you might coach students to not only jot what will happen but also how this will come to be. Or, if your students are already adept at making specific, long-term predictions, you could coach them to think of multiple ways this story could go based on the main character, other books in this series, and their knowledge of the genre. Essentially, you'll want to think not just about whether your students are predicting, but also about the level of sophistication in their predictions.

This same work is also true for the skills of envisioning, synthesis, and inference. If your students need additional support with these skills, you will want to create a string of instruction much like the one outlined above for prediction. You will want to coach children to jot on their Post-its so that you can study how adeptly they use the skill as they read. Then, you will want to teach lessons, or small groups, to move children forward on the skill continuum.

The interpretation work in this unit is critical. *Interpretation* is not saying that the character is nice or mean. You will want to study your students' Post-its, and, if you see that they are still writing that characters are simplistic and straightforward, you will want to emphasize nuanced theories. You might decide to linger on the second part, taking the second and third bullets and turning them into a string of minilessons. You might decide to teach additional strategies to help students grow more complicated theories and then big, complex thoughts. Then too, you might emphasize this work in your read-aloud and teach strategy lessons to small groups of children to help move them toward this sophisticated work.

In the first unit of study, *Building a Reading Life*, you launched partnerships in your classroom, teaching children to share their books with one another, summarizing the text and then discussing how it makes them feel. You will want to be sure to continue this structure during this unit, using partnerships as a scaffold for comprehension. Your students can meet to share their books and think through them together. Just as they did in the first unit, children can summarize the text and then share their thinking about the text. At this point, they should be stronger at these forms of discussion so their partners can ask questions to challenge and push their thinking. They can discuss the theories they are growing about characters and the evidence they are gathering. Partners can offer alternate perspectives, helping each other to create more nuanced and sophisticated theories.

You'll also want to check students' book logs at the start of the unit, and throughout the unit, to be sure that kids' volume is sky-high. Be sure that stopping and jotting, sorting Post-its, filling out book logs, and other tools aren't eating away at actual reading time—teach kids to be efficient and selective when it comes to using these tools, so that they can read as much as possible every day.

Below is one possible way the unit could go. You may want to adapt these plans, depending on the particular needs of your own fourth graders. If you decide

to forge your own pathway, think about how to make the parts of your unit seem coherent and logical, so that readers feel as if they are on a pathway that will inevitably help them emerge as more powerful and independent readers and thinkers.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Envisionment, Prediction, and Inference (Walking in a Character's Shoes)

- "If we read well, we become the character in a book. We read the words and then poof! We are one of the characters in the mental movie we're making. Poof! I'm Willy, bundled up on that sled, snow flying into my eyes, my heart racing, urging Searchlight on."

- "When we read, you and I need to be the ones to notice if we are just gazing out at the text, thinking, 'It's as pretty as a postcard.' We need to notice times when we are reading on emotional autopilot—maybe understanding the text, but not taking it in. And we need to say, 'Stop the car. Pause the reading.' When we read, we need to see not just words, but also the world of the story through the eyes of the character. There is a rap on the door, and we hear it. Even before the character calls, 'Come in,' we practically call out a greeting ourselves."

- "When we read ourselves awake, really envisioning what's happening in the story so that we are almost in the character's shoes, we often find ourselves remembering times in our lives when we lived through something similar, and we then bring feelings and insights from those experiences to bear on our understanding of whatever we are reading."

- "A reader not only sees, hears, and imagines as if in the story, making a movie in the mind. A reader also revises that mental movie. Often when we read on, the story provides details that nudge us to say, 'Oops, I'll have to change what I'm thinking.'"

- "One way readers read actively and wisely, then, is we empathize with the main character, we feel with the main character, in a way that leads us to anticipate what the character will do next."

- "To predict well, it helps to make a movie in your mind of what has yet to happen. Those movies need to show not only what will happen next, but also how it will happen. We can anticipate how things will happen by remembering what we already know of our characters."

- "When you read in such a way that you are connected with a character, when you open your heart to him or her and care the same way you would about a friend, then envisioning, predicting, and thinking about a character happen all at once, in a whoosh."

Part Two: Building Theories, Gathering Evidence

- "We pull in to read, yes, but we also pull back from reading to think. We read like we are a character in the book, but we also read like we are a professor, growing intellectual ideas about the book. We read like we're under the covers, reading by flashlight, but we also turn the imaginary lights on in the room and scrutinize the text to grow ideas. The most fervent ideas center on the people in our books."

- "Researchers have found that some people, like my husband, are good at reading people, and those who can read people in real life can also read people in stories. To read people—in life and in stories—it is important to remember that actions can be windows to the person. In life and as we read, we can pause after a character has done something and say, 'Let me use what just happened as a window to help me understand this person.'"

- "It is important to keep in mind that characters are complicated; they are not just one way. And here's a key point: To grow nuanced and complex ideas about characters it helps to think deeply about times when a person seems to act out of character."

- "Paying attention to the objects that a character keeps near and dear is one way to grow ideas about what kind of person that character is. Those objects are often windows into the mind and heart of our characters. The possessions that a character keeps close almost always reveal something important about the person."

- "When readers want to think deeply about a character, we examine the ways that people around the character treat the character, looking especially for patterns of behavior. We not only notice how other people, other characters, treat and view the main character; we also notice what others call the character and the voice and body language people assume when talking to the character."

- "Readers sharpen our ideas about characters by using precise language to describe them and their actions."

Part Three: From Inference toward Interpretation

- "When readers get about halfway through our books (or when our books are bursting with ideas), it is wise to take some time to organize our thoughts. One way to do this is to sort our Post-it notes into piles of ideas that seem to go together."

- "As Jasmine showed us yesterday, once readers have grown a theory, a big idea, we reread and read on with that theory in hand. And I want you to know that we hold a theory loosely, knowing it will have a life of its own as we travel on. It will take up places we didn't expect to go."

- "Expert readers believe that when thinking about stories, it can especially pay off to pay attention to characters in general and to their motivations and struggles in particular."

- "A simple, obvious idea about a character or a book is a great place to start, even if your goal is a complex idea. To take that simple idea as a starting place and to climb to higher levels of thinking, it helps to use a few phrases as thought prompts, grasping those phrases like we grasp rungs on a ladder, using them to help us climb higher and higher."

- "The stuff that keeps recurring, that resurfaces often, that is threaded in and out of the fabric of a narrative, is the biggest stuff. That's true in life, and true in books. In books, the things that the author mentions again and again are the ones that she really wants you to notice, the ones that are critical to understanding the essence of the character and the story."

- "I want to teach you a way that readers can intensify our reading, a way readers can catch some of the spirit of the book, to hold onto for themselves even when they are finished reading."

- "We can look back on the jotted notes we make as we read, and research our thinking, asking, 'What sort of thinking do I tend to do as I read?' After we spy on our own thinking, we can put together all the clues that we see, and together, these can help us construct a sense of ourselves as readers. We can come away from this saying, 'I'm the sort of reader who does a lot of this kind of thinking . . . and who doesn't do a lot of that kind of thinking.' We can then give ourselves goals so we deliberately outgrow our current habits as readers and thinkers."

UNIT THREE

Nonfiction Reading

Using Text Structures to Comprehend Expository, Narrative, and Hybrid Nonfiction

LATE NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: Q/R)

Before you launch into this unit, you'll want to make some decisions, and to do this, you need to think about the nonfiction texts you have available and your plan for supporting nonfiction reading across the year. Presumably, you'll be teaching nonfiction reading as part of your content area instruction in social studies and science, and if you follow this calendar, then you'll also devote almost half a month of your reading workshop to nonfiction reading. This is one of the demands of the Common Core State Standards. That's a lot of nonfiction reading!

In this curricular calendar write-up, we outline a unit of study in which you give your students stretches of time to read whole texts, reading not to answer a specific question or to mine for an interesting fact, or to follow just the features of the text, but rather, to learn all that the author wants to teach. This write-up is aligned with *Navigating Nonfiction*, a recently published two-volume unit of study within *Units of Study for Teaching Reading: A Curriculum for the Reading Workshop, Grades 3–5* (Tolan and Calkins) and the Common Core State Standards. The unit spotlights the skills of determining importance, finding the main ideas and supporting details, summary, and reading to learn. Students will learn to increase their expertise with interpretation, cross-text comparisons, synthesis, research, and nonfiction projects, as asked for in the Common Core State Standards.

In order for students to be able to ascertain the big ideas in a nonfiction text in such a way that they can summarize as well as think critically, they need to grasp the text's infrastructure of ideas and supporting details. We envision that your students will be writing essays during writing workshop on topics of their own choice while they engage in this nonfiction reading work. They will, therefore, be able to recognize, in the expository texts they read, a template that they'll know as "boxes and bullets." If

readers expect an infrastructure of big ideas and supportive information within expository texts and if they learn to use text features, white space, and cuing systems such as transitional phrases to help them discern that infrastructure, they will be able to glean what matters most even from texts that contain an overwhelming amount of raw information. Of course, the infrastructure will be different when students read narrative nonfiction—and it is important students know this and use that knowledge to help them approach texts differently after ascertaining their structure. In this unit, you'll teach students to become expert at explicit and implicit structures of texts.

The unit highlights the importance of structures and channels students to read texts of a particular structure for a bit, noting that structure. You'll need to decide whether to start by channeling students toward expository or toward narrative nonfiction. For a number of reasons, we encourage you to start by spotlighting expository nonfiction. Not only will this feel fresher to your students, but there also tend to be more accessible texts available in this structure. Then, too, beginning with expository nonfiction will put you in a position to recruit involvement from readers who have decided that fiction reading isn't their cup of tea. Finally, beginning in this way allows you to hug the shores of *Navigating Nonfiction*, leaning on that book for minilessons and small-group ideas. If you decide to start with an emphasis on expository texts, you can convey to your class that this unit will invite readers into a whole new kind of reading—and that some readers will like it even better than they liked fiction. Once you have provided almost two weeks of instruction in expository text structures, you'll introduce narrative nonfiction, again alerting students to the ways in which expository and narrative texts differ in structure and to the fact that they require a different alertness from the reader. Though the narrative structure of most biographies and true adventures will feel familiar to young readers who have a strong grasp of story grammar, other narrative nonfiction texts might provide a challenge, especially if the main "character" is a plant or an animal and if technical, content-specific vocabulary blurs comprehension. You'll want to alert readers to decoding strategies as well as teach them to recognize unlikely, inanimate protagonists within their narratives so that they counter these comprehension hurdles.

To support the work of this unit, you'll want to evaluate your classroom library and consider how to expand it. If you bring forward just your expository nonfiction texts, do you have enough texts to keep your students "in books" for the period of time in which you'll highlight expository nonfiction? As you mull over this question, keep in mind that many nonfiction books are deceptive. Their lush photographs can mask the difficulty level of a book. Also keep in mind that a fair percentage of your readers may need to read expository texts that are a notch easier than the fiction books they generally read. If this is a new genre to them, they may need a bit of warm-up time before they can read expository books that are as hard as the fiction they read. If possible, you will want to gather multiple texts on a few subjects, so that students have access to more than one book about a topic. On the TCRWP website, we've included a leveled bibliography of nonfiction texts, which includes a large section for texts that are expository. This collection is angled to include books designed to support kids' volume of reading, with lots

of text, as well as books with a clear exoskeleton, often structured with headings and subheadings. The books on that list are all available from Booksource. Please contact us with more book suggestions that you have found keep up student stamina at different skill levels. Our booklists are constantly evolving, and we always appreciate input.

You'll also want to decide on which text or texts you'll highlight in your read-alouds and minilessons. In Volume I of *Navigating Nonfiction*, Kathleen Tolan and Lucy Calkins model on a collection of texts, including *Bugwise* and *Frogs and Toads*. You can find a list of recommended texts for read-aloud for this unit, on our website, and on the DVD that accompanies the *Units of Study*. In general, we recommend choosing texts that are lively, accessible, and include many of the text features and reading challenges that your students will face in the expository and narrative texts they'll be reading in the unit. That is, choose a few texts where the ideas and categories of information are explicit, and others where the reader needs to read between the lines to infer the message of the author. The first part of this unit focuses on expository texts, and the second on narrative and hybrid, so you'll want to choose one or two short texts for each of these structures.

A word of advice: especially if you do not have enough just-right texts for students to maintain their volume of reading during this unit, we strongly suggest that you reserve time every day (at least fifteen to twenty minutes in school and more time at home) for students to continue reading just-right chapter books and novels in fiction, using and practicing all the skills you've already taught. Be sure readers continue to maintain their outside-school reading and their reading logs. Monitor that they're reading the proper number of chapter books each week—probably anywhere from one to four, *in addition to* the informational nonfiction texts they read. The Common Core State Standards emphasize the significance of students reading informational texts and literature—and usually, students can keep going with both across these two months to keep up their stamina and skill level. Of course, if your students are doing a lot of informational reading in science and social studies, that helps as well—or if they have related novel book clubs in those classes, that can also help. Students become powerful readers when teachers plan across the curriculum—which is a necessity if we want our students to achieve at the high levels demanded by the Common Core State Standards and to reach our own dreams and aspirations for them.

For the very start of your unit, you may want to locate the expository texts that have a fairly clear infrastructure of headings and subheadings. You may even get two copies of some of these texts so that readers can start by reading at least one book in same-text partnerships. Creating same-text partnerships early on in the unit can provide effective scaffolds for readers. Soon students will be able to read these texts independently and they will be able to work with texts that expect that it will be the reader who almost "writes" the subheading, chunking the text by topic as he or she reads it. As you examine books, determining which are worth having multiple copies of in your library, look for ones that:

- have a clear organizational infrastructure
- are at difficulty levels where students can read with fluency, comprehension, and accuracy

- are highly engaging texts
- span a variety of topics, including history, social studies, and science

Part One: Determining Importance and Synthesizing in Expository Nonfiction

To start this work, you will teach text-previewing strategies, what Norman Webb's *Depths of Knowledge* levels describe as a Level 3 skill. Your teaching might model that paying attention to expository text features such as the table of contents, diagrams, charts, graphic organizers, photos, and captions helps develop a sense for text content. These features help you get ready to take in the new information on the page, thinking, "What's this page (or two-page spread, or chapter) likely to be about?" Then too, you might encourage students to also activate their prior knowledge of the topic, orienting themselves to predict the likely subheadings and content-specific vocabulary they'll encounter reading forward. If the text is about a wild animal you're discussing, you'd teach students to approach it asking, "I wonder if this text will have the usual categories of information: ecosystem, body, eating habits, predators, and so forth." If the text is about a war, you'd teach students to bring their expectation that they will learn about the two warring sides, the reasons for the war, the series of major battles, the turning points, and so on. Even before they begin to read, you want readers to be alert to the visual features of expository texts as well as to anticipate particular content. This work of previewing a text so we can read with power is described in Session I, Volume 1 of *Navigating Nonfiction*. The session lays out the important work readers can do to "rev up" their minds for reading. You may give your children actual phrases to use as they talk with partners about their predictions, such as, "This heading says . . . so I think this page is mostly about . . ." or, "I looked at this (picture/caption/graph) and saw . . . and this (picture/caption/graph) and saw . . . If I put them together, I think these pages will be about . . ." You might also teach them to go across the page, part by part, and use their finger to point to or circle the aspects they are paying particular attention to. Too often, you'll see students pick up nonfiction books and just flip through them with little apparent focus or even only read the backs of books! That's browsing, not readying to read. It's what we do in magazines in a supermarket line—it's not what we do when we study a subject seriously. Malcolm Gladwell, in *Outliers*, reminds us that one of our jobs is to teach students to work hard—that is the key to extraordinary success. So here, you'll begin by showing students how to approach a text in a serious, intellectual manner.

You will follow this initial instruction on previewing texts by telling children that actual reading of a text means constantly confirming, revising, or adding to one's initial expectations about the text. Rather than letting children dive into texts uninitiated, you'll be teaching engagement from the outset where children read with a curious stance, checking what they read against what they had *expected* to read. In the shift from previewing to reading, your goal is that readers find their expectations become more focused and specific: "Oh, this is not just about moose in general. It's about the

new dangers to their habitat," or "This looked like an all-about-whales text but it actually *compares* whales and dolphins."

In the next lesson, you might teach students how to look for structure within a nonfiction text, particularly teaching them how to "chunk" a text and say back the important information as a summary. Right away, you will want to alert students to the boxes-and-bullets infrastructure of expository texts, which is what enables readers to ascertain the main idea (box) and the supporting details (bullets) of their texts. This awareness is crucial to understanding the interconnectedness of ideas within the text; you want to guard against children picking up a random fact (smaller bullet) from the text without connecting it to the bigger idea (box) that validates it. It is no easy task for readers to determine the main idea of a paragraph or a passage, especially when these are mired in intriguing or overwhelming new facts and details. You will need to constantly remind readers to ask themselves, "What is the one big thing that this text is teaching and how do all the other details connect with this?"

Once students develop an eye for the architecture and layout of expository texts, it becomes possible to take in, synthesize, learn from, and respond to large swaths of nonfiction texts. That is, once readers recognize a text structure, they can use that information to structure their own reading, allowing parts of the text to take on greater significance while letting other parts of the text fall away. You'll want to teach students that most expository nonfiction has a central idea followed—or surrounded—by supporting evidence. In your teaching, you will probably model reading a mentor text with an eye for that central idea as well as for supportive specifics, demonstrating that expository reading involves gleaning outlines and summaries of the text. The goal is that this awareness becomes foundational to the way your children approach expository texts. In this way, you'd support reading expository texts in their entirety, enabling children to understand the main *concepts* that the text teaches as opposed to an "extractive" way of reading expository in which readers mine texts for isolated nuggets of trivia or "cool facts" that, to their eye, might bear no connection at all to the larger scheme of a topic.

As students move up levels, the sections of the texts they are reading will often contain more than one idea—a fact that is emphasized in the Common Core State Standards. So in your next lesson, you'll probably want to teach students to notice, as they read on, whether the next part of the text holds a new idea with supporting information, or whether it adds more information about an idea that was already introduced. It's important to emphasize that nonfiction readers read with the same kind of stamina and pace that fiction readers do—they don't linger over one picture for an hour; rather, they move on to gather as much information as possible, while constantly asking themselves, "How does all of this fit together?" Sometimes it is helpful for children to simply look for the "pop-out sentence" as they read, knowing that often one sentence summarizes the content of a paragraph or a passage. Teach students that this topic sentence is often the first or last sentence—but not always! Students could read the first sentence of a paragraph and ask, "What is this saying?" and then read on, sentence by sentence, asking, "How does this fit with what's been said so

far? And this?" To find the main idea, readers need to take the sentences they've read and say what they learned in one short statement, not a question. It may help readers initially to make this underlying boxes-and-bullets infrastructure visible by using a pencil to underline or "box" the main ideas and "bullet" the supporting details. You'll want to teach readers to break dense swaths of expository text into chunks—either with a pencil or with their mental eye—and to tackle these chunks by fishing out and holding onto the main ideas within, rather than being sidetracked by supporting facts and details. At the end of each chunk, readers may profit from saying (or writing on a Post-it), "This part teaches me. . . ."

Readers can move from finding the main idea of a paragraph to figuring out the overarching idea of a multiparagraph text by noticing, as they read from one paragraph to another, whether the two paragraphs continue to build on one main idea or whether the second paragraph turns a bend, laying out yet another idea. Nonfiction texts can be tricky because section dividers are often invisible; readers need to be vigilant, reading in such a way that they notice when the text has gone through a transition and saying, "Oh, this is about a new subtopic." You'll also want to teach young readers to be flexible, poised to revise their thinking as they read on: "I was right about the *topic* of these two pages, it is about whales," you might model thinking, "but I was wrong about the main *idea*. This part is actually mostly about how fishermen are a danger to whales in the Arctic, not just where whales live." This flexibility of thinking, though challenging, is an important goal to take on!

You will want to teach readers to reproduce the same boxes-and-bullets work in reading that they've used to structure their essays in the writing workshop (see *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*). That is, you will ask students to read in such a way that they can take the sort of notes you might take at a well-organized lecture—notes that look like very rough outlines. For a while, they will paraphrase at the end of a chunk of text, pausing to name the gist of what they just read, and to do so in ways that build on what they learned from previous sections. This "reading for gist" builds the muscles foundational to summarizing—a skill that Dick Allington reminds us about in *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers* by saying, "This is, perhaps, the most common and most necessary strategy. It requires that students provide a general recitation of the key content. Literate people summarize texts routinely in their conversations. They summarize weather reports, news articles, stock market information and editorials. In each case, they select certain features and delete, ignore, others" (p. 122).

As students become more skilled at the work of nonfiction reading, you'll want to remind them to draw on knowledge they bring to the text as well as strategies they have learned in prior units. They'll want to add what they're learning now to a growing repertoire that includes such things as making just-right book choices, paying attention to volume, and using logs to track their reading progress. Readers may want to revisit old charts, making sure they are applying old strategies to new work. You'll meanwhile want to encourage them to read broadly, learning as much as they can on any single topic before moving on to a new one.

As your readers become expert on subjects, by reading whole books, and then trying to read another book on that subject, they'll need regular opportunities to synthesize their learning by teaching someone else. This expectation creates accountability to the text; readers know they will have to explain the big ideas of the text to someone else, but this makes what could otherwise be a mechanical process into something vital and lots of fun. You're offering a chance for ownership and the opportunity to develop expertise on a nonfiction topic—creating a real incentive for children to want to know how to master the structure and organization of texts. Ideally, in the next lesson, you'll teach how to do this work in partnerships. To set readers up to teach so that their partner will understand, you'll guide them through some ways to explain what they've learned to their partners. You might have them prepare for partner talk by rehearsing how they'll explain important information by using the text's pictures and charts, an explaining voice, and explaining finger and gestures. You might teach that when partners meet, instead of just saying what they have learned, they:

- Point out the details in the pictures or diagrams that highlight what they're saying.
- Link previous learning to the new information that they just encountered by flipping back and forth to show pictures that build off of one other and by explaining how those pictures go together.
- Add gestures to their explanations and use their voices to emphasize what's important.
- Act out what they learned and invite their partner to join in. For example, if one partner is explaining to his partner that owls don't flap their wings like most birds, but rather, they glide, he could have his partner put out his arms and flap them like wings. Then, he could instruct his partner to sway his body and keep his arms out and still to illustrate the difference between gliding and flapping. There's good research to show that adding kinesthetics to our reading process helps move information from short-term to long-term memory—so don't underestimate the value as well as the engagement of using your hands to demonstrate what you've learned.

Once your readers are adept at learning from expository texts and at teaching others the information and significant ideas of those texts, a natural next step to paraphrasing and synthesizing text is to respond personally and intellectually to what the text teaches. You can expect young readers to have comments for all the new information contained in expository texts: "That's weird," "That's cool," "That's interesting," or "That's gross." Of course, these are just launching points—quick reactions children might have to these sorts of texts. You'll want them to take such responses further intellectually, so that they also think and talk about the texts and generate their own claims about what the Common Core State Standards describe as the implications of

what they read. One way that you could encourage independent thinking off the text is to situate partnerships for conversations around the books they read. Positioning a reader to locate a big idea in the text so that he or she may then talk back to that big idea in the audience of a partner enables collaborative response to texts, but you want to take care to ensure that these conversations are actually *responses to* and *not reiterations of* textual content. To this end, it will make the world of difference to introduce conversational thought prompts that might help students phrase responses to the text. For example, the thought prompts, *But I wonder . . .* and *I used to think that . . . but now I am realizing . . .* will structure and channel a response to the text. They are also great scaffolds for facilitating talk, allowing students sure and predictable ways to pilot their ideas off the text. You might develop your own conversation prompts for your students to use, ones that facilitate prediction, paraphrasing, or questioning. For a more detailed list of conversation prompts and for guidance on instruction that incorporates these, you might visit Session XII in Volume I of *Navigating Nonfiction*.

Students will naturally question the information they are reading in expository texts. "Why do male emperor penguins stay alone, keeping the egg warm on its feet for two months with nothing to eat, while the female leaves to fish in the ocean?" a reader might ask. You'll want to teach your readers to not only read on, seeking answers, but also to think back over everything they've read so far and everything they already know. In response to his own question, the reader might offer as answer, "Maybe the male emperor penguin keeps the egg warm instead of the mother because, on page 12, it says he has that big flap of fat that she doesn't have," or "Maybe the emperor penguin is like the sea horse, and the males are the ones who are responsible for the babies until they are born." Again, such an inquiry and research stance toward their expository texts has greater urgency and meaning for readers when it is undertaken collaboratively with a partner rather than in solitude by a lone reader—readers need to read for implication and for the possibility, in their lives, of applying what they know, what the Common Core State Standards highlight as the relevance and significance of what they read.

Finally, you may find it useful to teach a lesson or two designed to help readers tackle challenging words, what the Common Core State Standards call "domain language." Much of this instruction will merely reiterate decoding strategies of the past, such as "break up the word into its root, prefix, and/or suffix to see." You might alternatively remind students, "substitute the hard word with a synonym and then read on." In many expository texts, however, after an author uses a technical or content-specific word a casual reader isn't likely to know, he or she provides clues about the meaning of the word, occasionally even defining the word outright and explicitly within the text or in a marginal glossary feature. Consider the following lines from *The Yangtze River* by Nathan Olson; they are typical of how many expository texts tend to go:

> The Yangtze flows north and then east into a series of **gorges**. **Gorges** are deep valleys with steep, rocky sides.

Even when the text makes overt efforts like this one, to give readers direct access to unfamiliar vocabulary, young readers will often resist adopting the new words they see

in print. Technical vocabulary, with its infrequent real-world usage, unconventional spellings, and vague pronunciation, is not the most easy or natural for students to incorporate into their own language. You'll need to urge readers to actively adopt the technical jargon of whatever subject they're exploring. You will also want to create a classroom environment that encourages this—asking readers to think of themselves as teachers and topic experts and creating space for partnership conversations around these topics, so that students may have the chance to verbally use new content-specific words in a real context.

Students will also profit from learning how to use text features to make sense of unfamiliar vocabulary—illustrations, photographs, and diagrams often accompany the text's effort to define and explain new words or concepts. For example, an illustration that accompanies text that introduces "baleen whales" to a reader will likely have a visual representation of what baleen looks like. Some readers need explicit instruction in order to learn to "read" illustrative portions of the text carefully (e.g., photographs, quotes, time lines, charts, and maps). Teach them to peer closely at the visual features of the text for more clues and explanations for the difficult words or concepts that the text introduces them to.

Part Two: Navigating Narrative and Hybrid Nonfiction Texts

In this second part of the unit, you will teach students to now read *narrative* nonfiction with attentiveness to structure, using story grammar to synthesize and determine importance across large stretches of text. Like expository texts, narrative nonfiction is shaped according to a template. This one is familiar and easier for many children to identify and grasp, since their knowledge of story grammar is well developed by now. Once students recognize that most narrative nonfiction focuses on the goals and struggles of a central character—that the text conveys an underlying idea, and that many nonfiction narratives culminate in an achievement or a disaster—they will be able to make sense of such texts, following the events and details on the pages, and holding onto the information in such a way that it is memorable.

You'll recall that one of the important lessons you taught readers during the expository portion of this unit was to draw on all that one knows about a topic to anticipate how a text might unfold. If a reader is reading an expository text about a moose, the reader can think, "I've read other books on wild animals," and can draw on that prior experience with texts about similar topics to anticipate that this text will contain sections on the animal's body and how that body is adapted to the ecosystem and allows the animal to handle enemies, and so forth. In this portion of the unit, you'll want to remind readers to draw on what they know when reading narrative nonfiction, too. If, for example, they are reading the story of a famous dog, like Balto, they'll access their prior knowledge about dogs and possibly even about sled dogs or Alaska. But they'll also access what they know about reading narratives—that is, they'll expect a story structure. Of course, you'll need to teach your students to read for more than character development and plot in narrative nonfiction. They'll

also read for information and ideas. In this part, then, you'll teach students to use their narrative expertise, while simultaneously drawing on their new expertise in accumulating and summarizing nonfiction information and ideas. Students must be prepared to read, expecting that a nonfiction book of any sort will teach them something new about the subject.

You may want to begin by giving readers an opportunity to sort books as expository or narrative so that they practice recognizing the different explicit structures of these kinds of nonfiction texts. Recognizing the structure of a text will help them prepare for how to read it. Be sure that the texts you choose adhere to story structure in ways that will pay off for readers. You will likely have noticed that many—even most—nonfiction texts are hybrids, containing chunks that are expository as well as chunks that are narrative. Eventually you will help students navigate those hybrid texts too, *but for now* your goal is to help readers see how their knowledge of story grammar can help them read nonfiction that is exclusively narrative in nature. To support this work, the books you choose to place before kids ought to be exclusively narrative in structure.

As they familiarize themselves with narrative nonfiction, readers will come to see that a good portion of the texts they read tells the story of people and their achievements. The structure is similar in fiction. Characters have traits and motivations, and as they interact with each other and their environments they come to face challenges or obstacles that the story highlights, which they usually overcome. In narrative nonfiction, the overcoming of obstacles tends to create the story of why a famous person is famous, what he or she achieved, and why these achievements matter. You'll want to refer children back to the prompts that helped them develop theories in the character unit, asking "What does this character want/wish/hope for? What stands in his or her way?" Your students will already know from reading fiction that it is helpful to pay attention to the important events and decisions in a character's life; you'll also want to remind them that a character's response to those events often reveals his or her traits. Now, teach your readers to develop generalizations about the famous characters or groups of characters they meet in narrative nonfiction, formulating ideas about how certain traits might lead to a character's ability to overcome difficulty and achieve something meaningful—something so big that it has been recorded in a book. Session IX, Volume 2 of *Navigating Nonfiction* demonstrates how to expand the definition of a main character to apply to the main presence in the book, as in a meerkat colony, or "the Pilgrims."

Next, you will teach your students that narrative nonfiction contains underlying ideas—and that it is the role of the reader to seek those ideas. Your readers are used to activating schema about characters—now you want to activate their schema for realizing that these stories, like all complex narratives, also teach ideas. The story about meerkats probably teaches something about community survival techniques. That story about the Pilgrims probably did too! Moreover, the books the students are reading are undoubtedly about more than one idea. Teach them to keep track of ideas, using that same boxes-and-bullets structure, jotting Post-its as they read, talking to a partner, expecting their books to teach them important ideas and information. Having opportunities to teach a partner will be just as important in this part, as it was in the first part of the unit.

If you have access to biographies and adventure stories, you may want to begin reading these aloud. Children are likely to find this work more accessible when the books they read take the form of "true stories" that are written engagingly, such as the beautifully illustrated biographies or true adventure stories that line the shelves of so many bookstores. In these, the "hero" or "heroine" is easy to identify and the "challenge" or "mission" that drives this main character is also clearly spelled out. As children gain confidence, however, you may move to narrative nonfiction texts that are not so easy to classify according to the strict rules of story grammar. These will often be fact-laden—an account of a war or revolution, or of a chronological scientific process such as the metamorphosis or life cycle of a particular bird or plant. In the latter, readers won't always easily identify the main character, who, as a shape-shifting caterpillar or a nonspeaking/emoting/moving plant, doesn't immediately register as animate. You'll want to show readers alternate ways of determining that a text is indeed narrative in structure and also teach how to hold onto big trajectories in a text rather than simply fact-mining to get "notes." Session IX in Volume Two of *Navigating Nonfiction* charts one direction for this instruction using *Cactus Hotel* as a mentor text, a narrative nonfiction picture book that will feel deceptively like expository to many young readers.

No matter the kind of text children read during this part, the important thing for them to learn is that narrative nonfiction tells a story that teaches both information *and* ideas. For instance, we can anticipate that a sports biography about a famous basketball player will tell an engaging story about a character who faces interesting challenges, it will teach the reader some of the intricacies of basketball, and it will probably teach the reader why this particular basketball player is famous. It will do all that explicitly. The reader will have to infer what he or she can learn from this famous basketball player; it might be "big idea" lessons such as the importance of determination or the need for people to help each other succeed.

As this part progresses, you'll want to be sure that children move from retelling to inferring. One way you might help readers with this transition is to model for them how to retell the text by saying, "This text (or this part of a text) is mostly about . . ." and then to make a more inferential retelling by adding, "And the big new thing it teaches me is. . . ." Alternatively, the reader could say, "And the big way this adds to what I already knew about this subject is. . . ." For instance, the story of Balto tells the story of a desperate race across Alaska to deliver medicine that could save children's lives. It also teaches the reader about how sled dogs lead and pull their teams.

Finally, you'll want to teach students to use what they've learned from focusing on expository texts in isolation, and then narrative texts in isolation in order to tackle any part of a text that includes narrative and expository sections, such as many of the DK Readers and many of the articles and textbooks that students will encounter in their academic studies in the future. So somewhere near the end of the unit, you'll show students that some texts are a mixture of nonnarrative and narrative structure. These texts present an idea supported by facts and then may tell a story that relates to or illustrates the idea. Some texts like this begin with a story, a letter, a diary entry, or a mini-biography and then move into expository text structures. Because texts structured

this way often can't be broken down into boxes-and-bullets, you can teach readers instead to treat them like photographs and quotes, asking, "What is this letter or story teaching me?" and "How does it fit with what I have been learning?" Teach students to synthesize all the information on a page or in a section by determining how all the parts of the text fit together. It is essential then to teach your students to assess a text using what they now know about expository and narrative text structures and then to use appropriate strategies for each part of the text, as well as to synthesize the whole. You can also teach readers to stop at the end of a text they've read and to reflect on what they have learned. You can teach them to try to answer these questions: "What do I know now that I didn't know before reading this book/text?" or "How is my thinking different from reading this text?"

Read-Aloud

During the nonfiction unit of study, you will want to read aloud a variety of nonfiction texts so you can provide students with opportunities to synthesize, have thoughts off the text, make connections, activate prior knowledge, and so on. Your read-aloud should mirror (and act as a prelude to) the reading work you want your students to do. You'll want to show readers how nonfiction readers assess a text, make plans for how to read it, and begin by chunking it and moving across the sections and pages, including the pictures and diagrams. In the read-aloud, you'll want to demonstrate how readers learn new words from the context clues and from glossaries, and demonstrate word attack strategies they use as they read nonfiction. You'll show them how to summarize a text in a boxes-and-bullets format, and how to keep adding to those ideas, sorting out when a text has introduced new ideas, and when it is giving the reader additional information about a current idea. As you read aloud, you may want to organize a chart that shows how readers synthesize and retell the text as main ideas and supporting information/examples. So if you're reading a book called *Owls' Nests*, you might teach readers that they could try to infer the main idea of the text so far, after reading the first page—and that the system they may use to organize these notes is a boxes-and-bullets one that looks like this:

Owls Don't Build Their Own Nests

- They move into abandoned nests.
- They live in holes in the ground.
- They live in holes in trees.

There are several ways to make a read-aloud interactive. You might pause at strategic points in the text to nudge readers into making an inference, into predicting what happens next, or articulating a personal response. Such participation from students provides unique and valuable instructional potential as well as the chance to scaffold and manage children's engagement with and response to the texts you read them. However, you will

want to keep this participation brief and well timed so as not to interrupt the flow and power of the read-aloud itself. Quick methods such as "Turn and tell your partner . . ." or "Stop and jot," allow efficiency in managing children's responses. To make nonfiction read-alouds interactive, you may also demonstrate acting out the information as you explain the part you just read before giving readers an opportunity to act out a part as *they* explain information to their partner. Having readers stop and sketch what you read, and encouraging them to add details to the sketch as you read on, is another way to do this. The chance to put the information they are hearing into action by adding their own drama will enhance comprehension. This allows students to synthesize the text they're hearing by activating their own experiences and imagination as they create meaning.

Of course, one of the most important elements of a read-aloud is your own voice. Your intonation alone might clarify the structure of expository texts. For example, as you read, you might use your voice to emphasize main ideas, varying your intonation where support details are suggested. You might count out bullets or listed points across your fingers. While reading aloud narrative nonfiction such as biographies or true stories of animals or people, you will want to teach students to turn on their minds to listen for story structure and pay attention to character. Show them how readers of narrative nonfiction expect the text to teach them something, so they can stop and jot after parts of the story about what the story teaches so far. You will need to model such thinking and inferring explicitly to scaffold and model the kind of work you hope children will ultimately do automatically and without prompting.

When navigating nonfiction, readers will encounter specialized vocabulary. This makes it an opportune time to use read-aloud to highlight how readers take on new vocabulary and incorporate the words into their conversations. You may find it helpful to chart the most important vocabulary from the sections you will be reading aloud that day. You may want to give individuals or partners a word bank of the specialized vocabulary so they can find the words on their own sheets. Then, when students turn and talk, or during whole-class conversation, remind them to use their word banks. This way, they are actively using these words not just that day, but across the days that you read aloud that book. If you read aloud many books on the same topic, readers will have repeated opportunities to use and learn these words.

You might also help students understand the information they are learning by giving them a picture or two that you have copied from the book, so they can label these as you read. For example, if you are reading about insects' bodies, and students have a picture of a grasshopper and a beetle in front of them, you can stop to have them add labels like *exoskeleton*, *thorax*, *abdomen*, and *spiracles* as you read about each one. Then, partners can meet and explain to each other what they learned, or during whole-class conversations, students can reference their diagrams to explain, compare, and contrast.

Additional Resources

This unit draws upon *Navigating Nonfiction* from the series *Units of Study for Teaching Reading: A Curriculum for Reading Workshop*. The first part focuses on reading expository texts, emphasizing making meaning out of our texts and determining the main idea. The second part focuses on reading narrative nonfiction, drawing upon the character work of determining main ideas and growing theories as we read.

As you approach this unit, your first goal will be to try to avoid the almost universal problem of kids not doing enough reading during the upcoming nonfiction work because of either a shortage of just-right books, an increase in note-taking-type writing, or terribly slow fluency. Chances are high that you will not have enough just-right nonfiction to risk having students put aside their fiction books, so first, be sure you keep that independent fiction reading going and that you pay special attention to their logs and other indicators of time spent reading. The next goal will be to scaffold students so they actually *do* the work of determining a main idea. Expect this to be vastly harder for kids than you dreamed, and plan to listen closely, to do lots of quick, decisive small-group teaching and coaching, and to be inventing ways to get your teaching across in ways that allow kids' skills to get better. Watch for students who are belaboring texts—there will be many—and be ready to move many to easier texts and to give text introductions to others. You may want to use readers who know a lot about a topic or who have loved a book to welcome newcomers to that topic or that book about it, thereby sharing the workload of scaffolding readers. You'll want to look around the class during reading time and to literally count the number of kids who are engaged in reading. Hold yourself to the goal of supporting sustained and deep engagement. Also watch for kids who didn't get into the idea of reading when fiction was foremost in your teaching and see if you can build new self-concepts around nonfiction reading.

You may decide that your children need additional support with expository text. If so, you will want to linger longer in the first part, teaching additional strategies and repertoire lessons to provide additional practice. Then, too, if you find that your children are in need of more work with narrative nonfiction, you might stretch out the second part, again adding additional teaching points and repertoire lessons. If you have small groups of struggling readers, you might refer to the third-grade nonfiction reading write-up, which contains lots of specific strategies that can help you lead these groups.

If you decide to forge your own pathway based on your readers, think about how to make the parts of your unit seem coherent and logical, so that readers feel as if they are on a pathway that will inevitably help them emerge as more powerful and independent readers and thinkers.

Part One: Expository Nonfiction

- "Although great nonfiction readers are very different, one from another, today I want to teach you that every great nonfiction reader reads with energy, with power. One way that nonfiction readers do this is that we rev up our minds for reading. Even before we shift into "go" and read a sentence, a paragraph, of the text, we read the title and subtitles, look over chunks of the text, and we think, 'I think this book is mostly about . . . and then it will also tell. . . .'"

- "Another way readers can hold onto what we are learning is that when we come to the end of a chunk of text—or when our mind is brimful—we can pause and say to ourselves, 'What did I just read?' Then we can come up with little summaries of the important stuff. This helps us to recollect what we've learned."

- "As nonfiction readers learn new ways to make sense of their texts, they hold onto everything they know about good nonfiction reading. They add 'tools' for reading nonfiction to their 'toolbelt,' using these tools as needed when they encounter difficulty."

- "When people read nonfiction books on a topic, we become experts on that topic, teaching others what we know. To teach someone, we need to know the main ideas and the supporting details, and it helps to use an explaining voice and sometimes even to use your face, hands, and whole body to illustrate what you mean."

- "Reading nonfiction is like taking a course in which a person is told a whole lot of new and detailed information. Instead of trying to memorize all that information, it helps to create larger categories to organize that information. That way, as we read, we sort the little bits of information under bigger points, creating a boxes-and-bullets outline that matches the text. It is almost as if, as we read, we write headings for the texts that don't have any."

- "Readers talk to let texts get through to us, to let texts change our minds. We talk to grow ideas."

- "Whether you are reading nonfiction or fiction texts, it is equally important to talk about those texts with each other, saying, 'Isn't it weird how . . .' and 'I wonder why . . .' and 'Did you notice that. . . .' But I want to add one more thing. Readers read differently because we're going to be in conversations later. We read holding conversations in our minds."

Part Two: Narrative Nonfiction

- "If you divide nonfiction texts into piles based on how those texts are put together, you'll end up with one pile of true stories (narrative nonfiction) and one pile of all-about texts (little courses on a topic). Readers read these kinds of nonfiction texts in very different ways. When readers know what kind of nonfiction book we have, that helps us decide how to read it. When we know we have narrative nonfiction in our hands, we know we can read it like narrative fiction. A story is a story is a story!"

- "You can use what you know about getting to know characters in fiction books to get to know main ideas in narrative nonfiction books. You can often get to some big ideas by stretching the definition of main character to apply to a different sort of main presence in the text. Doesn't this sound interesting? Soon you'll be able to try it—to see if you can regard a meerkat colony or a Venus flytrap or a whole group of people, like the Pilgrims, say, as the 'main character' of your nonfiction narrative."

- "Narrative nonfiction readers keep in mind that narrative nonfiction texts are written to convey not just facts, but ideas. The idea is what allows the storyteller to shape information, experience, into something that fits together so the story is not just a hodgepodge of junky details strung along a line of time. While that is a writer's goal, it is also a reader's goal. Readers have to find the unifying idea behind the texts they read, to make coherence and find meaning out of what would otherwise be strings of events and facts."

- "Today I want to teach you that if you find yourself flooded with facts as you read and want to discern what is and is not important, it can help to see that beneath the details, many true stories are either tales of achievement or of disaster, and each of those kinds of story follows a predictable path. That path can help readers determine what matters most in the story—which details to pay most attention to and which to pay less."

- "The most powerful readers don't already know what every single word in a book means. The most powerful readers work hard to figure out what a tricky word means! One of the ways we can do that is to get a picture in your mind of what's going on in that part of the story and to think about what would make sense."

UNIT FOUR

Nonfiction Research Projects

Teaching Students to Navigate Complex Nonfiction Text Sets Using Critical Analytical Lenses

LATE DECEMBER/JANUARY
(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: Q/R)

In this unit, you'll build on all the essential nonfiction comprehension reading skills that you taught in the last unit, and you'll add new work that teaches students to compare and contrast texts, to analyze their claims and arguments, to investigate authors' points of view, to critique, and to design their own independent analysis of urgent nonfiction research topics that they'll pursue in small research groups. Both the Common Core State Standards and Norman Webb's *Depth of Knowledge* emphasize that students should be able not only to restate the information a text teaches, but also to analyze the author's claims and the validity of the argument presented. To do that kind of high-level, critical analytical work, students need to read more than one text on a subject. They must become expert both at gathering information *and* at analyzing how that information is conveyed, so they can evaluate texts rather than simply summarize them. It's exciting intellectual work that you'll embark on with your students—and they'll surprise you with how critical they can be as readers and thinkers, given the opportunity, the expert instruction, and the resources to develop their own stances on important subjects.

It's also important, for their academic and professional success, that students learn to do rapid, on-the-run research and synthesizing, rather than poring for days over the illustrations in a book or the few paragraphs of text in a short article. The days when students or adults spent weeks or months finding resources, and more weeks or months sifting through the parts of those resources that would most help their research, are over. These days, people need to be able to do research quickly and efficiently. The good news is that all it takes now, to look up the latest genome project or to find the number of polar animals displaced by the melting of ice caps, is the click of a button; the world is coming to think of the Internet as an eight-billion-page encyclopedia.

Yet even the most cursory research requires certain literacy muscles: the ability to pick the key words to search, the ability to pick one source of information to trust over multiple others, the ability to make up our own minds about aspects of a topic once we've read enough about it. Moreover, these muscles need to be deployed with automaticity. Information changes now almost in the blink of an eye. If a student takes six weeks to research the political system of Egypt, for instance, the information gleaned at the start of the six weeks may no longer be valid by the end of the six weeks! Most of our students, of course, will be researching more stable topics, about which they can find lots of information in a few well-chosen books and articles, as well as a couple of websites—but you'll be teaching them, in this unit, to read rapidly, to evaluate and compare resources, and to construct in-depth, critical understandings of research topics that feel urgent.

In writing workshop, your students will draw on all they are learning about nonfiction text structures as they create lively informational books. While they may not necessarily write about the topics they are researching in this unit (for more details on this see the informational books write-up), they will bring to their writing all they are learning about note-taking and about techniques published authors use to teach information.

This unit will take students through two progressive parts. In Part One you'll begin with a research project that you will initiate as a demonstration study, and will carry through during your read-aloud and whole-class lessons. This study will serve as a scaffold for students' own studies, which they will embark on in collaborative small groups, just as researchers work and study collaboratively now in almost every field. As you choose the topic and the texts with which you will model, you may decide to choose a complex subject and high-level texts, and your modeling will particularly aim to support the highest level of reading that you think your students can aim for. Or you may choose to model with an accessible subject and text set that you will then hand over to a group of more emergent readers—thus your instruction will launch students each day into their independent work. You'll see that the texts on penguins that are used as a model in *Navigating Nonfiction* are lively and accessible, and that they follow this model of supporting your more emergent readers, while your small-group work and conferences will extend your lessons with your highest readers. You can, of course, try to do both, by inserting some high-level texts into your read-aloud text set, and getting to those farther into the unit of study, or after prereading the texts with some of your students.

In Part One, you'll emphasize the power of becoming expert on a subject by reading across texts and comparing information with fellow researchers. This work is in alignment with the Common Core State Standards. You'll emphasize skills that help students acquire and apply technical vocabulary, and you'll teach them note-taking strategies and skills that help them write to develop their thinking as they read, gathering information from multiple sources, keeping track of those sources, and developing the essential skills of researchers.

Then in Part Two, you'll work on enhancing your students' critical analytical skills, showing them how to compare authors' claims and the validity of their arguments, as

well as *how* authors convey information. You'll also teach students to make connections across texts, to draw conclusions, to design their own informed opinions, and to apply their newfound knowledge by creating instructional material for their peers and communities. Again, these are skills that show up in the Common Core State Standards.

Preparing for the Unit

This unit revolves around thinking and learning derived from reading multiple texts on a single topic—so you'll need to prepare (ideally with your students) text sets on specific topics, ones for which there are already plenty of available books (either in your room, school library, or neighborhood). Ask students to bring in books and journals from home, to trade books with other teachers, visit the library, bookmark trusted websites such as PBS.org and Scholastic.com—and let your kids in on the work it takes to assemble texts on a subject.

As you and your students collect texts for this unit, you will want to remember that many of your students should be poised to move up text levels within this unit. This is the second unit on nonfiction reading, so they should have developed proficiency by now. Then, too, they'll be reading a bunch of texts on topics of interest. They'll probably read the easier texts first, which will provide them with domain-specific vocabulary and conceptual knowledge. This will position them to comprehend more challenging texts, according to the Common Core State Standards and the new National Assessment of Educational Progress Reading Framework 2011. They'll also be reading alongside other inquirers, and the conversations around shared texts will provide the same sort of scaffolding that you provide during guided reading sessions. Then, too, you can take any text set inquiry group and think of that group as a guided reading group, working with them to be sure they have the requisite skills to read texts of increasing difficulty.

Much of the work of research lies in realizing that information is available all around us, so invite your students to help you sort books and other texts into baskets, and to visit libraries and museum websites. If a few students want to pursue an arcane subject that you don't have resources for, ask if they have any books at home—some of our students are secret collectors of books on WWII planes, or thoroughbred horses, or castles and knights, or pirates, or any of the subjects that fascinate young children and the adolescents they become.

For the shared topic that you'll draw on to demonstrate your lessons and read-alouds, gather two or three short books and an article or two. You may also want to compile a few primary documents to share with students on an overhead projector screen or via document camera, or just by opening your laptop. These primary sources are easy to search for online—they might include some photographs or videos, an interview, or images of artifacts or archaeological materials retrieved from a site. Both the Common Core State Standards and the content area standards suggest that students at this stage should draw on primary sources. As a way to supplement their

understanding of a common research topic, students will benefit from collectively studying primary sources that report directly on a topic. Then do your best to build parallel collections with your students, on topics they can study in clubs. All of this work happens before you begin teaching into the research process, so take a couple of days to let students browse the text sets you have available, encourage them to communicate their interests and to bring in any resources they find on their own, and perhaps visit a local library, so they can share in the act of gathering texts.

Pay attention to which students you think could work together well, probably keeping groups small, even if you have more than one group share a topic. You'll be talking up the upcoming work, inviting students to share their passions, to give voice to their urgent questions, and ultimately to form research groups that feel as if the students chose these themselves, even if you have been doing some of what Kathleen Tolan calls "behind the scenes engineering." If you're low on the number of texts available for each subject, students might research first one subject and then a second, applying your teaching with increased expertise as they begin their second study.

Part One: Synthesizing Complex Information across Diverse Texts and Working in the Company of Fellow Researchers

Before the first lesson, you'll have coached students into work groups that make sense, using what you know of their reading levels, their friendship bonds, their work habits, and their interests and expertise. In your first lesson, then, you'll teach students that when researchers embark on a learning project, it's helpful to gather and preview a collection of texts, mapping out the lay of the land in order to plan a learning journey. Invite children to use their pens as they work, making flowcharts, tables of contents, or other visible plans for the order of the texts that they'll read, the categories of information they'll want to tackle, and perhaps some of their burning questions. Remind your readers of the skills you taught in the last unit, such as previewing a text. Show them how to use the headings and subheadings, but also show them how to range across more narrative or dense texts, imagining what some of the headings could be. Now is not the time for researchers simply to dive into a single book—it's the time for them to make a plan for their research. Remind them that they know that readers usually begin with a more accessible text—which could be an easier reading level or a text that has more background information. More specific texts, or ones that tackle a narrower subtopic, might be delayed until researchers have constructed some shared knowledge. This aspect of your teaching—reminding students to use the repertoire of comprehension strategies they already know—is very important in this unit. "Remember earlier when we started reading nonfiction together, we learned that nonfiction readers rev up our minds for reading by previewing the text," you'd say. "We looked at the titles and subtitles, the pictures and charts to make a map in our head of all the smaller parts that make up this topic." You might recruit four or five students to help model this work before the rest of the class. Hand this group some of the books on a topic and ask them

to read aloud chapter names from each to note some of the categories that repeat—and call out some of the more common or overlapping topics, jotting these down as a list on a whiteboard or chart.

Of course, the list your readers generate will be specific to your own whole-class topic. If you've chosen "Arctic Animals" as a topic, your list might include: the Tundra, Effects of Global Warming, Food Chains, and so on. What is important at this starting-out stage is that you teach students to review several books across one topic to independently generate a list of subtopics. Once they have such a list, teach students that we make plans for which topic to read first and which to read next. You might even create a large display (on a chart, for example) where these categories are listed out as headers, asking students to jot a couple of bullets under each heading as they read about it.

In the following lesson, you'll teach your readers to speak as experts and to teach their fellow researchers what they are learning, in order to compare information and ideas. You might set some time aside each day when students teach what they've read to members of their research group, encouraging them to pick out the bigger boxes and supporting bullets from texts and to "teach" in a boxes-and-bullets format. "Use the illustrations, diagrams, and charts in your books to teach from," you might add, requiring that students open their books to pages containing particularly fascinating or informative illustrations, and that they refer and point to the various features of these as they "teach" their topics to partners.

Teach students also that nonfiction readers have certain habits that make us experts. "A very important one of these," you might tell them, "is to use the special lingo, or technical vocabulary, of this topic." Call their attention to the technical words that are written in bold or italics—and often defined in a sidebar or in the glossary. Explain that "Just like an expert gardener's vocabulary would have words like *compost*, *nitrates*, *dead-heading*, *pruning*, *perennials* and an expert on skateboarding's vocabulary would probably be full of words like *pivot*, *wheelie*, *slalom*, *kick flip*, *long board*, they too need to read to pick up the lingo, or technical vocabulary (what the Common Core State Standards call "domain language") that will make them *sound* like experts on their topic.

Next, you'll teach your readers that researchers don't just *take information in* while reading. We also think about whatever we've read—we wonder at this, we think more deeply about that, we make connections, we ponder, we consider the *implications* of what we read. Then we take some of what we're thinking, jot it down, and write deeper off of it. You'll want your readers to "write to think," showing them that rewriting something fascinating in their own words (starting a sentence with prompts such as, *In other words*, or *Stated differently*, or *This matters because*) can spur bigger ideas if they just keep their pens moving. Other thought prompts: *This makes me realize, This is interesting because, This makes sense because*, or *This reminds me of . . .* can all be powerful ways for students to extend a point they've read about. To read about how students might be taught (and supported in their efforts) to respond to their nonfiction reading by "writing to think," refer to Session XVI of *Navigating Nonfiction*.

As your readers move to a second and a third text about a topic, it will become important to bring in cross-text comparisons. You'll want readers to move across texts cumulatively adding to their understanding of a topic: "This book taught me . . . and this book adds to this information by telling me . . ." or "This book introduces the point that . . . and this book provides *more detail* on this by saying. . . ." Students can teach their fellow researchers about the significance of each new text, by highlighting the particular contribution that text makes to their shared knowledge. According to the Common Core State Standards, we should teach students that they don't have to start whole new pages of notes for each book, but that instead, they may make charts and diagrams that let them gather evidence for a few important ideas and categories of information.

You might also nudge readers to move between texts, catching conflicting information: "In this book it says . . . but in this other book it says. . . ." Teach that they might read a third book to judge which information they trust more. Students might now also "read" primary sources and contrast these with secondhand accounts on their topics. With some effort, one can find primary texts on the unlikeliest of topics. If the topic is Ancient Egypt, for example, one might share tomb inscriptions translated from the original hieroglyphs, the notes or writings of an archaeologist providing an account of how he stumbled upon a previously unknown tomb, or what enabled him to identify a certain mummy. You might teach students the difference between a primary and a secondary source of information on a topic, adding that true expertise means not merely reading accounts written by other experts, but actually chasing a topic to its first and most basic sources of information.

Many nonfiction texts contain primary documents such as original photographs taken at a site or images showing manuscripts or artifacts related to the topic. Teach students to pay specific attention to these images, identifying why they qualify as primary sources and what one might learn or interpret from studying these closely. This work is aligned with the Common Core State Standards. Teach that to distinguish between primary and secondary sources, readers ask ourselves, "Was the author present at the event being written about?" We also consider whether a nonfiction text relates a personal experience or an eyewitness account (primary source) or whether it reports other texts or other people's experiences (secondary source).

As your researchers develop their expertise in nonfiction subjects, help them develop their expertise as collaborative club members, too. Teach clubs to talk often about their topic, retelling club members the boxes-and-bullets they've read on a particular day, sharing illustrations and charts that reveal more information about a topic, comparing and contrasting illustrations from different texts, and also sharing the deeper thoughts they uncover as they "write to think" about their reading. If their text sets contain primary as well as secondary sources, encourage club members to distinguish between and compare these, because this is aligned with the Common Core State Standards. Remind clubs of the protocols that make for good membership: to listen carefully, to take turns talking, to plan and divide roles.

If you want your students to have a close connection to writing, or to convey their ideas which they are speaking in fast drafts of opinion pieces, you may push clubs

toward planning and mentally drafting opinion-writing pieces dealing with their topic. Writing opinion pieces requires a level of familiarity with a topic—one can't form independent opinions about topics that one has little or no knowledge of. This could be the perfect time, therefore, to harness students' reading and thinking about topics they are having active discussions about—and pushing them to state (and defend) opinions about these. During their club conversations, teach students that each member might state an opinion as a "thesis statement" or "claim"—for example, "I think Cleopatra was a better ruler than King Tut"—and then supply two or three evidences for this claim by citing information from the books in the club's text set. Teach other club members to listen carefully to a claim and see if they can add evidence either to support or challenge this claim. Though this work will be done orally, this is the essential foundation for opinion (and in the case of a challenge to the claim, argument) writing. You might ask students to "record" the opinion essays they've generated through club conversations by flash-drafting them on papers to place within club folders. In Webb's *Depth of Knowledge*, this work would be considered a Level 4.

Part Two: Critiquing Texts with Analytical Lenses and Sharing Our Research

In this part, you'll teach clubs to look more critically at the texts in their text set, asking the questions that experts automatically consider: "What is the author trying to make the reader feel about this topic?" Students will tune themselves to noticing whether a particular text evokes pity, anger, admiration, or some other emotion for a topic. One text might inspire fear at the bloodthirsty nature of gorillas while another inspires remorse and concern for their endangered status, and a third might actually make us feel sad at the stories of what poachers do to gorillas in the wild. So your first lesson in this part will demonstrate how to ascertain what an author gets us to *feel* about a subject, through the images, stories, and information that author chooses to include. You'll push researchers to identify their emotional response to their subject, as they reconsider the texts they've read so far, naming that this one got them to sympathize with polar bears, that this one made them outraged at greenhouse gases, that this one, on the other hand, made them somewhat afraid of polar bears, and so forth.

A second part of this lesson, which you can do in the same or in the next session, will help students to note craft moves; *how* exactly the author engineered a certain response from a reader—whether a particular choice of words or particular illustrations contribute to making us feel a certain way. An important lesson to teach students during this process is that "nonfiction" texts may claim a truth but that they are authored by people who have their own perspectives, angles, motives, and lenses. The idea that all nonfiction texts are simply one author's perspective on the truth will be news to some students. Since your readers have multiple nonfiction sources on an identical topic to consider, they'll be better placed to evaluate the different ways that these texts approach, deal with, and present this topic. It's always easier to evaluate an author's claims and perspectives when you have another author's text to lay alongside

the first. One text might present Roman gladiators as tough heroes, for example, while another portrays them as poor victims of a cruel social order. One text might present sharks as bloodthirsty killers, while another presents them as intelligent animals that don't attack nearly as often as people think. One text will present penguins as hapless fodder of leopard seals and humans, while another will emphasize their complex social structures. You'll have to demonstrate this concept multiple times, if your students are new to reading analytically for author's point of view, rather than as consumers of information.

Your readers will gradually find that some of their burning questions cannot be answered by their texts, or that they are ready to outgrow their current text set, and find more resources. This is where you can teach them that passionate researchers go on, they do more. They show agency as readers and thinkers. Some of your students will be scientists and historians and social activists one day—and the first step to achieving in any field is to be willing to work hard, as Gladwell shows again and again in *Outliers*. Take the opportunity, therefore, to teach your students here how to differentiate websites that end in .org (not-for-profit), .gov (government), and .edu (educational institutions), from .com, which might be for profit or highly biased. Teach them how to do library searches, how to talk to librarians, how to seek local experts, how to visit museums. Teach them to look inside and outside of books, to pursue their interests and to seek knowledge.

The well-deserved celebration at the conclusion of this invigorating scholarship might have you setting students up to teach others in the school community what they have learned from their research and thinking, especially the angle on their learning that they consider most significant. Partners and club members who have read many books on a topic can come together and plan a presentation that they'll make to the rest of the class, or to another class, on the shared topic they studied. Students in their clubs might each take one part of their studied topic and teach that part to others. They may make a poster board including diagrams or charts. They may choose to read a part and act it out, or make a model, or put together a PowerPoint presentation, or make some social action artwork to educate their community. These presentations are meant to be simple and fairly quick, but can help solidify what students have learned and add interest and investment to the topic studied.

Additional Resources

The two parts of this unit are detailed in the book *Navigating Nonfiction* from *Units of Study for Teaching Reading: A Curriculum for Reading Workshop*. We decided to begin the work with the third part of the book because we assume that your class has just spent the last month reading voraciously through nonfiction texts, determining importance, synthesizing, and using text structures to comprehend the text.

You'll know your students are ready for this unit if they are able to navigate a single nonfiction text at their level with some ease, using the text features to navigate the text, reaching for a pen to do quick jotting of a main idea or two, and turning to

a partner to talk about what they've learned as they finish reading. If your children need more support with this work, such as determining the main ideas and making meaning out of their texts, then you will want to refer to the write-up for Unit Three: Nonfiction Reading: Using Text Structures to Comprehend Expository, Narrative, and Hybrid Nonfiction. If most of your kids do that well, they're ready to start reading more than one text on a subject. If you have just a handful of readers who struggle with nonfiction, these resources can help to inform your conferring and small-group work with those children.

You'll want to look at your students' Post-its because they will serve as a great assessment for you as you tailor your instruction to your class's specific needs. If you notice that they are copying down fact after fact, word for word, you'll probably want to spend more time teaching into the strategies in the unit on determining importance and taking notes. For more note-taking strategies you might want to consult our *Content Area Calendar for Grades 3–5*, in particular, Units One and Two. If some of your children are having trouble using the domain language of the topic they are studying, you will probably want to work with them on using their word banks in conversations as well as revising some of their jottings to incorporate the technical vocabulary. Essentially, you'll want to move beyond looking at whether children are jotting as they read, and study the level of sophistication of their notes. Also, see how your students use their Post-its and jottings when they get ready to talk to their research groups. If students are bringing Post-its to conversations that lead to dead ends, you may use "mentor Post-its," or sophisticated Post-its crafted by you or other students, to show how some jotting can lead to rich discussions.

If many of your students are having trouble critiquing texts, you may decide to do this work in just the read-aloud where you can support and coach your readers. Whether it happens during read-aloud or in the reading workshop, you will want to be sure that your readers are critiquing texts because this work will continue in the historical fiction unit that follows. During that unit, you will want to be able to build upon this work and support children in critiquing with increased independence.

By the end of this unit of study you should see a marked improvement in your students' ability to read across nonfiction texts and analyze these for meaning, craft, and perspective. You may decide that students should have an opportunity to do this work again in social studies and science, so that kids get repeated practice with this work.

Just as in the last unit of study on nonfiction, maintaining reading volume will be critical during this time. Resources can be hard to find and it is likely that you will not have enough just-right nonfiction for your class to sustain just-right reading throughout reading workshop. If this is the case, keep independent fiction reading going throughout the unit.

During reading workshop, be sure to watch your children, studying their levels of engagement. When you see a child who is struggling with a text, help him or her to find an easier one, or provide a book introduction to help the child navigate the harder text. Remember that during this unit children will be working in groups to quickly research a topic. The group can work together to support each other in comprehending text, providing book introductions for each other or providing information when

necessary. You could look at these groups as if they were a guided reading group, working with them over a series of days to move them along as readers.

You may want to adapt these plans, depending on the particular needs of your own fourth graders. If you decide to forge your own pathway, think about how to make the parts of your unit seem coherent and logical, so that readers feel as if they are on a pathway that will inevitably help them emerge as more powerful and independent readers and thinkers.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Synthesizing Complex Information across Diverse Texts and Working in the Company of Fellow Researchers

- "Right now, you can choose topics that will become your areas of expertise. To embark on a learning project, you gather and preview a collection of texts, mapping out the lay of the land between those texts much as we mapped out the lay of the land within a text. This then can help you plan your learning journey."

- "When you are reading—whether it is about penguins or hurricanes, insects or castles, or anything else—you can dig because you've been forced to do so, or you can dig because you're digging for treasure! Someone watching nearby might not be able to decipher the difference, but there's a world of difference between the two. So, readers, dig for treasure. Read for treasure."

- "My tip to help you go from good to great is that when you become an expert on a topic, it is important to begin using the technical vocabulary of that subject. Even if you're really just beginning to learn about a subject, you can accelerate your learning curve by 'talking the talk.'"

- "We don't do research just to become fact-combers, collecting facts like a beachcomber might collect pretty shells. We cup our hands around one bit of the world—and for our class as a whole and for one of your groups, that bit has been penguins—because we want to become wiser about the world. Specifically, today I want to teach you that researchers need not only to collect, but researchers also need to think."

Part Two: Critiquing Texts with Analytical Lenses and Sharing Our Research

- "Researchers don't just take in knowledge. We also construct mental models that represent our ideas about a topic. And the mental models that we construct influence what information we notice, what we decide to record, and what we think as we read our nonfiction texts. Since we are building mental models, things become significant to us that we wouldn't ordinarily even notice."

- "As we identify what authors make us *feel* about a subject, we also investigate *how* the author caused those feelings to get stirred up. Readers pay close attention, for example, to the images, the stories, and the choice of information, which authors include, and how those stir up emotional responses in us as readers."

- "Once you have your burning questions or hunches and you can't answer them on your own, you can look inside or outside a book for the answers."

- "Eventually, research leads to a burning urge to teach others. We decide what we want to say and organize what we know, and we decide how to share information and ideas with our communities, through presentations, artwork, and multimedia."

- "On the day before our celebration, on the day when we say goodbye to this unit on nonfiction reading, let's remember that when we finish reading a nonfiction text, that text lives with us. It walks down the street with us. We carry our nonfiction reading with us, using it to find direction in our world."

UNIT FIVE

Historical Fiction

Tackling Complex Texts

JANUARY/FEBRUARY

(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: R/S)

Historical fiction creates an opportunity for you to teach your students to tackle complex texts, in the company of their friends. Because historical fiction is inherently complicated—it happens in a time and a place the reader has never inhabited, the characters are entangled in historical and social issues of grand significance, and the events of the story are intimately related to real historical events—students have opportunities to harness all the teaching you've done up to this point in the year and to learn new reading skills that will really pay off for them in these books. Your goal is for your kids to emerge from this unit of study as knowledgeable readers who have new confidence in tackling complicated literature. They'll also learn how to build collective interpretations, how to listen closely to each other as they read, and how to carry ideas across time—both across the days of their book club discussions and across more than one text. It's an invigorating unit of study for readers of any age. And historical fiction is deeply romantic and wildly exciting, with dramatic plotlines and adventurous characters. There are reasons that *Titanic* was the most popular teen movie (market research showed that preteen girls watched it on average twelve times in the first year of its release) and that so many boys have longed to watch *Gladiator*—it's the urge to be lifted out of ordinary lives and imagine lives of great adventure and heroism.

Before embarking on this unit, however, think about the reading level of the majority of your readers. This unit is best for students reading Levels P and above. If your students are below this level, we suggest that you consider the series unit on the third-grade calendar—it is a favorite unit, full of support for inference and other reading skills. If you decide to teach that third-grade series unit to your fourth graders, you may also want to bring in some of the drumroll from the fifth-grade reading calen-

dar's June unit, "Author Study: Reading Like a Fan." Of course, as with any unit, one major goal is to move your students up levels of text complexity, as encouraged by the Common Core State Standards. It will be up to you to determine if this unit will accomplish that goal with your students.

Even if your students are well above the P-level cutoff, you will want to continue making sure you support their growing abilities to handle increasingly complex text. This unit is designed to support that work—just make sure that students are in books that represent the point of opportunity for them. Matching readers to books doesn't mean that they're all reading easy-as-pie texts. It means that they're encountering that magical mix of challenge and support that ensures engagement. You will probably want to talk up the fact that reading clubs provide readers with the group solidarity that allows each member to aspire to grow, reaching toward more ambitious goals. One way to do this is to be willing to tackle texts that are more complex and nuanced than the ones read before. If you are moving some readers into challenging texts, in addition to the support of a club, you can also provide those readers with book introductions, film versions of the start of a book, or background information on the time period. Often parents are willing to help out by reading a few chapters aloud to a reader and talking deeply about them—this is very helpful at the start of a book, especially. Parents can help also simply by reading the same book, in sync with a reader, and talking with great interest about the book.

If you have some readers who have not progressed as you'd expect over the course of the year, now is a good time to blow the whistle, to declare this as an emergency, and to gather all stakeholders together around an intervention. Does this reader need to spend an hour after school, in the building, reading? Does this reader need to double the amount of reading he or she is doing at home? Might a middle school reading buddy be employed as a mentor?

The essentials of this unit closely follow the unit that was researched and documented in *Tackling Complex Texts—Historical Fiction Book Clubs* from the *Units of Study for Teaching Reading*. Part One focuses on deep comprehension and synthesis of complex story elements, as well as on launching book clubs with high levels of engagement and independence. Part Two focuses on interpretation, especially on paying attention to perspective and point of view, and on carrying ideas across a text. Part Three helps readers move across texts, both fiction and nonfiction, developing readers' thematic understanding and potential as social activists. We've included a detailed description of these teaching points at the end of the unit. Where this unit diverges from *Tackling Complex Texts* is that it now parallels the historical fiction writing unit.

At the beginning of this unit, you'll aim to teach readers to read complex texts with deep comprehension. The characters in these books live in places where our students have not lived, in times they have not known. Readers must figure out the nature of the setting, the ways people live, and who the characters are, as well as the relationship between characters and historical tensions. As students read deeply to analyze characters, settings, and events in their stories and determine the relationships between those elements, they will be doing some of the important work encouraged by the Common Core State Standards. The reading work will be appropriately intense

and you'll want to start readers off on a strong foot by focusing on strategies that will aid their synthesis of emerging plots. With support from a book club, readers will learn to keep track of (often multiple) plotlines, of unfamiliar characters, and of shifts in time and place. You'll want to alert readers that they must often synthesize several crucial subplots, some of which involve unexplained gaps in time and unfamiliar circumstances and consequences. You might choose to read, for instance, *Number the Stars*, in which the main character, Annemarie, doesn't fully understand how or why Denmark has been occupied by the Nazis, or the role her family is playing in the Resistance. The reader, therefore, sometimes moves ahead of the main character in synthesizing details.

Like synthesis, envisioning in this month will hold new challenges. Readers may already have made a mental movie of their reading before this; in fact, you might have explicitly taught envisioning earlier in the school year. But because the time, place, and political circumstances mentioned in their historical novels may be unfamiliar and because the setting is more than a passive backdrop and contributes so actively to the plot, readers will need help, from the very start of their historical fiction novels, to see and feel the worlds of their stories. They'll need support to imagine these worlds from the unlikely perspectives of protagonists often markedly different from themselves. It was one thing to step into the shoes of a socially ostracized American child in *The Tiger Rising* (the backdrop of a school bus, motel, and bullying are within the reach of our readers' imaginations) but another thing altogether to step into the shoes of a young Danish girl whose sister has been murdered, whose country has been invaded, whose decisions may mean life or death to others. Readers might not have as *ready* a schema to envision Denmark during World War II, so you'll want to draw on all possible resources (for example historical images, movie clips, and social studies texts) to augment readers' understanding and awareness of this time and place. It will require additional preparation on your part to have these supplementary textual and media resources lined up, but the payback will be great in terms of children's awareness and understanding of history and their ability to empathize with distant characters.

Inherent in this genre, therefore, is the potential to overlap and integrate nonfiction texts, possibly from your social studies curriculum. In any case, you will set up intertextual resources for book clubs so they may look at specific historical eras such as the Civil War or the French Revolution through the lens of not *one* but *several* novels and/or picture books. A book club reading Avi's *Prairie School* might also read MacLachlan's Sarah, Plain and Tall series or other books documenting the era of Westward Expansion to understand (and compare) the life and times described in each. Students will grow their understanding of a topic by reading multiple accounts of the same historical events. In other words, book clubs in this month will be organized not around one specific *book* but rather around one specific historical *era*, and you can set the expectation that they will read *several* novels dealing with this particular era. You'll establish this expectation to ensure, firstly, that readers are keeping up with their requisite reading volume and secondly, because the familiarity with one specific

historical era in which their multiple books are set will provide its own scaffold. As students learn about their historical moments across texts, they will accomplish some of the goals set forth by the Common Core State Standards. With the support of multiple texts on the same time period, they will be offered opportunities to "compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts" and "analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent." You'll want each book club to have a text set containing multilevel books dealing with their one historical era, so that easier texts may introduce an era and scaffold the understanding of the harder texts set in the same era. Of course, you'll also fall back on your previous assessment notes on individual readers to ascertain that books in each club's text sets conform to the reading levels of the children within that club. Typically, you'd want to have at least one book in the set that is decidedly lower in level than the reading levels of the children in that club—this book may serve as a crutch for understanding the historical details referenced in the harder texts.

The ambitiousness of this genre, and this unit, does not end with the introduction of a distant time or place. Historical fiction novels don't merely reference other time periods, they also often introduce young readers to large, complicated themes that have recurred in human history and continue to be relevant today. By developing ideas about theme, students will be reaching the high standards of the Common Core State Standards, which emphasize that students be able to "determine a theme of a story . . . from the details in the text, including how characters in a story . . . respond to challenges." Students will draw on their thematic understanding of individual stories to develop bigger ideas about the themes of the entire time period. Therefore, while you can expect the book clubs in your room to begin the month with discussions of a main character's problems and to progress through the month tackling complex plots together, you will prepare for the fact that book club conversations toward the *end* of this month will touch on issues such as war, oppression, famine, and migration. You'll want to explicitly teach clubs to linger at significant or poignant moments in texts to actively interpret what the story might really be about. Whether it is a young girl struggling to assert her independence against the backdrop of the Dust Bowl or two boys struggling to cross the color line during the civil rights movement, you can expect that most historical fiction will teach lessons about human endurance or social justice, and you will tune your instruction accordingly, nudging book club conversations into interpreting historical fiction novels' underlying themes. As readers become more adept at talking and thinking thematically about their books, you'll want to teach them to recognize that most themes recur across texts and across times. Themes about courage or friendship, for example, can be seen in novels about Nazi Europe, Westward Expansion, or the civil rights movement. You'll want to celebrate that your children, during this unit of study, are coming to understand that reading is about learning how to live.

Gathering Resources before the Unit Begins—Taking Stock of Your Library

Before beginning this unit of study, the most important question is: Do you have enough historical fiction books so that students can read books at the appropriate level, and make choices about what they read? All our studies, and those of Richard Allington, show that students need to be reading with high volume and high interest all of the time—and we know that interest and choice go hand-in-hand. This means that within the unit, you'll need enough books at your children's just-right levels so that they can still choose books they want to read. Don't put a reader in books that he or she cannot read or doesn't want to read just so that the reader can "be in the unit." Be particularly thoughtful of the needs of your struggling readers. Even more than others, these students need to be reading a lot, and they need to read books that they find fascinating. So first, look at your book choices and do everything possible to gather many titles at various levels. You will also need to do some good book talks about the books that you have available, so you can lure your children to them. We included some "time travel" books, such as *Magic Treehouse*, to make available more lower-level books for students. The *American Girl* historical fiction novels, with their accompanying nonfiction texts, are also good choices.

Throughout the month, of course, you will keep your eye on students who don't seem well matched to texts and double-check them with a quick assessment of fluency, accuracy, and comprehension. Your readers need to be holding books they can read independently, not just with support!

Part One: Tackling Complex Texts in the Company of Friends

One way to start this unit of study is to begin with a quick read-aloud of a picture book, such as Roberto Innocente's *Rose Blanche*. As you read (and analyze the pictures), you'll teach your students to really synthesize the clues about what kind of place this is. That means not only identifying the place and time (a small town in Germany during World War II), but also paying attention to details that clue the reader in to what *kind* of place it is—what the mood or atmosphere is. In *Rose Blanche*, for instance, the town is beginning to have trucks full of soldiers, and the streets are becoming crowded and dangerous, and there are flags with swastikas on every building. So the mood is oppressive and scary to the narrator, Rose.

Readers who have had a steady diet of realistic fiction often let the settings in their novels fly by them. Picture the setting in *Amber Brown*. It's a school classroom, a bedroom, a kitchen, but it never plays an especially important role in the novels. The settings in N/O/P/Q books also tend to be fairly static. Wayside School is described once at the start of the story, but the place itself does not undergo major developments as the plot of the book unfolds. Instead, the setting provides the backdrop. Then, too, in books below levels P or Q, the story could often be transplanted to a different setting without the entire plotline changing. Once readers progress to higher levels of

text difficulty, the settings often become less familiar and more dynamic and also more essential to the story. In more complicated texts, though, especially stories in the R/S/T band and above, the setting becomes significant. It may even function as part of the problem that a character has to overcome—sometimes by *leaving* altogether, such as in stories that describe Jewish families escaping the Holocaust or Irish people migrating to a new land because of the famine. A natural disaster, or invasion by a hostile enemy, might change the setting completely. The setting may operate at a symbolic level, too: the dust of the prairie may mean more than simply that the land is dry.

Apart from teaching your students to be alert for clues about the physical setting, you might also want to explore the setting as an emotional space as the story progresses. Is this the kind of town where people are good to each other or where groups fear and mistrust each other? Is it a place that is on the brink of change or that has been swept up in a war? What is the mood of this place? Then too, you'll teach readers to pay attention to descriptive, transitional passages that tell about daily life—for example, about how a character gets from one place to another. You'll teach that these can't be bypassed because they often reveal a great deal about the world in which the story is set. Readers need to infer all that is implicit in what is given to them. Part of this involves reading with attentiveness not just to the concrete facts of the setting, but to tone and mood. Readers should come to realize that nothing that happens in a story is included accidentally. If the lightning flashes and the dark clouds rumble, the impending storm is included in the story for a purpose, and readers profit from thinking, "Why might the author have made it storm just now? What am I supposed to be thinking?" These will be new questions for your readers. They'll emerge from their study of settings more prepared to tackle the complex shifts in settings in any novel. They will also help students do the work, outlined in the Common Core State Standards, of comparing and contrasting "two or more characters, settings, or events in a story . . . drawing on specific details in the text."

As you do this work, you'll want to coach into clubs right away. The truth is that no single reader will notice as much, or synthesize as many details, as a small group of readers. So you'll coach your students to listen carefully to each other, build on each other's comments, and honor relationships so that every club member feels valued.

Next, you'll teach your students that historical fiction, from the very first page, presents the reader with a tremendous amount of crucial information not only about the kind of place the story is set, but also about the kind of people who will occupy the story. In these novels, as in all good novels, details matter. If you learn something on page two, or in Chapter One, it's because you're going to need it later in the story. Historical fiction, at the levels at which your children are probably reading, moves swiftly. Readers need to gather a lot of information quickly. And so you'll teach your readers to accumulate and synthesize details. You'll want to teach your readers some strategies for quickly synthesizing details and that they can pin these to an imaginary "feltboard" where they can keep track of all the incoming information. You may find it helpful to show a short film clip, such as the opening three minutes of *Mulan* (the Walt Disney feature animation), to demonstrate to readers how much information is usually given at the start of a historical fiction text. Right away, readers are given information

about the important characters, their world and way of life, and the challenges and conflicts they face. Some struggling readers find that talking about a film clip raises their engagement and their ability to pay attention to detail, and they can bring this engagement then to their books.

As your readers begin to realize that every detail matters in their stories, they'll also begin to notice gaps in their knowledge, perhaps from places where time moves fast or where there are flashbacks. Essential reading tools such as time lines, graphic organizers, and lists of characters, which your readers may not have needed for a time, now become important tools again. This is key, because one thing you'll be teaching is that good readers don't wait for a teacher to tell them how to use their comprehension strategies. Strong readers know that as their books get harder, they have to work harder, and you want to ensure that they know how to do this. A reading curriculum, like a writing curriculum, spirals. As students move up levels into harder books, they'll find that they need to consciously harness comprehension strategies that were helpful to them in the past. You'll model much of that crucial reading work, showing your students how to use multiple strategies to make sense of what they are reading. You'll remind them to use their pencils as they read. You'll remind them to reread on the run, which must become automatic if they are to tackle the kinds of complicated texts that await them.

Time lines will be particularly important. In historical fiction, it's often useful to create a time line of historical events, as well as a time line of pivotal moments for the main character. That way, you and your readers can begin to analyze the relationship between the main character and historical events. When does history affect the main character, and vice versa? It's important for historical fiction readers to understand that the characters exist in a relationship with history. Ultimately, this understanding will help readers with any complex novel, as characters never exist in a vacuum, but are always affected by the social pressures, community norms, and forces around them. Historical fiction novels simply require readers to wrap our minds around a greater *volume* of context. There is the personal story of the main character, the subplots of side characters and the historical backdrop of an era, all with their own changing time lines. It is not always clear at the outset that these different time lines bear any connection to each other or that they are intertwined. You'll want to teach readers new to this genre (and especially those new to texts at Levels P/Q and beyond) how to keep track of several simultaneously unfolding time lines or plots. You may model this using *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* by Grace Lin (2009), a Common Core State Standards recommended book, which has a clear story that unfolds over time within its historical moment.

Next, readers are probably ready to start thinking about the point of view of the main character, which may be radically different than the reader's point of view. That is, the main character experiences the world differently than the reader. So it's critical to be able to suspend our own judgments, and then try to compare and analyze how and why the main character behaves the way he or she does. It's only when we realize that the soldier who stops Annemarie and Ellen from running in the street is a Nazi, and that Ellen is Jewish, and that he is not their local friendly policeman,

that we can understand why Ellen is speechless with fear in the first scene, and how brave Annemarie is to stand up to the soldier. The reader has to separate his or her own perspective and frame of reference from that of the character—a skill emphasized in the Common Core State Standards starting in third grade. As students analyze the point of view of their characters, they will also come to understand the point of view of their authors. The Common Core State Standards for Reading emphasize that students should "describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described." Further, the Common Core State Standards for Social Studies emphasize identifying "aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose." Student investigation of point of view in texts will both develop their understanding about historical moments and bring them to an understanding of their own points of view.

Part Two: Interpreting Complex Texts

As the unit unfolds, your readers will embark upon the heady intellectual work of interpretation. It's easy for children to get caught up in the action of historical fiction, and the alluring settings, but you'll want to teach them that just as the fiction books they've read are about more than just plot, so are historical fiction books. They'll need to look beyond what's happening to uncover the ideas and themes that underlie the books they read during this unit, especially as these books become more complex. You'll want them to understand that each book they read will be about more than one idea. This is new work for a lot of readers, especially young readers who came of age searching for a central or main idea in a text. In this part of the unit, you'll teach your students that reading is about drafting and revising ideas. You'll do this work with your students first within one text, then across texts, and finally between texts and their lives. You'll teach your readers to grow nuanced ideas and to read to be changed by the new worlds and characters we encounter.

It's crucial to understand that this interpretation work is not about teaching kids to recite back an idea that a teacher gives them. You will not tell them "the theme" of a book or send them off to seek evidence for an idea they did not develop themselves. You will not skip the hard intellectual work that kids need to do to grapple with themes. Instead, your goal is that your students learn to articulate significant ideas about their books, that they learn to revise those ideas on their own, and that they learn to reconsider, elaborate on, and defend those ideas in the company of other readers.

You'll begin the interpretation work in this unit, therefore, by teaching your students to author their own responses. Too often, in too many places, kids are taught that they don't matter in the curriculum. Not here. Not in your classroom. You'll teach your students that what they bring to texts matters. You'll show them that what they notice in texts is intricately related to their personal and ethical concerns, to the history they bring to the page. You may also reveal how your history informs your own reading response, showing how you sometimes read as a big sister or sometimes as a

victim of bullying or sometimes as an expert on a historical time period. Your students don't need to know this, but you'll be depending on the reading response theories of Louise Rosenblatt. You'll teach that the meaning of a text lies between the book and the reader. It exists in the union of the words on the page and the mind reading those words. What really matters is that your kids learn that they matter—that what they bring to reading shapes their understanding.

As you teach this first lesson, you'll emphasize that just as no one can tell a reader what or how to think about a story, there is no "right" idea about a story. Each reader brings his or her own history to a book, so that what you might think is important, such as how Annemarie struggles to be a good friend, might be different than what I focus on, such as that she is a better friend than she is a sister. I might notice that because I too struggle to be a decent sibling—it feels harder than being a loyal friend. It's crucial to teach your students that their own responses and feelings matter. Otherwise, they'll be waiting for you to tell them what to think!

You'll probably then want to teach a lesson where you encourage your readers to pause as they read, lingering in certain passages—usually the extra dramatic or surprising ones, where they feel as if there is a sense that what is happening now is connected to other parts of the story or could be tremendously important to the character's development. It's almost as if those parts of the story are written in bold. Readers linger in those parts, jot about them, reread them with their clubs, compare their thinking, connect them to other parts, and have long discussions about them again and again. Often readers come away from certain passages with big ideas they are going to carry with them for the rest of the book.

You can expect your readers, once they have some big ideas, to need support in grounding those ideas in details. So again, you'll teach your readers that in good books, details matter, and that perceptive readers accumulate and string together details. It matters, for instance, that Annemarie finds a Star of David imprinted in her palm after clutching Ellen's necklace to hide it from the German soldiers. As your readers begin to follow ideas, they can keep track of details that support those ideas, and details that lead them to related ideas as well. They'll learn to be extra alert readers, just as alert fans notice so much more at a baseball game than do inexperienced viewers. You'll teach your readers to almost wear special lenses as they develop ideas—lenses that help them maintain a focus on some of those ideas as they read. They'll keep those ideas—those interpretations—in mind as they read, thinking, "Ah yes!" or "Huh? That doesn't fit." Perhaps they will want to jot themselves notes about the lenses they plan to read with each day. That way, clubs won't end up losing track of their ideas, or losing their focus.

The main goal of this part of the unit is for kids to value their own ideas about books and then hold onto these as they read, grounding them in details, deepening them, and sharing them with others. But it's important, too, that children remain open to *new* ideas. We want them to be able to widen their thinking, not holding so steadfastly to one or two ideas that they cannot embrace changing thoughts and interpretations as they push further into their books. So we suggest that you end this part by teaching your students that good stories are about more than one idea, and that to read a book

with complexity is to be open to a journey of thought, not just a single thought. You'll also want to nudge kids to revise their understandings as these change. Too often, young readers may reject or ignore parts of the story that don't fit an idea they came up with early on. So you'll teach them that it's okay to change their minds as you read and as they listen to the ideas of their fellow book club members. Thoughtful readers keep our horizons open as we read, and we use conversation as well as our individual observations to broaden our understanding.

The interpretive work students do in Part Two of historical fiction can parallel some of the work they do in social issues book clubs—reading to foster social justice. They can learn to raise burning questions in their book clubs about why history unfolds the way it does, how individual stories bear witness to suffering and courage, and what lessons we can take from characters' experiences. Their jottings and conversations will grow as you coach into this synthesis work, helping them place two ideas next to each other in order to form a new, more nuanced, one. The book club work will be tremendously important here as your kids learn that their ideas are more powerful in coalition than when they work alone. Indeed, one of the most significant lessons of this unit, and we hope one of the most lasting, will be that children's greatest strength lies in building thoughts off their talk with each other. You'll want to facilitate such talk by providing literary language for some of the things readers are intuitively seeing in their books but can't precisely name. You might teach readers to use allusions, figurative language, and symbolism to convey ideas that are not easily contained in ordinary language.

Part Three: Becoming More Complex because We Read

The Common Core State Standards ask students to not only separate their perspective from that of the main character, but also to discern the various perspectives of different characters within a story. You'll teach your readers, therefore, to look closely at a scene and imagine the different points of view that characters in that scene bring to the action. How might the young German soldier feel who is searching for hidden Jewish children in Annemarie's apartment? How might young, Jewish Ellen feel at that moment, as compared to Annemarie? There is abundant information in the text about Annemarie's inner thinking and emotions, but the reader can only imagine Ellen's feelings from her silence—and only a critical reader would pause to consider the soldier's point of view. So you'll be teaching into critical literacy at this point in the unit as well. And you'll be helping your readers to become more empathetic and imaginative, as well as more observant and discerning.

Another way to teach into critical literacy is to teach your students to reanalyze their stories, or parts of them, through the lens of power. This work often leads them to new thinking, especially for readers of this age, who haven't often thought about power and resistance, although they may *feel* powerless often. You'll teach your students to ask themselves who has power, how power is visible, what forms power can take, and how power shifts. For instance, power is not always about weapons or physi-

cal strength. In the end, it is not physical prowess that defeats the Germans' attempt in *Number the Stars* to round up the Jews in Denmark. It is the power of community, integrity, and collective courage.

If you haven't done so yet, you'll want to make sure that your students now have the opportunity to read some nonfiction alongside their fiction. This doesn't have to mean that you create enormous text sets, ravage your libraries, and do big book orders. You could simply type up some statistics, or download some simple fact sheets or articles. Knowing how many children died in the Holocaust, for example, gives the reader an even greater sense of what was at stake when the Johansens took it upon themselves to hide Ellen in *Number the Stars*. It's also helpful to have some images, so that students can use these as references while they envision. Even though children will have learned that the books they are reading are set during real-life events, they may experience these events and characters at a certain distance because they are reading about them against the backdrop of fiction. It is one thing to read about Rose Blanche's plight or Lise and Peter's bravery and quite another to see photographs of Anne Frank and Miep Gies and other real people who experienced the Holocaust, or other historical events, firsthand.

As your readers add in nonfiction reading, teach them to begin to talk about ideas across texts—both fiction and nonfiction. The idea that war teaches children to grow up fast, for instance, is true not only in *Number the Stars*, but also in *The Butterfly*, and also in any images you download from the American Holocaust Museum site. This work, of realizing that an idea a reader has in one text can be true in another text, is revolutionary for young readers. They'll begin to see themes everywhere. So you won't have to build text sets around themes—in fact, you don't want to. You want your readers to begin to imagine that each text they read can be read in comparison to other texts, almost as if they are making virtual text sets. You'll teach your readers, then, to look closely at something the Common Core State Standards emphasize, which is *how* each text develops a theme—in order to compare and contrast multiple books with the same theme, analyzing carefully and using details as evidence for their ideas.

Another way to use comparison to deepen thinking is by teaching your students the art of allusion. Sometimes, readers want to say so much about a story, yet they struggle to find words that contain thoughts so big. Rather than searching for all the right words, they can compare the story or the character to another story or character who is familiar to their audience. If a reader says, for instance, that the main character in the story he or she is reading is as clever and self-sacrificing as Charlotte in *Charlotte's Web*, we know what that means. So saying that a character grows up fast, like Annemarie, or pays a price for her courage, like Rose Blanche, will convey huge meaning. The Common Core State Standards name the ability to make allusions as a key part of understanding literary traditions and archetypes—the foundations of cultural literacy.

As you bring this unit to a close, invite children to step back a little from the historical worlds they've stepped into, and from the heady interpretation work they've

been doing within and across texts, to think more largely about the meaning these tales bear for their own lives—and for the world at large. What does it mean to them, for example, that Mama in *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* covers up the offensive notations in her seventh-grade students' texts so that they do not have to be humiliated by seeing these every day? How are we affected by that decision and by the school's response of firing her? What can we learn from Annemarie's decision, in a moment of high stakes, to rip off her best friend's Star of David necklace, which identifies Ellen's Jewishness and now potentially marks Annemarie, too? There are lessons in these defining choices that characters make, and you'll want your students to think deeply about them, to be affected by them, and to live differently because of them.

Use Your Read-Aloud to Support the Unit

Plan to use your read-alouds to anchor this unit. If you decide to focus your read-aloud on one historical event—World War II, for instance—you might read aloud the chapter book *Number the Stars*, which is full of teaching opportunities. But you might decide to introduce this event in history by first sharing a picture book or two (*Rose Blanche*, *Terrible Things*, and *The Butterfly* are a few we recommend), and then you'd probably want to read aloud several more books across the unit, of varied lengths, all about World War II. If you decide to have students reading books from a variety of time periods, your class read-aloud could also switch time periods. As you make these decisions, consider that your read-aloud will serve as a touchstone for the critical reading and interpretive work you teach.

In turn-and-talk you might say things like:

- "So the main character is facing a big problem. Turn and talk to your club how you think she may try to solve it." (prediction, interpretation, intertextuality)
- "Hmm, I'm thinking that if I were this character in this situation, I might have done something different. Stop and jot what you would do. Keep in mind what you know about that time." (interpretation, envisioning, accumulating the text)
- "So far we've gathered a lot of details about the setting! Stop and jot how you think the setting is affecting the main character." (determining importance, interpretation)
- "How do you think what just happened will affect the character? Turn and tell your partner." (prediction)
- "How does this situation compare to other experiences or situations we've read about?" (intertextuality)

Integrating the Unit with Social Studies

In the historical fiction writing unit, students will be collecting as many new insights as possible about the time period they will ultimately write about; therefore, you might choose to align your social studies instruction with your historical fiction reading and writing work so students have multiple opportunities to explore this time period. For example, in social studies your students might be learning about the Civil War through discussions, trips, film clips, and primary documents—all the while collecting jottings about what they are learning about the period, talking in partnerships and clubs, and creating whole-class word walls and charts gathering their understandings. Simultaneously, in reading workshop, your students will need to read historical fiction from various time periods (so that you can keep everyone "in books"), one of which one might be the Civil War. During read-aloud time, you could highlight books set within the Civil War.

Of course, just because you are studying the Civil War doesn't mean that your students can't be in related, but broader, topics of book clubs—ones that focus on stories of "war" or "oppression" or "change." When children read one historical fiction text after another, this provides an excellent opportunity for them to compare texts. This kind of intertextual reading work supports a richer understanding of historical fiction in general. Another way to go, if you feel your social studies materials are not broad or supportive enough, is to lean more heavily on the reading workshop work paired with your social studies unit—using historical fiction book clubs and read-alouds of picture books, short texts, or novels as points of research for your readers.

In both your content study and your reading workshop, you may use word charts, time lines, visuals, and maps to record class understandings of the concepts, events, places, and vocabulary. You may also decide to make a variety of nonfiction texts available so that students can supplement their reading of historical fiction with informational texts. It's helpful to have nonfiction texts with lots of images, so that students can use these as references while they envision. If there are any crucial historical events in the stories your students will be reading, try to include some texts that explain these events and give some background information on them. Include maps as well, so students get an idea where the stories they are reading take place. Clearly, it will take some work to gather all these resources. You may find that you need to visit your local library, or that teachers on a grade level want to rotate baskets of materials in order to share resources. Remember that many children read nonfiction at lower levels than they read fiction, so keep that in mind when accumulating texts. If it has been a while since many of your students last read nonfiction texts, you may wish to remind them how to focus their learning by looking for the main idea in each section.

Additional Resources

The unit outlined below follows a sequence of teaching points set out in *Tackling Complex Texts: Historical Fiction in Book Clubs* from the series *Units of Study for Teaching Reading: A Curriculum for the Reading Workshop, Grades 3–5.* The lessons are detailed in the book,

and therefore, as you embark on this unit, you might reference those texts. The first part of this unit focuses on deep comprehension, synthesizing complex story elements. The second part turns toward interpretation, carrying big ideas across texts and paying attention to point of view. The third, and final, part focuses on reading fiction and nonfiction to deepen readers' thematic understanding.

Historical fiction is a complex genre. Before beginning the unit, you will want to look at your running records and your conference notes, and decide if this unit is the time to call your children to action, pushing them to grapple with more complex texts than before, or if you will table the unit for later in the year when your children are ready to read more complex texts. If you look at your data and see that the majority of your class is reading below Level P, you might want to consider another unit of study. You might turn toward the third-grade curricular calendar, teaching a unit on Series Book Clubs, or the fifth-grade calendar, teaching a unit on Reading Like a Fan: Author Study.

If you do decide to teach this unit, this can be a time for you to encourage children to push themselves as readers, tackling more complex texts than in prior units. During this time, children are in book clubs and can support each other with comprehension. Of course, some clubs, and children, will still need additional support from you. You might provide book introductions to help them move into a text as well as do some guided reading, whether they are at the beginning, middle, or nearing the end of their book.

As you teach the unit, keep your eye on the work that children are doing. Study their Post-its and reading notebooks to assess their comprehension. You might find that children are in need of additional support with synthesizing story elements, and, therefore, might decide to teach additional lessons on that skill. You might encounter children struggling with growing ideas about their characters, so you might revisit the Post-it to theory work that you taught in Unit Two, Following Characters into Meaning, encouraging children to again sort their Post-its into piles of ideas that seem to go together. Then too, you might teach additional lessons on learning from the lives of our characters, seeing the bigger life lessons, which was also taught in the third part of "Following Characters into Meaning." For more detailed teaching points, you can refer to the unit itself.

If you see some children talking about their books as though they are just fiction stories, not paying attention to the real events and how they are affecting the characters in the story, then you will probably want to do more work on setting and cause-and-effect relationships. Cause-and-effect work is critical to the unit. Children need to understand that the events in history set off a chain reaction, and the characters' actions are part of that chain. You will want to teach that the decisions the characters make are influenced by the events taking place and that the presentation of these decisions is also affected. If children need more knowledge about the time period to be able to do this work, you might introduce nonfiction materials to help explain the setting earlier than the unit suggests. Then too, you might develop the last three bullets of the first part into a string of minilessons on the different ways that the historical context, or setting, has an impact on the character.

If your readers were struggling with critical reading in nonfiction, you will not want to delay this skill set any longer. They will need it for the interpretation unit that follows. So, you will want to emphasize the interpretation work throughout this unit. While the interpretive work is in the third part, you might decide to begin this critical reading work earlier, bringing it into your read-aloud where you can coach and support children, preparing them for when they will do this independently. Then, when you do teach the third part, you might decide to linger. You might take the teaching points below and develop them into a string of minilessons, or you might teach additional strategies to support this work. Also, if you know that children will need additional support with this, prepare to teach strategy lessons to small groups.

In addition, be sure to keep your eye on your children's reading logs. As they tackle these complex and sophisticated texts you want to ensure that their volume is not dropping. If you see a dip, if you see children reading fewer pages, then act and act quickly. Help them to find more time in the day to read and encourage them to track their own progress, setting goals and then putting in the time to reach those goals. Ultimately, volume matters, and it cannot suffer at the expense of increased complexity.

The teaching points below are far from encompassing, nor are they set in stone. They are meant to help you imagine a possible pathway, one that will need to have detours based on your readers. If you decide to forge your own pathway, think about how to make the parts of your unit seem coherent and logical, so that readers feel as if they are on a pathway that will inevitably help them emerge as more powerful and independent readers and thinkers.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Tackling Complex Texts in the Company of Friends

- "Readers, here's the thing: All of us already know what a setting is in a story. It's the place where the story, or scene, happens. But today, I want to teach you that in historical fiction, because the setting will inevitably be unfamiliar to us, we have to really pay attention not just to what the place looks like, but also to what it feels like—not just to its physical details but to its emotional atmosphere."

- "Readers, as we begin to invent ideas about reading clubs, I want to also teach you that it's important, in any club, to take care of relationships within that club. We do that by making sure that we're creating work where each member will feel a part of something important, and each member will always feel supported by the group."

- "Specifically, I want to teach you that when the grown-ups in my book club and I began reading our historical fiction books, we found ourselves almost tacking up information we'd need to know on mental bulletin boards. At the start of our books, there was so much information flying past us as we read

that we felt as if a lot of our mind work was spent catching the important stuff and almost sorting it so that we began to grasp the who, what, where, when, and why of the book."

- "When skilled readers read any complex story, and especially when we read historical fiction, we are aware that time is one of the elements in the story that is often complex. Specifically, we are aware that the spotlight of the story is not continually on the here and now. Sometimes the story harkens back to events that have already occurred, earlier in the story or even before the story began."

- "In historical fiction, there are many time lines. There is the main character's time line—a time line that is a personal narrative or plotline—and there is a historical time line of the big historical events. And the two are entwined. This is also true in life itself. The events in the main character's life—in your life and mine—occur alongside, and are affected by, an unfolding time line of world events. To understand a character, a person, we have to get to know not only the person's personal time line but also the historical time line that winds in and out of the personal time line."

- "Readers try to understand the decisions that characters make, and we do this in part by keeping in mind that the character's behavior is shaped by what is happening in the world in which the character lives, that is, by the historical context. And here's the thing: When different characters respond differently to one event, it is helpful for readers to muse about this, asking 'Why?' Usually when different characters act differently this reflects the fact that each of those characters plays a different role in the world and therefore is shaped differently by the times."

- "Sometimes we come to places in a story where the action slows down, where there is more description than action. Readers, trust the author. Be loyal, stay side by side, rather than running ahead alone. Probably the author inserted these details so that you could better imagine this place. In good books, readers can trust that we'll learn something important through these descriptive passages."

Part Two: Interpreting Complex Texts

- "When we read novels, and specifically when we study texts really closely, we are looking at (I held up a giant question mark) . . . We are looking at . . . something. And here is the thing. No one can tell you, as a reader, what to look at, what to notice, what to think. One reader and another will tend to notice similar things about what is happening in the story—about the plot. But each reader brings his or her own meaning to the story, and to do that, we let different parts reverberate in our lives. Each one of us is the author of our own reading."

- "Today I want to remind you that thoughtful readers sometimes press the pause button, lingering to ponder what we've read, and to let a bigger idea begin to grow in our minds. For each reader, there will be passages in a book that seem to be written in bold font, parts that call out to that reader as being important. Often these are passages that harken back to earlier sections in the book and that seem laden with meaning, and we read those passages extra attentively, letting them nudge us to think."

- "Readers, you are all writing about big ideas and big questions. And today I want to teach you one incredibly important bit of advice. The writer, Richard Price, has said, 'The bigger the issue, the smaller you write.' He means that when you are writing about big ideas, you lodge your ideas in the smallest details and objects from the story."

- "Once readers have paused to think deeply about a book, and developed an idea that seems true, from that point on, readers wear special glasses, special lenses, and look at the upcoming text through those lenses. We read on with our interpretation in mind, and say, 'Ah yes!' or 'Huh? That doesn't fit.' Doing this is one way that we continue to develop our ideas."

- "Although it is really important to fashion ideas and to care about them, it's also important to be open to new ideas. You don't want to read, or to talk, like you're knees are locked, like you are determined to not let your mind budge even an inch. The reason to talk and to read, both, is to learn. In a good book, as in a good conversation, you can literally feel your thinking being changed."

Part Three: Becoming More Complex because We Read

- "Readers, although it is natural to understand a story from the perspective of a main character (because the author lets us see his or her thoughts), it helps to also see a story through the perspective of other characters, characters whose feelings and voices might not have been brought out so clearly. If we try to think about and to see a story through the eyes of someone whose perspective is not shown, this—like trying to see the school through the eyes of a bird—gives us a new way of seeing, and more importantly, of thinking."

- "Readers, also, take our ideas through a process of drafting and revision. And just as we have an internalized sense for the qualities of good writing that guides us as we draft and revise in writing, we also need an internalized sense for the qualities of a good interpretation so we can draft and revise our ideas about the texts we are reading."

- "Readers, looking at our books with the lens of power leads to all sorts of new thinking. When we investigate who has power, what form power takes (how you see it), and how power changes, that helps us find huge meanings in books."

- "Readers, we often turn to nonfiction to spark new ideas about our novels. Just as two sticks light a fire when they're rubbed together, we can rub some bits of nonfiction up against parts of novels and see ideas ignite."

- "It is important when we read to think about people, places, events—and also about ideas. And when you have thought about an idea in one story, sometimes that thinking helps you find ideas in another story."

- "If your head is so full of ideas, your chest feels like it swells with all this huge stuff you have to say, and yet you find yourself sort of sputtering and hemming, you need to know that people who read and who care about books often have things to say for which no ordinary words will do. And the good news is that we can use the same techniques that authors use to say things that are too big for words. One of the things we can do is we can reference a beautiful detail, significant theme, or lasting image—anything really—from a story we all know, and by doing so we conjure up that whole story. People who know it go, 'Ah yes, yes. I know what you mean.' That's called making an allusion, and literate people do this all the time."

- "Readers, when characters face critical moments of choice, when a character must decide how he or she wants to respond, we need to remember that it's not just the people around that person who are affected by the choices the character makes. We can be as well. We can learn from characters in books, just as we learn from people in our lives, and we can especially learn from the moments of choice that characters face."

UNIT SIX

Interpretation Text Sets

FEBRUARY/MARCH

(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: R/S)

We could not agree more with the Common Core State Standards' recommendation that we teach readers at this level to determine central ideas or themes of a text as well as analyze the development of these themes. By now, your students have already been doing some interpretation, of course. They have interpreted the motivations for characters' actions and feelings; they have constructed theories about events, places, and people in their novels. In this unit of study, you will sharpen your students' analytical skills even further, teaching them to study texts deeply in order to grow big ideas as they read. In this unit, you'll help your readers to sharpen their analytical skills as you teach them that the stories they are reading are also about ideas. You'll move your students to think and talk about the ideas their chapter books suggest. Then you'll show them, pretty much immediately, that good books are about more than one idea, and you'll teach them to keep more than one idea afloat in their minds. All the time, you will be training your students to be analytical and persuasive as you teach them to back up their ideas with evidence from the texts. Pretty early on in the unit, you'll teach your readers that just as their books are about more than one idea, ideas live in more than one book—we call those ideas themes. Once your students are recognizing themes, you'll teach them to compare how themes are developed in different texts. You'll have them hone their reading and the ideas they are growing as they read to be more nuanced, deliberate, and finely calibrated.

You'll know your students are ready for this teaching if, as you look over their Post-its and listen to their partner conversations, you see that they are regularly inferring about the characters in their stories and are synthesizing the narrative elements in the stories they read. If, for instance, a student is reading *Because of Winn-Dixie* and

has no trouble keeping track of the characters, figuring out where the story is taking place and what kind of town is at the beginning and end of the story, that student is ready to also realize that *Because of Winn-Dixie* is the kind of novel that suggests important themes—it's a book that teaches us how to live. If, on the other hand, when you talk to that same student about *Because of Winn-Dixie*, he or she seems to talk only about what is happening right now in the book, without connecting that action to earlier events, and as you check-in with another student, you see that same "reading-for-plot-and-constantly-surprised-by-the-plot" kind of reading, then you may want to turn to Unit Two: Developing Ideas about Characters, in this curricular calendar, or in the *Units of Study for Teaching Reading, Grades 3–5*. This interpretation unit makes the most sense for readers who are reading books, at minimum, at Level P and above, and who are regularly inferring about the characters' emotions, traits, and changes in their books. Ideally, the bulk of your readers will be Level S and above when you embark on this unit.

Unit Overview

The unit has three main parts, each one leading students toward increasingly more nuanced thinking, while also leading students in steps so they can do the work independently and not merely follow their teacher's thinking. It's an easy job to tell young readers what the ideas are in a novel. It's easy to tell them a theme and have them find evidence for that theme in a text. It's easy, that is, to hand over a piece of literature as content to your students and have them hunt and peck for answers to questions you devise. It is much more challenging to teach young people to think for themselves, and to be dissatisfied themselves with easy, literal, undisputed reading and thinking. They'll need some specific strategy instruction in analytical reading practices, or else they will remain ever dependent on collaborative, teacher-led, co-authored understandings.

Part One begins with students revisiting familiar texts, thinking about the ideas these texts suggest. You'll teach students to reconsider and "reread" prior events and texts. You'll teach them that stories are never about just one idea, showing them the way that the Common Core State Standards analyze nonfiction texts, for more than one idea, is also relevant for fiction. And then pretty quickly, you'll show your readers that ideas live in more than one text. In Part Two, you'll move students to more nuanced reading and thinking, by teaching them to lay texts that are united thematically alongside each other, and really investigate how an author develops a theme. Rarely are the settings, characters, or events exactly matched, and it is in these fine details that students, with your instruction, will learn to illuminate complexity, really analyzing how ideas that at first glance appear the same, may be different either in their development, or in their details. Imagine how this thinking will help your students in later life, as they learn to ask colleagues, leaders, and co-citizens, "Wait, I think that these ideas are similar, but somewhat different in their implications or applications."

Finally, in Part Three, you'll offer your students analytical lenses for interpretation that focus on symbolism and literary craft, so that students are alert to the metaphors in the texts that they encounter. This ability to think metaphorically enriches students' experience of literature, it hones their thinking in new directions, and it will enhance their own language and expressiveness. Your students will emerge from this unit more alert to the metaphoric allusions and rhetoric in the texts they encounter, whether it is the idea that the dog is a pivotal character in *Because of Winn-Dixie*, or that the suitcase is more than a suitcase in *Tiger Rising*.

Getting Started: Preparing Your Classroom Library

This unit will not require any special new texts. Universal ideas (i.e., literary themes) are universal because they are important in a great many stories. You will not need specially constructed text sets in order for readers to think about how different authors convey the same theme. So you don't have to make a basket of books labeled "struggle against nature" and fill it with *Skylark*, *Little House on the Prairie*, and *Out of the Dust*. The unit is going to lead students to do much more intellectual work than simply find evidence of a prenamed theme. Your students will, though, want to do this work collaboratively, in partnerships and small clubs—so you and they should gather texts of which you have multiple copies. They'll range back over the fantasy and historical fiction you had already gathered for club units. Some students may reread these books, with more comparative thinking, during this unit. Others of your readers should be at higher reading levels now than when you were in those units of study, and so they can reach for harder texts.

You may, though, make it easier to tackle this work by having copies available of your prior read-aloud texts, by gathering some baskets of poetry and nonfiction that students may investigate if they become preoccupied with certain themes, and, of course, by having at hand as many rich, dense chapter books at appropriate levels as possible for each reader. Students simply can't do the higher-level work of the Common Core State Standards if they are reading one text and thinking about that text in isolation. During the reading workshop, members of a book club will read books together—say, for example, four students read *Hatchet*. Within a week of the start of this unit, you'll be encouraging readers to think between the one book that they are reading—in this instance, *Hatchet*—and other books the class has read. How is *Hatchet* like (and unlike) *My Side of the Mountain*? How is it like (and unlike) *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*? Readers will create their own text sets by looking across books they've read and plan to read, and finding ones that address similar themes.

Check that your lower-level readers have access to books they can read, that are just difficult enough for them to be striving and achieving while still within what they can actually read. It's often easier to do analytical thinking, in higher-level texts, because the texts themselves are so complex. So make sure that you've gathered narratives that are as suggestive and complicated as possible, for your lower-level readers. *Dragon Slayer Academy*, for instance, at Levels N–O, offers wild complexities and pro-

vocative themes, whereas it may be hard (but not impossible) to develop thematic understanding in *Magic Treehouse*. They are both terrific series, but you may highlight one over the other in this unit of study. Look over your library with that lens; imagine yourself doing the work of this unit in the books that are available.

It will be important for your class to have a set of shared texts to mine in this unit—and presumably those will be the books and short texts (picture books you have read aloud all year, combined with books that students know from previous years, for example, may qualify). If you have not done much reading aloud and your class does not have a shared repertoire of texts, then begin reading aloud now!

As with any unit, teachers need to first decide upon the skills that will be forwarded. We recommend using the performance assessment aligned with the curricular calendar to glimpse what your kids can do with analyzing across two texts and articulating their ideas about texts in writing, with substantive evidence gathered and cited from the texts. Chances are very good that all your students need considerable help with these skills, in which case, you will be wise to teach this unit with a lot of heft, using your small groups and individual conferring and book clubs as forum for supporting your students' progress toward being able to read analytically.

Once students can see that texts often address the same theme, then you can help students notice differences in nuance of the message or in each author's treatment of the message. Students will be able to contrast how authors present or develop a meaning, theme, or character—first in conversation, and then in writing. You can meanwhile teach a parallel unit in the writing workshop on writing literary essays, using some of the reading workshop (as well as other short-text work) as grist for their writing mills.

Part One: Considering the Implications of Stories

To begin the unit, you'll offer your students an invitation to interpretation work, teaching them that events in our lives are open to analysis, just as events and characters in books will be. You'll teach all your students how to return to critical moments in their lives and learn more from those moments. The unit begins with what the Common Core State Standards suggest are the "applications" of more complex thinking—the ability to analyze any experience. Students will have an opportunity to revisit moments in their lives and then to revisit favorite texts. Then they'll quickly move to other texts while their interpretive zeal is strong.

The goal of the first two days is to give kids (and ourselves) lots of repeated practice interpreting so that over the two days everyone becomes fluent with this sort of thinking, more aware of text interpretations that exist out there in the world, more accustomed to speaking in this analytical, idea-based "language." We also want kids to realize that they are interpreting all the time, and that any one event or story can have lots of different interpretations. An important thing to realize is that sometimes we have taught interpretation as the One Big Idea that a text teaches, channeling kids to think about this only when they are two-thirds of the way through a text or done

with it, or after a teacher has suggested an idea, thus channeling them toward the interpretation that we have decided is the best one. The problem is that when we do this, we put interpretation on a high-up shelf, out of reach from kids' sticky fingers—and we take away the thinking work, leaving kids in the role of miners looking for diamonds that will belong to someone else. As a result, lots of kids (and frankly, lots of teachers) feel uncomfortable with the "correctness" of their own interpretation. There is a feeling that this is literary criticism and we are not sure we're entitled to have a go at it, when in fact, any interpretation, just like any text, is open to debate, and needs to be validated, examined, and justified.

So this part of the unit aims to reverse or avoid that damage, helping kids know that interpretation is what thoughtful people do all throughout our lives, and it is within grasp of us all. By inviting kids to feel at home interpreting, we expect they'll become accustomed to this way of thinking and this way of talking about texts, and that their interpretations will get far better just from immersion. So please, during this first part of the unit, issue a generous invitation to kids, welcome much of what they say, don't get bent out of shape by what may seem like shallow interpretations, and know that your students' room for growth stems largely from unfamiliarity with doing this work independently.

In your first lesson, you may teach a lesson that begins in your life and then moves to familiar stories. First, you'll tell your readers that good readers don't read just to find out what characters do, or what happens in stories. Powerful readers also realize that the stories we read are about ideas—they literally teach us how to live. Then you'll invite your students to first consider how, in their own lives, there have been experiences that have taught life-lessons.

You'll probably want to model on a real-life story that seems significant in your own life—perhaps one that you have already used in writing workshop. Right from the start, then, you'll be teaching that we're not searching for one idea, but that analytical thinkers develop ideas about events and experiences.

In the same session, you can have your readers revisit the narratives they've written in their writers' notebooks and analyze them for ideas or life-lessons they see in them. Then they can turn to the stories they've read and talk with a partner or club members, sharing their ideas about stories they've read this year so far. Coach into how kids support their ideas with evidence, and teach them to listen closely to each other and to add on to the ideas that are brought up, so that they build a cornucopia of ideas together. If this teaching seems like too much for one lesson, you could break it into two lessons—the first where you teach students that moments in our lives are open to interpretation, and you and your students reconsider real-life moments for the ideas or life-lessons they suggest, and a second lesson where you teach that moments in books also teach life-lessons, and you and your students reconsider favorite stories you've read so far this year.

For homework, you might invite students to do this same work on the television programs they watch, or the books they are reading on their own, or the events that happen in their days. Students will love the invitation to watch a TV show, each of them thinking, "What does this character learn? What can the character teach?" You

can help students ask this question using other phrases or terms as well, which is a wise thing to do as eventually standardized tests will ask them this same question, and there are a lot of different ways to work the question. Alternately, students could be invited to think about the people in their families who are always drawing life lessons from things that happen. Perhaps it is a grandparent who comes from an event saying, "See what I mean? I always tell you—families have to stick together." That's interpretation.

If your kids have a lot of trouble interpreting, you will want to do a lot more work reading aloud and show them how you begin to think interpretively. We recommend you watch Kathleen Tolan's work with *The Giving Tree* on the DVD that accompanies *Units of Study for Reading*, and watch the active moves Kathleen makes as she demonstrates and supports kids to move from reading actively to reading interpretively. Notice that she slows down the process of thinking interpretively, saying, "Hmmm . . . I'm just wondering . . . what *could* this be teaching me? . . . Hmmm . . . I'm thinking about . . ." (Then she recalls, rereads.) "What *could* that mean? Could it maybe mean . . . Or could it mean . . . ?" You can do similar work, stretching out and slowing down the process of interpreting so that kids begin to climb up on their knees, saying, "I know! I got an idea!" And then, if their ideas are not particularly strong, try to accept them anyhow, listen to them, and find better ideas within those flawed ones.

In your next lesson, you may turn your readers to pivotal moments in stories, showing them how to pay attention to moments in stories when characters experience strong emotions and/or make critical choices. These moments are also ones where readers have an opportunity to learn from the decisions characters make. Again, you'll reteach that at each of these moments in a story, readers can make more than one interpretation and construct more than one idea that may turn out to be significant. You'll want to alert your readers, as well, to how powerful readers remain open as they keep moving through a book, seeing how their ideas play out. Probably, you'll demonstrate this work on a read-aloud text that is familiar to your kids, and so your students will probably also want to return to favorite texts. There is value in giving students opportunities to reread texts, and here they'll have a chance to revisit favorites, thumbing through the pages for remembered moments, reconsidering those more analytically, jotting down ideas those parts suggest, and then arguing and defending those ideas with their partners and club members. As readers talk to each other, teach them to listen carefully, not to find out whether they agree with an idea but whether the author of that idea justifies it well—that is, do your readers assemble textual evidence for their arguments?

In what's probably lesson three, you may find it helpful to begin with a chart, co-authored by the students, of the ideas and lessons they have been gathering from their revisiting of prior stories. The students will immediately begin to see that, just as stories are about more than one idea, an idea may appear in more than one story. This, you may explain to them if they do not know already, is the notion of *theme*—an idea that appears in more than one story. If your students have already been in the historical fiction unit of study described in this calendar and in *Tackling Complex Texts* of the *Units of Study in Reading*, then they have bridged themes across texts before.

If that's the case, then use this lesson to remind them that readers call on their prior reading practices, such as being alert to how more than one text may suggest similar themes. If that seems fuzzy to your readers, then use your chart to visibly articulate themes that seem as if they appear in more than one of your read-alouds. The idea, for instance, that even a child may make a tremendous difference in a community, is suggested by *Because of Winn-Dixie.* It is also suggested by *The Other Side*, and by the Harry Potter books. Demystifying "theme" so that young readers can analyze texts for their thematic implications themselves, rather than awaiting a sacrosanct, pre-conceived theme, may be among the most important early work that happens in this unit of study. In later years, when one of your students is "told" what the theme of a novel is, that young intellectual will probably say, "perhaps, though I also see other possibilities such as . . ." In the same manner, your students will need to be convinced, with evidence, of the integrity of ideas that they are presented with. Reading is how we train our minds.

It may also be helpful to chart some phrases readers sometimes use when they are talking about interpretations, such as:

> "When I first read this story, I thought it was just about . . . but now that I think deeper about it, I realize that really, it is also about. . . ."
>
> "Often people . . . but this story shows that it's possible people should. . . ."
>
> "I used to think . . . but now after reading this I think . . . because. . . ."
>
> "I learned from (the character, the event) that in life, it can be important to. . . ."
>
> "This story teaches us not only about . . . but also about. . . ."

As students engage in this work, coach into their work by showing them that they *always* need to support their ideas with evidence from the text. If they select passages from the text that seem tangentially related to the main idea, then say, "Does the connection between that and your idea hit you over the head, seem totally obvious, or is it a bit hard to see? If it is not hit-you-over-the-head obvious, usually it helps to think of another example from the text, or to say more about why this example seems so relevant. Perhaps your idea is more complicated than you thought at first."

So far, students have been analyzing stories they have lived, and stories they have already read. For the following lessons, club members need to be in new books, so have them choose a book at the end of this session, if they haven't done so already, and get started reading it for homework.

So far, since your students have been revisiting familiar texts, they'll mostly be thinking *after* they've finished the book. Now, in what's probably lesson four, you'll want to teach your readers that we don't wait until we're done with a book to begin constructing ideas, and you'll want to design reading plans to investigate these ideas. You may want to go to your current read-aloud text and talk about some of the ideas the text is suggesting so far. Teach your readers to jot these down, to substantiate them by giving a little boxes-and-bullets speech to club members, and to be ready to read

on, gathering evidence for these ideas. Then give them an opportunity to do the same work in their own books. Remind them that good books are about more than one idea, as well, so teach them to follow more than one idea as they go forward.

Finally, in lesson five, you'll want to teach your students that powerful readers revise our ideas as we keep reading. Show them how sometimes ideas develop into more complicated ideas. Sometimes ideas we had about a text, as we keep reading, simply are no longer true—the text diverges and the story suggests alternative ideas, so readers have to remain flexible and alert. And sometimes ideas that seemed important come to seem smaller next to more significant ideas. What's important is that your readers remain alert and responsive and that they expect to keep validating their ideas and revising them. You might show students that at first *Because of Winn-Dixie* seems to be the story of a lonely girl who makes friends with a dog—teaching us, perhaps, that a dog can be a best friend. But then the story takes a new turn, and it tells about how Opal's relationship with her dog seems to change her relationship with her father, leading one to think that the story may be about how learning to love a dog can help people learn to love people, too. Readers can learn to talk about how the book's message unfolds over time by saying, "First when I started to read this, I thought that deep down, it was maybe about . . . but now as I read on, I'm finding that it is also about. . . ."

For example, if you were to read aloud *The Tiger Rising* you might find yourself thinking aloud when Rob makes the choice to save Sistine from the group of kids who are beating her up at lunch. You might say, "Wow, Rob really surprised me by standing up for Sistine and saving her from that gang of kids. This is such a contrast to Rob who, up until this point, has shown us that he has become an expert at 'not-thinking' about anything that bothers him. Remember how earlier in the story Rob's 'not-thinking' strategy made us grow some ideas about how a really terrible loss, like Rob losing his mom, can make people shut down? And some of us even wondered if shutting down, like Rob does, is just something that grieving people have to do to protect themselves from all the hurt. Well, after watching Rob take on Sistine's attackers and then sit with her on the bus, my thinking is starting to change a bit. Rob may be good at shutting down his feelings about everything and everyone, but I realize it's not really working for him. Rob enjoys the 'thrill' of saving Sistine, but then he's terrified of talking to her, of letting his feelings show. Maybe this story is beginning to be more about how after a terrible loss somehow people have to learn to trust again and to let themselves grow close to others. We'll have to see if and how Rob does that. . . ."

Part Two: Themes May Be the Same across Books, but They're Usually Developed Differently

You'll probably notice that your readers eagerly jumped to show that an idea that is true in one text may be true in another. In fact, you can expect that they'll begin to see themes everywhere, and that they'll lapse into cliché, or even into proverbs, that they'll overstate and simplify. Donna Santman, author of *Shades of Meaning*: *Teaching Comprehension*

and Interpretation, reminds us that what is cliché to us as adults, is remarkably original to a young reader. So you have to keep your face straight and be impressed when they notice that *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* and *The Other Side* both show . . . that it's ok to be different! "'It takes all kinds,' as my grandmother says," one student will say. Then her club will apply that idea to all their texts eagerly. That said, our next job will be to teach students the Common Core State Standards work of analyzing *how* a text makes a theme visible—how that theme is developed, where and how you see it becoming more visible in the text, and how that development is undoubtedly different in different texts. Oliver Button and Clover from *The Other Side* are not, in fact, the same in every way. They are similar in how they tackle trouble with fortitude. They are similar in how they hold onto their dreams. They are similar in how they are lonely. But they are not similar in many other ways. Oliver tackles differences in gender expectations, whereas Clover tackles the color line. Oliver acts alone, whereas Clover carries others into her scheme. The time, the place, the characters, and the kind of trouble they face are different.

In lesson one of this part, therefore, you'll praise your readers for noticing how themes live in more than one text, and you'll study the classroom charts that document these themes intently, perhaps holding up some of your read-aloud texts as you demonstrate. "You know," you may say, "I'm realizing that while some of these stories have the same theme, there's also a lot of differences in these stories. It seems to me that it would be fascinating to investigate what's *different* about stories that have the same theme. I know that when I think *people* are the same, it turns out that I can usually learn a lot from how we're different as well. For instance, I'm drawn to Dylan because he's such an avid reader—he's a lot like me. But he reads different kinds of books, and now I've learned to love a lot of those books too. Or, Sarah and I share a love for the Kings of England—but she loves the modern ones and I love the historical ones, so we learn a lot from each other when we pore over what's different in our knowledge. I'm thinking, for instance, of how we said, when we studied historical fiction, that a lot of our stories showed that war makes kids grow up fast. And that's true. But the war that Annemarie endures in *Number the Stars* is really different than the one that Ishmael Beah suffers in *Long Way Gone*, which I've been reading. In *Number the Stars*, the war came somewhat slowly to Annemarie, and she changed rapidly for a child, but she still had time to make sense of what was happening around her. She grew up fast, but she could do it. Whereas in *Long Way Gone*, the war comes overnight to Ishmael's village, and it all happens at such a rapid-fire pace, that it's almost as if he can't grow fast enough—there's no way to make sense of what is happening. All this is making me realize that it will be worth studying what's *different* in stories that are linked thematically, and seeing what it makes us realize. One way to study those differences is to study what's different about the setting."

You may need a lesson on some of the practicalities that help readers study and compare texts.Your readers, now, will continue to read the books they are choosing for their clubs, but they'll analyze and talk about those books in the context of other books they've read before, putting ones alongside each other that they think are related and learning now to analyze the nuances in how these stories are different as well as similar. There is more on support for clubs, for how they choose their books, for how

they interact with each other, and for how they document their work, below. It may be helpful to have students make up a chart with the titles, characters, places, and themes or issues that occur in your read-aloud texts from this year and old favorites that your class remembers. Or, make color copies of the covers and hang them on the bulletin board—any kind of visible reminder helps students recall earlier texts and work with them. You can also demonstrate how to leaf through the pages of your reading notebook, if your kids are keeping them, reminding yourself of earlier books you've read, and of ideas you had in those books. And just as, when you showed your students how to revisit their writers' notebooks to see new ideas in old stories, you can show them how, as you revisit and remind yourself of stories you read before, in the light of your new thinking, you have new understanding and insights.

In your third lesson of this part, you'll teach your students that just as we can study how the settings of stories that share themes are usually different, and that difference has implications for how the theme develops in the story, there are usually differences also in the characters—in their backgrounds, their perspectives and points of view, and their traits. If you examine how Oliver Button responds to trouble, for instance, in *Oliver Button Is a Sissy*, he is quiet, almost silent about his determination. He acts in open defiance of his father's urge that he play "any kind of ball"—but he does it not by arguing but by asking for something different—dance lessons. He doesn't ask for help when the boys bully him. He forges quietly ahead, and it is his silent fortitude that wins over some in his community, such as his father. Clover, on the other hand, also wants to be different. She too doesn't believe the same things her mother does. So both books share a similar theme (and probably several themes), that kids don't always believe the same things as their parents. But the characters show those beliefs somewhat differently. Neither child speaks in defiance, but Clover immediately enlists other children into her actions. She assumes that kids share beliefs, and in fact, the children she meets rise to those expectations, whereas Oliver is teased and bullied by his peers.

Expect that your readers will *like* to study texts deeply and to engage in intellectual work—and you'll find that they enjoy analyzing and arguing the nuances of how their stories are different. And all the time, they are training their minds. The same kind of thinking that allows lawyers to prepare defenses and researchers to create new vaccines is this paying attention to detail, poring over material, and honing ideas with intellectual zeal.

If your students need more support with finding places in their texts where characters demonstrate how they help develop a theme in similar and different ways, point them to the moments in their narratives when characters face trouble, and coach them to analyze how characters respond to trouble.You may want, especially if your students are engaged in the parallel writing workshop unit, Thematic Anthologies in Poetry, to remind them that one reason we read is not just to study themes as an intellectual exercise, but to learn invaluable lessons about ourselves and our lives from the big ideas in texts. Bronwyn Davies, the great gender researcher, writes that children learn about possibility from the stories they encounter in school. Teach your students, thus, that readers draw conclusions about characters' traits from how

they respond to trouble, and then teach them to compare those traits with their own. Teach them that our characters, like our ideas, are revisable—we can at any moment choose to try to respond differently, to be different. Our own selves are a constant process of revision.

In what's probably your fifth lesson of this part of the unit, you'll teach a repertoire lesson—that is, rather than laying out a new strategy, you'll show your students how they have increased their repertoire of reading practices, and you'll show them how to access that repertoire with fluency and delight. So, you may teach your students that just as a basketball player who has been practicing dribbling and throwing drills finds in a game that he or she does all that work automatically while simultaneously processing who is where on the court, the amount of time left in the quarter, and where the ball is going, a reader takes on all the parts of the story as it comes in, now with increased alertness and expertise and thus increased responsiveness. For example, we begin to ask ourselves early on, "What is this story beginning to be *about*?" We begin to track ideas, we collect moments along the way that support those ideas, we recall other stories we've read and we think and talk about how the story we are reading compares to those, we weigh our own lives and decisions with those the characters make, we have epiphanies where we are struck with possible life-lessons that books leave us with. Moreover, as the books we read get more complicated, things are not always what they seem. Characters who appeared trustworthy may not be, and thus their relationship to themes and lessons they demonstrate will shift. Any reader of Harry Potter knows this. But with our training, we are that basketball player, weaving with grace and power through complicated courts of deception, ruse, and opposition.

Part Three: Symbolism and Literary Devices and Their Relationship to the Meanings and Themes of Stories

Students take great joy in being introduced to symbolism and in exploring symbolism as an analytical lens. Again, remember what Donna Santman says about cliché. The notion that the fence in the *Other Side* is more than a wooden fence, that it is a metaphorical fence, is an absolute epiphany to readers who haven't investigated the history of the color line in this country. Wait, they'll say—"this fence . . . it's not just in Clover's backyard." Investigating and articulating symbolism has tremendous intellectual potential for young readers. Because that fence isn't just in Clover's yard, and that fence manifests itself differently in different places, times, and situations. Teach your students, therefore, that one way readers are moved by literature is that we are moved by the symbols that seem significant. We can begin to see and say that objects, for instance, have symbolic importance. Usually, you simply need to give a stream of examples and invite students to add to this stream during your lesson for students to grasp how symbolism works. For example, the fence in *The Other Side* and fences in anyone's lives, the dragon in *The Paper Bag Princess* and the dragons that any of us face in our lives. Move from these obvious, explicit symbols, to

ones that may be less obvious and more metaphoric—the hat that symbolizes gang acceptance in Eve Bunting's *Your Move*, the chess game in that same story, the dog in *Because of Winn-Dixie*—each of these objects is laden with potential meaning.

As has been your mantra in this unit, refrain from telling your students what these symbols mean, and instead issue an invitation to explore symbolism. Your students will return to old favorites, and begin to dig into the texts they are reading. Show them how to use their pencils and notebooks to articulate their ideas about symbols. Expect sketches and excitement, expect your students to notice first the grand and obvious symbols, expect to lament that they seem to miss the smaller, more subtle ones—and then decide whether to alert them to some of these, perhaps through disguised book club conversations, "I'm just wondering about the pitcher of water too. . . . Have any of you wondered about that?" or by showing how readers sometimes return to old favorites and pore over them again, reconsidering the significance of objects and moments that seemed mysterious before. It does help to teach students that in good stories, details matter.

In your second lesson of this part, you'll turn to another symbolic element that may be surprisingly new to students—the notion that titles can be symbolic as well. You'll teach your readers that often a moment comes in our reading when we realize that the title may have significance. Sometimes it is at the end of the story, and sometimes earlier in the story, when we'll come upon a line, or a scene, that seems to directly refer back to the title. Invite your readers to consider what "The Other Side," and "Fly Away Home," and "Tiger Rising" mean in the context of the story. Invite them to consider why it's *Because of Winn-Dixie* and not simply *Winn-Dixie*. Your book clubs will hopefully be zealots about returning to their conversations and arguing and defending what the titles of books they have read might mean. Usually titles have metaphorical significance, often deeply related to possible meanings of the story—what the story may be *about*. Robb gains courage, he emerges from a deeply hidden self, he *is* a Tiger Rising, he shows us that we too, can become tigers, rising.

In the following couple of sessions, you have some choices about how to increase your students' flexibility and skill with analytical thinking and synthesis in complex texts. One option is to teach them about literary devices, such as foreshadowing, repetition, and perspective, and how these devices help an author develop and complicate themes. Essentially, for students this age, we teach them that powerful readers know that in good stories, details matter, and we ask ourselves about details that seem to be in the text without other context. For example, if there is a cat and you are wondering why the cat is in that scene, that is the same literary device as Chekov's gun—if there's a gun in act one, you can expect it to go off by act three—it's probably there as *foreshadowing*. Often, we understand how events have been foreshadowed when we *finish* a text—so you may demonstrate how we return to the beginning of a story sometimes, seeing more and delighting in how clever the author was to lay down a trail of breadcrumbs. Harry Potter readers are expert at this kind of synthesis—they can connect clues and events across literally thousands of pages of texts, and they are alert to twists. Small scenes along the way alerted Harry Potter readers to the theme that characters are not always what they seem,

that Snape might be cruel but also heroic, that small character flaws may not mean the impossibility of greatness.

Return to the beginning of *Tiger Rising* and you'll find so many clues there about Robb's character, troubles, and potential that didn't really make that much sense when we read the chapter the first time—it's only later that we recall them or revisit them. *Edward's Eyes* also demonstrates the significance of foreshadowing beautifully. Even before you begin the story, you're pretty sure there's something special about Edward. And you're pretty sure that he's dead. There are two aspects of understanding foreshadowing that help readers navigate more complex texts. One aspect is that it teaches a discipline of rapid, on-the-run rereading. Anyone who has tackled a complicated text knows that we often turn back quickly, recalling something that seems connected, that was perhaps foreshadowed earlier, and that we now recognize as being significant. So we turn back, rapidly. A second aspect of understanding the potential significance of foreshadowing is that we are alert to details that might otherwise seem random. It's the Chekov gun syndrome. If the author inserts a detail that seems somewhat unexplained, chances are that the reader will find that it matters later, both to what happens in the story, and to what the story may mean or be about. Analyzing foreshadowing well means that readers must synthesize across many, many pages of texts, and that they must be comfortable holding onto some unexplained questions as they read, having faith that later, the answers will be revealed.

Another literary device that is worth teaching, not just in poetry but in reading and analyzing literature, is repetition. Teach your readers, for instance, that it's not just objects that may be repeated in a text. Sometimes it is lines, and sometimes there are parallel scenes, or moments—when things are almost the same but perhaps slightly different. In *Number the Stars*, for instance, the moment comes in the text when that actual line appears—more than once. An alert reader realizes that there is probably significance in that repetition. You might return to familiar read-alouds, to show your readers that sometimes a bell goes off in the reader's head, and we say to ourselves—this is here more than once, I wonder if it's important. In *Fly Away Home*, for instance, the narrator speaks repeatedly about the blue clothes they wear. The blue shirts, the blue jeans, the blue bags. The character is, clearly, not just wearing blue clothes, he *is* blue. But it's the repetition that alerts us to the character's mood—that the author chooses to make so many things blue, in repetition that alerts the reader that blue may matter. Ultimately the boy perhaps shows us that we may feel blue, but we can still hold onto hope.

Finally, you've undoubtedly taught your students before to analyze characters' perspectives and points of view, but this may be an apt time to return to that teaching and show them how to analyze and compare the significance of characters' perspectives to the possible meanings of a story. For instance, the narrator in *Fly Away Home* has a different perspective on airports than the other travelers in the story do—and thus he teaches us that places can seem very different, based on your condition. New Yorkers, for instance, know that on any given day the city may feel very different to different characters in it. If this is new teaching to your students, you'll want to teach them how to really articulate characters' perspectives by laying down their own, and trying to say what it

must be like for the character in the story, even to try speaking in that character's voice about their emotions and point of view. If it is reteaching, make this a repertoire lesson, and show your students now how to use what they know about analyzing characters' perspectives to say more about potential meanings and themes of the story.

Coaching into Clubs

Some of your clubs may need some coaching in choosing books. They may, for instance, think that as they finish one book, in which they have talked long about a theme such as that kids sometimes crack under family pressures, they may begin to search for a second book by expecting that theme to be listed on the back cover! You'll want to remind your students that good books are about many ideas, and that they should trust that as they begin a second book, any good book is going to be full of ideas, and some of those ideas will turn out to be related to those in their first book. If you know that there are one or two books that will undoubtedly turn up some of the same ideas, of course, you could steer some of your club members in that direction—especially a club of more struggling readers, who may benefit from seeing obvious links between their two novels. Check in with club members as they finish their first novels and are about to begin their second. The more that readers are tracking multiple ideas, rather than one single idea, the more they'll be ready to see thematic connections across novels.

You may also find that readers move easily into seeing that books are related by theme, but then don't seem to expect that the books will also have many differences and that these differences will also affect the meaning of the story. Visit with clubs as they are having conversations and, if needed, push them to look at the ways in which the times or places of the novels they are discussing are different, or the characters' traits are different, and how those differences affect the ideas these books suggest.

In order to scaffold some of our students in their club conversations, you might try using a large index card that on one side says *talk*, and on the other side says *essayists*. This tool can be placed in between the club to support them as they reach to talk like essayists. Readers might begin talk by sharing out lots of ideas, and when once they reach a place where they think, "Oh! That's it, we need to talk long about this one," readers can flip over the card to a series of prompts that support talking like essayists. Some prompts might include:

One idea this book suggests is . . .

One example that shows (this idea) is . . . because . . .

Another example that shows (this idea) is . . . because . . .

This makes me realize/think that . . .

Or

I used to think this book was about . . . because . . .

Now I think this book is about . . . because . . .

This makes me realize/think that . . .

Or

These two books are similar because they both teach that . . .

On the one hand, though, in the first book . . .

On the other hand, in the second book . . .

This makes me realize/think that . . .

A Big Question for readers to ask in club conversations is, "How do two or three different books advance the same theme differently?" These conversations will help when you have readers rehearsing and writing multiple fast-draft compare-and-contrast essays on books that seem to address similar themes. Authors may send their characters on strikingly (or at least somewhat) different journeys toward addressing and resolving a similar issue or have them (and readers through them) learn variations of the same life lesson. In both *Those Shoes* and *Fly Away Home*, the main characters must learn to go without something they desperately want. Both belong to families that struggle financially. And both boys learn to give up—at least for now—the dream of having something. For one boy it's a pair of designer shoes, for the other it's a home. The latter may seem a much larger want, but to Jeremy, those shoes mean so much more than a pair of shoes. And yet the paths these two boys follow toward dealing with not having what others around them have diverge. Jeremy comes close to getting what he wants, only to discover that it isn't really possible to use the shoes himself (they are a size too small), and instead, gives them to his friend, for whom the shoes are a perfect fit. We might say that Jeremy learns (and we learn, too) that making someone else's dream come true may not take away our own longing but can fill something else inside of us. Meanwhile, in *Fly Away Home*, Andrew never comes close to getting out of the airport; he and his dad scrape together money for small things, like food, but aren't anywhere near to having the money to rent an apartment. But Andrew finds hope in a little bird that manages, after many tries, to free itself from the airport, and he begins to take small steps toward helping his dad save. One lesson here might be that working toward a dream is sometimes enough to keep you going. The point is that both of these stories address some of the same themes, but the journeys the characters take are different. Rehearsing and writing fast-draft essays will help your students become adept at this kind of thinking, reading, and writing work.

Additional Resources

This unit is a good match for your students if they have learned to read between the lines and infer about characters' emotions and traits, if they pay attention to the settings in their stories, and if they use strategies they know to figure out unfamiliar words and difficult parts of their texts as they read. If any of that work seems like it still challenges your readers, you may want to return to Unit Two: Following Characters into Meaning

and perhaps the book club unit on historical fiction, which precedes this unit. In those units, you'll find more teaching points to support inferring about characters and navigating complex fiction. You might involve your students in assessing their readiness for this unit of study by inviting them to demonstrate a rich partner discussion about their books—and then listen for how they talk about characters' changes and about the story lines in their novels. If they're doing that work well, onward!

By this time of year, students should be choosing books wisely, using their pens to jot and keep track of characters and events in their stories, and monitoring their comprehension and stamina independently. That is, they shouldn't need you to be constantly checking on how reading is going for them—they should know how to do that for themselves. Nevertheless, you'll want to keep an eye on these essentials as your class moves into the heady intellectual work of interpretation. Kids love to talk about ideas in their stories—often more than they love to keep track of how much they are actually reading. Sometimes, when reading within book clubs, especially, they'll begin to slow down as readers. If one of your goals was to slow down your readers, because you have avid "plot junkie" readers who speed through books, then fine. If you have readers who need to keep reading at a steady pace, with lots of time of eyes on print, keep an eye on reading logs and make time for kids to look over their logs with their club members to make sure they are getting enough reading done.

As your kids begin to develop ideas about the novels they are reading, you may find that they are quick to submit ideas and slower to provide evidence, defend, and track those ideas. They love to call out a theme but need support in showing how that theme develops across a novel or across texts. You'll see that the unit offers many strategies for finding the parts of texts that are often worth lingering in, and you'll want to look at your students' reading notebooks and/or Post-its, and listen to their conversations, to make sure they are using what they know about argument to investigate, analyze, and defend their thematic hypotheses.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Considering the Implications of Stories

- "Powerful readers know that reading is much more than finding out what characters do or what happens in stories. We know that stories are about ideas and those ideas have the power to teach us life-lessons. We may, therefore, reconsider stories we've lived or read, and rethink them in terms of the lessons or ideas they suggest. We keep in mind that good stories are about more than one idea. There may be many possible meanings of a story."

- "As a reader, it is especially worth paying attention to moments where characters experience strong emotions or where characters make critical choices. These are the places where we as readers may learn significant lessons."

- "As readers, we revise our original ideas as the story develops. We expect to back up our ideas with evidence from the text, and we mark, collect, and ponder moments in the text that support our ideas."

- "Just as stories are about more than one idea, ideas live in more than one story. We can find the same idea across different texts—stories, nonfiction, and even our life stories. Readers begin to compare texts that share similar themes, recalling texts we've already read and remaining alert to new texts, both literary and nonfiction, that seem to deal with similar ideas, issues, or themes."

Part Two: Analyzing Differences: Becoming a More Detailed Reader

- "Readers realize that while stories may share the same theme, there are still many differences between stories that are worth studying. One difference we may focus on is setting—differences in the time and place where stories happen. Readers understand that these differences affect the meaning."

- "As readers begin to compare texts, we often need to develop some systems to help us recall the texts we've read. Sometimes making charts that list the titles, issues or themes, and characters, helps us to quickly recall texts so that we can move to analyzing them. This supports us as we revisit important parts of a text we've read before and place these parts against ones we are reading now. We think across these parts by noting what's similar, what's different, and how this affects our ideas."

- "Just as we may analyze the differences in the settings of stories that are linked by theme, powerful readers often analyze the differences in characters as well. We may pay attention to their backgrounds, relationships, pressures, perspectives, and how they respond to trouble. We study how those characteristics affect our ideas about the themes."

- "Just as we can compare how different characters respond to trouble in thematically linked texts, we can compare ourselves to the characters we are studying. Doing this highlights a powerful truth that just as characters in literature often change in response to trouble, we too can change in response to our reading. That is, we can allow the characters in our stories to change how we think, feel, and act in the world."

- "Athletes access all their skills from the moment a competition begins and so do readers. We access all our reading practices from the moment we start reading. We try to process what is happening in the story, at the same time as we ask ourselves, 'What is this story starting to be about?' And then we keep adding in new information, and having new insights, as we read."

Part Three: Literary Devices and How We Are Affected by Texts

- "Powerful readers allow the texts we read to affect us in powerful ways. We pay attention to the objects that repeat in our texts, working to understand the deeper significance these objects may hold. We understand that physical objects may act as symbols for themes and ideas."

- "Another part of the text that is often symbolic is the title. Readers often think and talk about the potential meanings of titles. We do this work part way through our reading and as we finish a text."

- "Readers know that in good stories, details matter. We read with a special alertness to the details of our texts. We work to figure out the possible meanings of perplexing or unexplained details."

- "Readers also pay special attention to repetition—to lines or scenes that feel parallel. Usually there will be significance in those repeated moments, and readers think, talk, and write about their potential meaning."

- "Readers analyze characters' perspectives and points of view as a way to find deeper meanings in texts. One way they might do this is to think about the significance of characters' perspectives on the possible meanings of a story. Readers might ask themselves, 'How does the story go because this character is telling it? Would it go differently if a different character was telling the story?'"

UNIT SEVEN

Test Preparation

MARCH/APRIL

(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: R/S)

This version of the test preparation unit was created in early 2011, based on the most recent, up-to-date knowledge on the 2011 tests and the New York State Learning Standards. It reflects a wide body of expert knowledge and it received acclaim from schools across New York and the country. Many of the preparation tips in this unit are classic tips that will be helpful regardless of changes to the test.

The first thing to remember as you prepare students for state reading tests is that the tests are, in fact, *reading tests*. They test the level at which a student can read with strong comprehension and, in most states, including New York, they test a student's rate as well—the pace at which he or she reads with strong comprehension. In 2011, the level of text that fourth graders were expected to read and comprehend was higher than ever before. The good news is that much of what is tested is what we teach throughout the year. Students who read at high reading levels with solid reading rates, meaning they read with stamina and fluency, do well. Students who read below grade level, or who read so slowly that they take an unusually long time to finish books and texts, perform poorly on state tests. Thus, the best preparation for state tests is to teach your students to be stronger readers, tackling stamina, volume, and comprehension simultaneously. A major aim of this unit is to support students in bringing forward strategies for each genre that they have been taught throughout the year. And, perhaps most importantly of all, this unit is about supporting students in thinking logically and flexibly and transferring all they know to their test-taking.

Stamina, Resilience, and Rate

Stamina is a critical factor in test-taking. Test-takers in 2011 were asked to read for *seventy*-minute blocks, during which time they encountered a great variety of texts. We cannot expect students to maintain focus and use a repertoire of strategies across many texts over seventy minutes if they have never had the opportunity to do this work. In addition to being asked to read for longer amounts of time, students were asked to read longer texts. We cannot stress enough the value of continuing to support students in building their reading stamina, both in the amount of time they read and the length of texts they read.

We recommend that you build in one day each week, perhaps called "Reading Marathon Day," in which students are given the opportunity to read for sixty minutes across a variety of texts. On this day, you could ask students to stop periodically to jot questions or reading responses based on the genre they are reading (more on this later), but aim to keep these interruptions relatively short so that students still have plenty of time to read. In general, substantial time to read just-right texts must be respected and protected each day of the week. In other words, don't substitute half an hour filling out a worksheet that has fifty words on it for half an hour during which a student may have read thirty pages of a book.

As the whole-class unit of study progresses, be sure to analyze reading logs, and make sure students are continually making time for independent reading inside and outside the typical school day. It is helpful to look at a reading log and think, "Is this student making time for reading?" and, "Is the time consistent?" If not, be sure to design creative ways to enable that student to keep up with his or her reading. You might, for example, look at the daily schedule with your class and talk about ways to fit in more reading time across the day.

Scheduling and Structures

Think carefully about how you will spend your time as well as how you will structure your days so you support independent reading, test prep, and the writing-about-reading work that your students may need in preparation for the test. One way to do this is to have a *reading/test-prep workshop* in which you teach your students how to read, talk about, and answer questions about short test-like texts, as well as multiple-choice strategies; a *writing workshop*, in which you teach quick, purposeful writing, especially writing-about-reading and writing for the test; and a separate time for *independent reading*, when students continue to read just-right chapter books. During some of independent reading you could continue your small-group test-related work with students. During test-prep workshop, while students practice, you will circulate, coach students, and support them with their test-prep work. Fitting all this into the day will mean you may have to change something in students' schedule. Some schools protect reading time during class and accomplish their test prep during Extended Day or

After School. Other schools have their independent reading time during a separate, protected block and use what used to be the reading workshop times for test prep. Yet other schools substitute test prep or independent reading for some of their social studies work for two or three weeks.

Because of the possible emphasis on nonfiction texts, we recommend that you use science and social studies as a time for students to be reading a lot of nonfiction texts in at least thirty-minute blocks. Aim to provide students with a variety of texts similar in length and format to the ones they'll be reading on the test—informational passages that are two or three pages in length and that include text features such as diagrams, photos, and captions, as well as narrative nonfiction pieces like biographies. You can also provide students with interviews, advertisements, and, in grade four, how-to pieces. Give students opportunities to teach each other what they are reading, and continue to emphasize boxes-and-bullets and other finding-the-main-idea strategies.

Getting Ready: Assembling Materials for Test Prep

Assemble test-prep material by collecting state tests from previous years. If you live in a state other than New York, make your own packet of texts from actual tests. Assemble texts from the last few years of state tests, using texts from earlier grades as well as your own grade, and put the passages in order of difficulty. So, if you are a fifth-grade teacher, you might have on the top of the pile a realistic fiction story from third grade, then another more difficult third-grade passage, then another; then the easiest passage from fourth grade, then another fourth grade, then another. The first day you review with kids, you will use the easiest text. Then you'll assess student success and either move to a harder text, stay with the easier one, or differentiate by groups. (A word of caution: While it might be tempting to think that strugglers need lots of practice reading too-hard texts, the evidence is overwhelming that they can't and don't read these. The last thing these readers need is to spend the three weeks before the test working with texts they can't read!) Be sure that some of the texts you use are longer, at least two to three pages in length.

As you design these packets, keep in mind the genres that students are likely to encounter according to their grade level. We suggest you sort materials by genre, and then by difficulty. Create some packets with lower-level texts, some with medium-level, and some with higher-level texts and aim to match these packets to readers' levels as much as possible so that students can practice test-taking strategies in texts that they can read.

Look at last year's state test first, and then look to the year before and keep in mind the genres students are apt to encounter on the state test. Here's our assessment of common possible texts for the NYS ELA. If you work in a New York State School, we recommend you visit the NYS ELA website: http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/ela/. See our website, www.tc.readingandwritingproject.com, for levels of passages from previous years' tests. Previously tested genres for fourth grade include:

Narrative (Story) Structure:	**Expository Structure (Nonfiction):**
Realistic Fiction	Reports
Historical Fiction	Information Pieces
Folktales	How-to Pieces
Book Excerpts/Literary Works	Interviews
Narrative Nonfiction (including Biography and Autobiography)	Questions and Answers
	Letters
	Poetry
	Narrative Poems

As well as using past tests, we recommend that you supplement your packets with additional material. One way to do this is to take a text such as a short story, article, or poem, and make a series of test-like questions to go with it. Good sources for these texts are *Highlights*, *Cricket*, *Cobblestone*, *Read and Rise*, *StoryWorks*, and *Sports Illustrated for Kids*. You might put these questions in the same order for each text so the first question is a main idea question, the second is vocabulary in context, the third is about mood/emotion/tone, and the fourth is a genre question, and so on. Then, make the same kinds of questions for different levels of texts—a story at a J/K level, a story at an M/N level, a story at a P/Q level. This will allow you to track how a student is doing on particular kinds of reading work at each level. It may be that a student can't answer main idea questions; it may be that he can only answer them successfully until the text is past Level N. In that case, you'll know that past that level he doesn't need main idea help, but rather, some strategies for reading too-hard texts, such as skimming, summarizing, underlining, jotting, and using pictures and headings. Teach him those as you continue to sharpen his main idea strategies, such as reading the first and last sentence only of each paragraph.

Organize the texts, deciding on the order of the different genres, so this supports your teaching. You will be using these texts to reinforce the reading strategies, predictable questions, languages, and strategies for answering multiple-choice questions.

How to Approach Test Prep and Getting Started on Accessible Texts

There are two main approaches to test prep to get students ready for their daily learning and practice. First, students must be alert as they read. They should have expectations of how a text will go based on their understanding of a particular genre. In fictional stories, students should read thinking about what challenges the main character faces and how he or she resolves these problems. Teach students to be alert for some of the predictable questions as they read, such as the lesson a text teaches, or the big, main idea of a text.

Secondly, students need to be able to read the question stem and predict the answer before looking at the answer choices. This way, as they read they'll do much more smart reading work and won't be seduced by the distracters among the answers. In fact, the first few times students practice, you might choose to not give them the answer choices and instead have them write in the answer and/or circle in the text the part that supports their answer. Students are easily confused by multiple-choice answers (that's the point of the distracters); therefore, it's important to teach them to construct a text-based response first, before revealing the possible answers. For a day or two, you could have them write answers to questions without showing them the answers; then teach them to cover the answers, go back to the text and predict the answer based on their understanding, then match their prediction to the answer choices.

You might find that you can do a lot of your test preparation in the beginning using short texts with which students are already familiar, introducing the kinds of questions that will be asked, and teaching students how to infer the answers from the texts. When you know students are familiar with a story, you have a special window into assessing because you'll know whether it is the language of the questions with which they are struggling. If this is the case, you can do some small-group instruction on common test language.

Begin the work with a prompted read-aloud of one text with partner talk, and then have your students immediately answer the multiple-choice questions. If you start with realistic fiction, choose the easiest text first. Assess students' success. Decide if you need to address what the test is looking for when certain kinds of questions are posed. Do you need to teach your students to determine the meaning of vocabulary words by reading them in context? Do you need to teach them that the main idea or the theme usually refers to a big lesson the character learns or that we learn? Do this again the next day, probably with a prompted read-aloud, or if you think students are ready, with silent partner reading and partner talk as they go. Then do a third day on the same genre, with silent reading and independent work and with small-group work, if you need it, though you may be coaching during this time and doing some small-group work in Extended Day. Another option is to make test prep not an isolated act and to have partner work be heavy on Days Two and Three, and wean until partners meet on Day Five after they have read and answered the questions. A possible week of test prep might go like this *(see following page)*:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Shared Experience	Heavy Partner Work	Heavy Partner Work	Less Partner Support	Independent
Together the class works on reading one text and answering the questions. The teacher leads the class by providing students with prompts and strategies that will help them navigate and hold onto the text, as well as demonstrating through think-alouds. Some sections are read aloud while other sections are read together or in partnerships	After a minilesson is given, partners read the leveled text together and stop to talk about what they've read. You will confer with partners as they read. Next, partners read each question and talk about what it means and what they have to do as test-takers to answer it. Then they write an answer in a short, simple sentence. Then they look at the choices and pick the answer that is closest to theirs, unless there is a better answer. You will confer with partners as they answer the questions. At the end of the workshop, partners who read the same passage gather in small groups to compare their choices and to discuss why they chose them. You will intervene by pushing students to explain their logic, by teaching a strategy, and by teaching content (alliteration, metaphor, main idea) and/or to compliment.	After a minilesson is given, partners read the leveled text together and stop to talk about what they've read. You will confer with partners as they read. Next, partners read each question and talk about what it means and what they have to do as test-takers to answer it. Then they write an answer in a short simple sentence. Then they look at the choices and pick the answer that is closest to theirs unless there is a better answer. You will confer with partners as they answer the questions. At the end of the workshop, partners who read the same passage gather in small groups to compare their choices and to discuss why they chose them. You will intervene by pushing students to explain their logic, by teaching a strategy, and by teaching content (alliteration, metaphor, main idea) and/or to compliment.	After a minilesson is given, students read alone (reading the same passage(s) as their partner), then talk about what they've read. You will confer with individuals as they read. Then the students answer the test questions alone before discussing the choices they made and why they made them. If there is a disagreement, they will revisit the text. You will confer with partners as they discuss the choices they made.	After a minilesson is given, students read alone (reading the same passage(s) as their partner) and answer the questions.* You will observe and take notes as students read and answer the questions. These notes will inform your small-group instruction. Partners meet afterwards to discuss their answers and how they reached them. You will confer with partners as they discuss the choices they made. **As the test approaches, give students time limits that match those of the test.*

Students benefit from doing this work first in partnerships on accessible texts. Encourage them to write on their texts just as they will on the ELA test. For tips on teaching into students' note-taking, see the sections on predictable questions by genre and road-mapping, further on in this write-up.

After a day or two on accessible short texts, do the same kind of work at the level of the test, with the exception of kids who read far below grade level. These students may need to keep practicing on texts that are closer to their level, and to move more slowly toward ones at grade level. Then repeat these days across genres, not forgetting to include all the kinds of narrative, non-narrative, and poetry that will be on the test.

Progression of the Unit

The big work of this unit is not to teach new reading strategies for each genre, but to support students in bringing forward all they have learned all year about each genre. This unit, then, is not about teaching students that realistic fiction pieces have a problem and a solution and that the character often changes. This unit is about *reminding* students all they already know about the elements of realistic fiction and teaching them ways that questions that ask about these elements might be phrased. It is also about helping students to see connections between genres—for example, reminding them to use all they know about story structures in fiction to identify important elements in biographies. The work, then, will be to support students in reading passages and holding onto meaning, to review strategies students already know for each genre, to teach strategies to quickly identify genres, and to teach predictable question types for each. You will organize your teaching around genres, teaching narrative structures, non-narrative (expository) structures, and poetry, coaching your students to bring forward all they know, giving tips for identifying the genre, and teaching predictable questions for each genre.

During the final sessions of the unit (we recommend leaving about two to three days for this work), you will provide opportunities for students to practice the reading work they will be required to do on the test—reading flexibly across genres. During this part of the unit, provide your students with a variety of texts and support them in efficient use of strategies as they move from genre to genre.

For each genre, teach your students they can use the same strategies of marking the text, predicting, writing the answer, and then matching it to the choices. Gradually, they will come to just say the answer in their head and match it to the choice. To ready themselves to answer these questions, they need to know what to pay attention to as they read for each genre. Teach your students that they are guided in their reading by their knowledge of what kind of text is in front of them.

There are some common skills that help students tackle any text, including the ones of the test. Teach students to preview the text to ascertain its subject and structure, making a quick reading plan and breaking the text into manageable chunks. Then, when students read across these chunks they can use strategies to summarize,

synthesize, and determine where any difficulty lies and use the appropriate strategy to cope with it. There is a slight adjustment to the particular strategies students will use in reading and answering multiple-choice questions. On the day of the test, they cannot use the strategy of finding an easier text to help them, nor can they build prior knowledge by reading related tests, nor can they reject texts because they are boring or irrelevant to them. On the other hand, students *can* use a bundle of strategies to access recognizable and familiar schema to help them move through these texts and the commonly asked questions that follow. Help students realize and sharpen the strategies they know, coach them to make smart decisions about accessing strategies, and increase their familiarity with common text structures and test tasks. The goal of this unit is to create flexible and resilient readers.

Narrative

If it's a *narrative* text, readers expect to pay attention to and infer about characters. Students need to be alert for what kind of people characters are. What do they want? What challenges do they face? How do they overcome these challenges? How do they change? What do they achieve? What lessons are learned? In *historical fiction*, *biography*, *folktales*, and *science fiction*, there may be a question about the setting. Students may need to infer a lesson from the story. They will probably answer a question about how the character changes and how that change happens. They may need to infer the character's point of view or perspective.

One important note on biography and autobiography texts: research of our data shows that, in general, students do well on the questions asking about narrative aspects of these text types (e.g., what did the character want?), but they don't do as well on questions asking about the information taught in the passage. Be sure some of your teaching includes direct instruction on how to extract not just the story but also *information* from biographies.

Predictable Questions on Narrative Passages
What is the main problem or struggle in the story?
Which character trait would you use to describe the character?
What was the cause of this event?
What is the same about these two characters? What is different?
Why do you think the character took the action that she did?
Why do you think the author put this minor character in the story?
Which of the following is a detail from the story that explains how the character solves the problem?
Which of the following details is not important to the plot?
What can you conclude about the character from the story?
From whose point of view is the story told?
(Historical Fiction/Science Fiction) How does the setting fit with the story? Why did the author use this particular setting? What can we learn about the time period through the setting?
(Folktales) What moral or lesson does the passage teach?
(Biography) What were the character's achievements? What motivated the character to do what he or she did? Which of the following is a *fact* about the character's life?

Non-Narrative/Expository

If it's a *non-narrative* or *expository* text (including information texts, advertisements, and interviews), readers may expect to pay attention to and infer from the structure, headings, and topic sentences. Students will need to read ready-to-answer questions about the purpose or main idea of the article. They may be asked to provide evidence to support the author's argument, or to differentiate between fact and opinion. They may need to identify the genre, and know where they would expect to find it. For both fiction and nonfiction, students will probably be asked the meaning of a vocabulary word in context.

If it's a *how-to* text, readers may expect to pay attention to what is being made or what the experiment is, to what's new at each step (usually a material and how it is being used), and to learn how the how-to object is used or works or what it shows. There may be questions about what items are needed in a step, or what to do right after or right before the step. Students may need to consider the main purpose of the article as well as the most important part.

Predictable Questions on Non-Narrative Passages
What is the main idea of the passage?
What is the article mostly about? What is the purpose of the article?
Why is the author giving this information?
Which detail supports the main idea that _____? What is the purpose of the illustration/diagram?
What is the structure of the passage?
Which of the following is a fact from the passage? Which of the following is an opinion from the passage?
(Interview) What do the questions that are being asked tell us about the main purpose of the interview?

Poetry

If the text is a *poem*, readers should expect to pay attention to what the big meaning of the poem could be, what the poem is mostly about, or what it demonstrates or teaches. There may be questions about imagery, or the meaning or symbolism of a part or line. Students may have to answer a question about figurative language such as personification, simile, or metaphor. In all texts, for all grades, readers consider the author's purpose, asking themselves, "What does the author want to teach me? What does he or she want me to feel?"

Predictable Questions on Poetry
Read these lines from the poem _____. What do these lines most likely mean?
Which line best describes how _____ expresses _____?
What point of view do _____ and _____ share?
There is alliteration in lines _____ and _____.
Which of these words from the poem imitate a _____.
The author is telling you _____ about the characters.
The character in the middle decided to _____. Which element of poetry is not found in these stanzas?
What feeling is the speaker expressing in the poem?
The statement _____ (figurative language) means _____.
What is the rhyme scheme on the first stanza of this poem?
The tone of the poem is _____?
According to the _____ the _____ symbolizes _____?
The narrator sees the main character in the poem as _____.
How does the poet feel about _____?
Who is talking in the poem?

Reading a Variety of Texts

During this part of the unit, students will read a variety of texts and will need to think flexibly and draw on strategies they have learned while studying the different text types. Your teaching points, then, should focus on using a repertoire of strategies. Teach students to determine the text type and read strategically, holding onto predictable questions for that genre as they read. You'll want to coach your struggling readers with modified strategies, helping them to make sense of what they are reading and to not get too hung up on holding onto predictable questions.

Road Mapping: Reading Passages Actively and Annotating in Smart Ways

One of the most important skills test-takers can have is active reading—not just reading for the ideas in the passage but using the *structure, or genre* of the passage in order to hold onto ideas and to locate details easily when they approach the questions. Grouping information into categories is a much more effective way to hold onto ideas than trying to remember all of the details from the passage.

One way test-takers can practice reading actively is by making a "road map" of a passage—a mini-outline that helps them to hold onto the overall structure of the passage, get a sense of important ideas, and quickly locate relevant details from the passage to answer questions. For many test-takers, underlining ideas is not as effective as jotting a few keywords or a phrase after each section to help them remember what is stated there. Many test-takers either underline too many ideas to be able to differentiate important ones, or don't understand what they are underlining. If you find that is the case, encourage your students to put ideas into their own words in the margins. Doing so not only boosts their understanding but also provides a clearer reference to locate answers. You can teach students how to create road maps depending on the passage type. Road maps should consist of the gist (main idea or most important ideas) of each section, written in the margins at the end of that section, as well as a few notes that will help them answer commonly asked questions, such as the main idea or main problem.

Underlining parts of the text is a helpful strategy for some test-takers. Of course, you will need to determine which students in your class benefit from this and which don't. This strategy won't be helpful for those students who underline almost the whole text. It is also helpful if students spend time underlining or starring the parts of the texts where they found or inferred their answers. This benefits them when they talk to a partner about how they are answering questions, and it helps you see what they are doing so that you can then coach them. For instance, a student may underline a part where she found or inferred the answer to question number 3, and write a "3" in the margin next to it so you can see what she is doing. Marking up the text also prompts students to revisit earlier parts. A word of caution: this is meant as a temporary scaffold, which you will work to remove as the test approaches.

Reading Difficult Passages and Students Who Struggle with Road Mapping

Road mapping is an effective strategy when students are reading difficult passages. When passages are difficult, chunking the passage into smaller sections can be helpful. Students may need to stop more often to jot down a gist. If students struggle to jot down gists of the main ideas for sections, they can also jot down words that seem important, which will offer clues to the structure of the passage and where to find answers to detail questions.

Encourage students who struggle with timing to annotate the text with symbols so they can locate important details more easily. For example, when reading narratives, students can put a "P" near sections that deal with the main problem and a "C" near sections where a new character is introduced.

Multiple-Choice Questions

Determining question types can be very effective for some students. But do monitor your students' use of this strategy carefully. What is most important is that students take the time to really understand what the question is asking them to do. Don't let students waste valuable time figuring out question types unless they are proficient at reading the passages. Note that this strategy may not be effective for strugglers, who should just focus on making sense of the passages.

Strategies for multiple-choice questions differ depending on the type of question. For example, for questions that ask about details in the passage, test-takers who have the time and know-how to scan and find passages should go back to the section being referenced to find the answer so they won't be swayed by wrong answer choices that are especially tempting (and written to lure readers away from the right answer). But on main idea questions, test-takers should predict the answer based on what they believe to be the main idea. Teach test-takers the common question types and teach them to differentiate one question-type from another. To do this, help them understand the different ways that each question-type might be worded.

Main Idea Questions

These are about the passage overall. Wrong answers to these questions will usually be answers that are true and grounded in the passage, but are about only one part of the passage rather than encompassing the whole passage. To answer main idea questions, it's often best for readers to think about (and generate) the main idea before reading over the optional answer choices—this way readers won't be swayed by choices that are only about part of the passage. When looking at the answer choices, it's best for a reader to ask, not "Is this true of the passage?" but rather, "Does this answer choice

apply to the whole passage or to just one part of the passage?" Test-takers should read *all* of the choices before selecting one.

Possible main idea questions:

- What is the *main idea* of the passage?
- Which is the *best title* for the passage?
- What is the passage *mostly* about?
- What is this story *mostly* about?
- Which choice best tells what the passage is about?
- The story is *mainly* about . . .
- What's the *main* problem in the first paragraph?
- In the story, what is the character's *main* problem?
- Where does *most* of the story take place?

Main Idea Question Strategies for Strugglers

Because strugglers often have difficulty holding onto larger chunks of text, you can teach them to stop frequently to think about the main idea. On nonfiction passages, they can stop after the first paragraph and think, "What is the *main* thing this passage is teaching me?" and they can continue to stop after each paragraph or section, considering whether what they have read fits with their prediction about what the passage is mainly teaching or whether to revise their idea. They can do this same work on fiction passages, asking themselves instead, "What is the character's *main* problem?"

Detail Questions

These questions ask about details or about parts of the passage, and the answers can be found directly in the passage. These questions are often referred to as "right there" questions. The best way to answer these questions is usually to go right back to the part of the passage where the detail can be found. You can teach students that after reading a detail question, it helps to think, "Will this be at the start of the passage? In the middle? Toward the end?" and go to that section of the passage rather than rereading the entire passage. Even if test-takers think they know the answer, they should *reread* that part to double check. Then they should predict what the answer will be *before* looking at the choices.

Some detail questions are essentially sequencing questions. While it is not important that students learn all of the different varieties of detail questions, it is important to support their use of accumulation strategies for fiction and nonfiction texts. As students read fiction, they can hold onto plot details that are related to the main problem.

As they read nonfiction, they can look for text structures that have a sequence, such as how-to or cause-and-effect structures.

Possible Detail Questions:

- What does the character do after he goes to the park?
- Which detail best supports the idea that . . . ?
- Which fact from the article best describes . . . ?
- Which event in the story happens first?
- In which section of the article can you find the answer to the following . . . ?
- What does line 4 mean when it says . . . ?
- What happens right before . . . ?
- Which phrase *best* explains how the character felt?
- According to the passage, what happened *right before* . . . ?
- What does this line mean?
- Which event happens *first* in the story?

Detail Question Strategies for Strugglers

It is very important that students learn to read detail questions very carefully. Many wrong answer choices are details from the text but they do not answer the question posed. Teach strugglers to restate the question before thinking about an answer. If it is clear from the question where in the passage to look for the answer (for example, sequencing questions often refer to a section of the passage, such as "Which event happens first?"), then students can go back to that section to look for the answer. However, particularly when the passages are longer, strugglers won't have time to go back and look for details. One strategy you can teach is to take notice of details that seem to repeat in the passage, as these will often be asked about in the questions. Strugglers also can use what they know about the genre to find relevant details.

Inference Questions

These questions ask about ideas that are implicit (not explicitly stated or "right there") in the passage. These questions are also often called "Think and Search" questions. It is important to note that students are not learning new reading strategies to deal with this question type. Instead, they are using strategies such as envisioning, developing theories, and synthesis to draw conclusions about texts. There are types of inference questions, such as cause-and-effect, theme, and author's purpose. It may not be necessary to teach students these different question types. It can be confusing, particularly for strugglers,

to think about and attempt to manage multiple question types. What is important for all readers to know about these questions is that they are about what conclusions a reader can draw from the passage and that the answers will not be explicitly stated.

Typically, these questions call on test-takers to use ideas they can generate by thinking about the whole passage. Wrong answer choices are often about only one part of the passage and sometimes a wrong answer will contradict some part of the passage. Test-takers should read the question and predict an answer, making sure that their prediction doesn't go against any part of the passage. Then, test-takers could look at each answer choice, thinking about whether each one is a conclusion or a big idea that can be drawn from the passage. They should read *all* answer choices before choosing one.

Possible Inference Questions:

- After reading the article, what could the reader conclude?
- Why did the author most likely include this character in the story?
- What will the characters most likely do next?
- Which event from the story could not really happen?
- The word "degree" in sentence two most likely means . . .
- Why did the author most likely write the article?
- What is the main lesson that the story teaches us?
- After reading the passage, what could the reader conclude?
- This passage is most like a . . .
- Why did the author most likely write this passage?

Inference Question Strategies for Strugglers

This question type can be the most difficult for strugglers. It is important that strugglers learn to identify genres in order to think about questions that will mostly likely be asked as they read. For example, on fiction pieces the reader is often asked about the lesson that can be learned from the story. It is helpful for strugglers to look for the lesson *before* going to the questions, and then look for the choice that matches their prediction.

Wrong Answer Types

These strategies are for test-takers who are already doing well and who could use these strategies to avoid wrong answer traps and potentially score a few more points. A word of caution: some test-takers misuse these strategies and eliminate the correct answer. As with any strategy, these may not be appropriate for all of your students. However, they

may be effective as an alternative option for students who get hung up by answer choices that relate to only part of the passage or that misconstrue a detail from the passage.

Additionally, some readers will be tempted by choices where the answer relates to the reader's outside knowledge but is not within the scope of the passage—these answers may sound correct to the reader. Urge test-takers to stick to ideas from the passage, not from their previous experiences with the topic. One of the best strategies test-takers can use to avoid being swayed by tempting wrong answers is to predict an answer before looking at the choices.

Classic Wrong Answers

- choices that say the opposite of the main idea or the facts
- choices that twist the facts or the main idea; an example could be naming only part of the main idea
- choices that mention true points from the passage but that don't answer the question being asked

Teaching Students to Deal with Difficulty

You will absolutely want to teach students ways of dealing with difficulty. Even just-right texts pose puzzles. Too often, students generate one idea about a text and then continue to hold tightly to that idea even when the upcoming text points to the fact that it is wrong. Reading is a process of revision. Accomplished readers continually realign in our minds what we thought the text said with what we are now uncovering. The revision-of-reading work that students do now will influence each successive first draft on-the-run reading as they go forward. If a student realizes she misread because she imagined that an extraneous detail was the main idea, the next time she reads she'll be less apt to do this. Jotting notes or headings in the margins helps summarize text, so students can quickly refer to those sections rather than reread them, which they won't have time to do. Of course, all students won't necessarily have to do this type of work to be successful. Then, too, you'll want to wean students off of this strategy as they get closer to the test, as they won't have time to do this self-correcting under exam conditions.

Teach students to skim texts that are very hard for them, to summarize as they look for main ideas, to move past hard words unless there are questions that refer to those words, and to dig into hard parts only for the purpose of answering questions. One of the most important things you can teach students is to learn to read on, to keep going and to not get demoralized when the text is too hard. Moving on and staying alert to the things they need to look for should help students do better on each subsequent text. When texts are really far-reaching, you may want to teach students to read and underline just the first sentence of every paragraph to get a sense of what that passage is about, and then to move to the questions. Sometimes just reading the first sentence of each paragraph is enough for a student to answer a question. If the answer isn't in the first sentence, it may at least be in that paragraph.

Students will inevitably face difficult words on the ELA. The vocabulary work you do just prior to the test, then, will be synonym- and contextual-clue-based to prepare students. Because this work will occur on the brink of the test, now is probably not the best time to teach readers to persevere over difficult words or to make a stab at pronouncing them. Instead, for now, teach students to substitute a synonym or best-guess understanding for an unknown word, and to keep on reading. Tell them to underline the difficult word, too, so when they reach the end of the passage they can go back and tackle that word if necessary. The question they will most likely need to pose will read something like, "In line 16, what does the word *X* mean?" Students can often figure out the answers to questions such as these by thinking about what's happening in that part of the story or article. Keep in mind, too, that to answer a question like that, students do not need to pronounce the word.

As students approach the test, you can also teach them specific multiple-choice strategies, such as monitoring time by figuring out how many questions there are and how many minutes they have. Teach them strategies for elimination. For example, you might want to teach them to eliminate the answers that are found in the passage but to not answer the question. Or they can eliminate answer choices (only after they have read through all of these) when they think of the correct answer before they look at the answer choices that don't match or aren't close to their own. Show them how to mark their answer sheet and to avoid skipping any questions as they go. Teach them to return to questions they were unsure of if they have time at the end, and, most of all, teach them to keep going! This kind of teaching and learning is not invigorating and can only be sustained for a few weeks, so do it intensely, but briefly.

Small-Group Work

During this unit, you'll want to pull small groups each and every day during independent reading time, not during the test-prep workshop, when you need to be conferring with and coaching students as they read and answer questions. To form small groups, you'll want to review last year's test and do an item analysis for each student, noting his or her strengths and weaknesses. Look for patterns in your students' work on last year's test in order to ensure you are teaching skills your students really need. In other words, if a student answered a main idea question incorrectly on one passage, look to see if he or she answered other main idea questions incorrectly before putting that student in a small group on main idea. It could be that the passage was too hard or the student didn't understand the question as it was posed. If you believe this is so, work on predictable question prompts that ask about a main idea and confer about the student's independent reading. You'll also want to review your record keeping and observational notes throughout the unit, as well as completed test-prep passages, looking for patterns. You will pull together students who are having trouble with a particular genre, a level of passage, particular types of questions, test terminology, short answers, or distinguishing between a good answer and the best answer. Often teachers think they have to use new materials when working with small groups but, in fact, it is possible to reuse passages

and questions that students struggled with in the past, teaching them strategies to help deal with this difficulty in the future. That is, the goal isn't for students to be able to answer *a particular* question on *this* test. Rather, the idea is to teach them strategies that will help them tackle *similar* questions on future passages. You can also reuse a passage but create new questions that address whatever it is students do not quite understand. Students may benefit from an additional shared experience or shared reading of a particularly challenging part of the text or perhaps another shared writing experience for the short responses.

Read-Aloud

Your read-aloud will support students' multiple-choice work as well as their listening skills. When you read aloud as part of test prep, choose passages you think are similar to the ones students will encounter on the test, and that can be read in one sitting. The read-aloud will also be different in structure. Focus on getting your students oriented to the text and to their job as readers of such a text, rather than thinking aloud. Prompt readers for their upcoming listening and thinking work, rather than demonstrating this thinking after reading. In years past, the fourth-grade listening selection has been a narrative (though of course we can't guarantee this will true for next year), and in 2011 it was accompanied by five multiple-choice and three short-response questions. As you read aloud narratives, including realistic and historical fiction, plays, book excerpts, allegorical folktales, and biographies, continue to do the predictable question work described above. Help students to listen carefully as stories unfold swiftly, with their minds alert, ready to answer predictable questions. Start with high-interest short texts, and move only at the end to texts that are actually from the last few years' tests.

For the fiction and fable read-alouds, teach students to get ready to listen by thinking about what they know about how stories go and about their jobs as readers—they are mostly listening for *character*, *problem*, and *solution*. Prompt them to listen for clues about the setting and the characters. Use predictable questions for each genre to plan your think-alouds and student interactions. Be sure to refer to the charts you use in minilessons. After the first section of the story, encourage partners to turn and talk, and listen for how they may need coaching. Similarly, you might pause in the middle of the story, coaching students to turn and talk about what they've learned about the characters, their relationships, and the challenges they faced. As you get ready to read the end of the story, prompt students to listen for how people change and how problems are solved. Give them an opportunity again to turn and talk about these inferences. Finally, coach them to infer possible lessons the story teaches and to talk about the author's possible purposes. The next time you read aloud, have students talk to a partner beforehand, reviewing what they know about how stories go and what they need to pay attention to as they listen. Continue to interrupt the story so that they can turn and talk at appropriate intervals. Next time, move them to stop and jot their responses, and finally to jot responses to ELA-like short-answer questions. This way, the read-aloud prepares students both for the listening selection, explicitly teaching

them to listen with their minds turned on, and to hold a story in their heads, and for the multiple-choice sections, as they listen and come to expect predictable questions.

When you begin your read-aloud work on short passages, use prompts that help transfer what you've been doing earlier in the year to these texts. You might, for example, begin by saying, "We just learned some important information about Trudy. Turn and talk about what you learned. And what does that tell you about her?" Or "This lets me . . . Turn and talk about what this lets you know." Or "What's the big thing that just happened?" Or "Turn and talk about what you think is going to happen next in the story." Of course, you'll want to use test language as you make your way in this unit so that when you read aloud, the prompts will now sound like the types of questions students are asked on the test. For example, "Turn and talk about what Trudy wants." Or "Turn and talk about what words best describe Trudy. Trudy is . . ." Or "What's that part mostly about?" Or "If the story had continued, what would most likely have happened next?"

Because read-aloud will help students with both the listening selection and the multiple choice, be sure to read aloud each nonfiction genre. Students should expect that a nonfiction text is going to teach them something. In narrative nonfiction they need to use what they know about story (paying attention to characters, including the obstacles characters face, and their achievements), and what they know about nonfiction (looking for the specific idea a text teaches, and how the story demonstrates the idea). You'll especially want your test-prep read-aloud to include narrative nonfiction for grades that will encounter more of this structure. Common passages on the test include sports, historical and scientific figures, and fiction and narrative nonfiction in which the character is an animal.

Similarly, reading poetry aloud supports students' work on the multiple-choice section of the test. Some of the questions you'll want students to think about are: What is this poem mostly about? What does it teach? What is the big meaning of the poem? Teach them also to notice structure and to recognize and name imagery and figurative language in a poem, and to consider the effect of these.

Timing Guidelines

Because students are testing under timed conditions, eventually timing will need to be part of their preparation. Many students need additional coaching on how to use allotted time wisely, both to finish within the time constraints and to not rush through, finishing well before the time is over but not checking their work carefully. At first, what is paramount is that students get plenty of practice becoming more comfortable with test-taking strategies, such as note-taking while reading—so at the start of the test-prep unit, don't worry too much about timing.

One way to start practicing timing is to consider approximately how much time students will have on average for each passage in the section. Here are timing guidelines for the reading comprehension section:

Grade	Number of Passages	Number of Questions	Minutes
4	7–8	43	70

On average, students should take about nine minutes to read each passage. Of course longer passages will take more time, shorter passages not as much. You can give students a baseline timing assessment by giving them two passages, each two to three pages long, and accompanying questions, typically one fiction and one nonfiction. Ask students to read both passages and answer the questions using all of the strategies that they know, including marking up the passage. Record each student's time, making note of students who take much longer or much shorter than about eighteen minutes.

If you have students who take much longer than eighteen minutes, work with them on the strategies they are using to read the passage. They might be taking too long to read the passage, spending too much time marking it up before they go on to the questions. Or, they might be taking too much time going back to the passage to reread to find answers. Work with them on streamlining their active reading so that they are only writing basic gists for each section, and not underlining and highlighting too much. Also work with them on predictable questions for each genre as well as strategies for each question type so they don't spend too much time rereading the passage for answers to questions that aren't explicitly stated, or scouring the passage looking in the wrong places for details.

If you have students who finish really quickly, check their responses. Our data shows us that test-takers, strugglers in particular, often read much too quickly. When students miss more than one or two questions, teach them to stop more frequently, thinking about predictable questions for each genre and holding onto as much information as possible before going to the questions. If most questions are correct, you might not have to work too much on timing. One final note about timing—it usually is more beneficial for students to spend more time on each passage instead of spending their remaining time going back and checking their answers at the end, as their recall will be much sharper right after reading a passage.

Things to Work on with Struggling Test-Takers

You will want to teach your strugglers strategies for navigating difficulties on the test. In the beginning, it is helpful to teach them some strategies for tackling multiple-choice questions. Teach students to read each question and ask, "What does the question mean?" "What is it asking me to do?" You might want to create a game that helps students learn what predictable questions are asked on their test. Questions on the test fall into one of two categories: questions that ask the reader to think of the whole of the text and questions that ask them to think of a part, a line, or a detail. You might want to put questions in an envelope, and on the outside of one side of it write "W" and on the other side write "D." Students can dump out the questions and turn them over, and then take

turns reading the questions and putting them under the "W" (think of the whole of the text) or "D" (think of a detail from the text).

Questions to include in the envelope:

Whole-Text Question	Detail Question
After reading the passage, what could the reader conclude?	What's the *main* problem in the first paragraph?
In the story, what is the character's *main* problem?	Which phrase *best* explains how the character felt?
This passage is *most* like a . . .	According to the passage, what happened *right before* . . . ?
Where does *most* of the story take place?	What does this line mean?
The story is *mainly* about . . .	Which event happens *first* in the story?
What is this story *mostly* about?	
Why did the author *most likely* write this passage?	
This passage is *mostly* about . . .	

You can also create the game "Which one of these sentences doesn't belong?" Students read through a series of test questions and find the ones that are asking them to do the same work as a test-taker in order to find the one that is different. For example:

- What does the word _____ most likely mean?
- Which word means about the same as . . . ?
- In the first sentence, the word _____ means . . . ?
- Why did the author most likely write this passage?

It is wise to teach these youngsters to answer the question *before* looking at the choices, and then to look for the answer choice that best matches theirs. If a student is having trouble answering the question, teach him to think back over the story and retell it to himself. If this does not help, he must return to the story—but not to the beginning. Instead, he should think about the part of the story that corresponds to the question and return to that part, then reread and answer the question.

Often when novice or struggling test-takers have trouble with a question, they pick an answer they remember being in the story, and while not incorrect, it is not the best answer to the question. It is wise to teach your students that most of the answers will be found in the story, and are not really wrong, but only one answers the question the best.

Among the first things you'll want to make sure students know is that boldfaced words are very important, and to pay attention to them because they offer guidance about what to look for in the passages. For example, often test questions set words like *before* and *after* in bold typeface.

To help students understand test language you may want to create games that they can play for ten to fifteen minutes a few times a week. One such game is Concentration.

Cards are made with test language written on them and then students have to find the match that is a description of what the test-taker has to do. It might look like this:

Right Before	**Mostly About**	**Best Describes**	**Not**
Recall or look back in the text for what came directly in front of that sentence, part, or step.	Think about the whole text.	Words that tell you what kind of person someone is based on that person's actions	Refers to a statement that is not true about the text
Main Problem	**Most Like**	**Most Likely**	**Right After**
Describes the biggest issue or challenge the character is facing	Identify the genre of the passage you read.	Based on what you read, what is the best explanation or meaning?	Recall or look back in the text for what came next.

The actual cards you use should reflect the words you've been using to talk about test language and types of questions.

You'll want to teach your students the language of the test. We assume that students know what the phrases *mostly about*, *most likely*, and *most important* mean. You might find it necessary to make these terms concrete for your students by infusing them into your classroom's daily life. You may even make collages of pictures from magazines that can be sorted a few different ways, for example, clothes, hair accessories, and winter accessories. Then you can ask your students what they think the collage is mostly about. Some students will look and sort and count that there are more clothes than anything else, and they'll say this is mostly about clothes. But students with a more sophisticated sense of sorting into a concept will be able to see that most of the items fit under a broader category, like "things you wear."

Sequence words are used a lot on the third-grade test, and so you should weave these words through your daily classroom life as well. Ask students to look at today's schedule and find out what they will be doing *first*, *right before* lunch, and *right after* reading workshop. You may also ask students to line up for lunch by using sequence words.

Students are often asked in the listening section to identify opinions, and many teachers have found it easy to teach kids the words that commonly indicate opinion, such as *best*, *most*, *greatest*, *worst*, and *very*. To support students in understanding opinion statements, it is helpful to teach these outside of the test. It is important that students understand what an opinion statement sounds like because it isn't necessary to understand the passage to be able to get this question correct. You may support students' understanding of opinion statements by giving them a factual statement, like: "Today is Wednesday and we have PE at ten o'clock." Next, you could ask students to generate opinion statements about this fact. For example, "Wednesday is the best day of the week because we have PE." Bringing test language into our students' lives will demystify it and help kids gain confidence in their test-taking abilities. You may want to create a test-prep game that teaches into fact and opinion. You can create categories like baseball, movies, New York, and in an envelope put opinion and fact statements. Students will sort these into fact and opinion piles by looking for the statements that

contain opinion words. For example, in the category "movies," students will read a sentence strip that has "*It's Complicated* was the funniest movie of 2009," and would then discuss whether this a fact or an opinion. They would put this in the opinion pile because it contains the opinion word *funniest*. But if they pulled the strip that said, "*Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* is a 3D movie," they would put that into the fact pile because it doesn't contain an opinion word.

You want to study what kinds of questions students are getting wrong and make up practice materials that work specifically with these kinds of questions. You'll want to create questions that mimic those your students struggled with and have them practice in small groups during test prep. For instance, to support students on a difficult multiple-choice question, pull all of the students who answered "B" and invite them to discuss *why* in a small-group setting. Ask, "What in the story made you choose B? Do you think it is the *best* answer?" Or, you can pull kids who chose B and C together and have a debate: "Remember, what is the *best* answer?" Main idea and true/false questions are very effective for this type of small-group work.

While students are reading the test you'll move around and confer, assessing to understand what they are doing well and what they are struggling with as they read each genre, passage, and text level. When students are reading the passages some things you might want to ask them are:

- Tell me how you're making sure you understand what you're reading.
- Can you show me how you figured out what that part was about?
- Explain to me what you're doing to hold onto what you're reading.
- Do you agree with your partner when he/she said what that part is about?

When students are reading the questions and answering them with a partner or by themselves you want to hear their process, noticing where they get derailed or what is working so you can teach into or compliment their work.

- What does that question mean?
- What is the question asking you to do?
- What do you think the answer is?
- Can you think back and recall the information that answers that question?
- If you can't recall the information, where will you go to find it? Will you look at the beginning, middle, or end of the text? How do you know?
- How does what you are saying answer the question?
- Could there be any other possible answers?
- Is there a better answer?
- Tell me how you decided that is the answer.

Struggling and Emergent Readers—Decoding

Many of our struggling and emergent readers have difficulties decoding and comprehending test passages that tend to be above their independent reading levels. If you notice some of your readers are still having a hard time working through difficult texts, you might need to devote more instructional time to decoding.

When students encounter a hard word to decode or comprehend, they can anticipate what the word should sound like and/or mean, checking what they think against what they see. Make sure they understand how to orchestrate the information. While reading, students should be sure the difficult word *looks right* (relying on graphophonic clues), *sounds right* (relying on syntax), and *makes sense* (relying on semantics). Help them learn strategies to be active meaning-makers as they read.

Most importantly, you'll want to constantly remind your students to be flexible word solvers, using strategies repeatedly, without losing a standard pacing through a text. Once students figure out a word, they need to be taught to reread, putting the word back into context so its meaning isn't lost. Rereading is indispensable for students who are having decoding issues. On the day of the test, however, it can be problematic for kids to reread because they'll risk running out of time to complete the passages and questions. Students might have a book in their baggie from which they reread passages or chapters in order to read with more automaticity and fluency. This book, which might change weekly, will make them feel more comfortable with rereading quickly in the crunch of test time. The goal of all this, of course, is to have students read through the whole passage with the best possible comprehension the first time.

Vocabulary Enrichment

For many students who are just starting to read texts that are full of literary or book language, the language of the test poses many challenges. The test values and assesses familiarity with book language. Often a student may understand a question, such as, "How is the character feeling in this part?" and she may correctly predict an answer, like "Nervous." But she won't recognize the word given in the answer, which may be "apprehensive" or "anxious." She'll know the character is a brave person but won't recognize "courageous."

In the weeks before the test, we can't teach *all* the words that students may encounter, but you can make an effort to enhance students' familiarity with book language and to broaden the range of words they recognize and use in conversation and in writing. An excellent activity teachers and students can do is to create word walls, collecting words that describe characters in different ways. The words can be sorted into categories, such as words that describe *happy*, or *sad*, *brave*, *mad*, *scared*, *mean*, *kind*, and the like. Underneath these headings, words can be listed that mean *mostly* the same thing, such as *frustrated*, *upset*, and *enraged*, for *mad*. Words can then be sorted from most to least, that is, the words that mean "more mad" can be put at the top of

the list, and the words that mean "less mad" can be put at the bottom. This visual cue helps students understand the graduated meanings of these words. We're not looking for students to learn dictionary meanings but to see, and hear, and try using a wider variety of literary synonyms.

Use these word walls as you stop and think aloud for the students during read-aloud. For example, you may pause and say, "I imagine Oliver is feeling, let's see, 'apprehensive,' right now." You may also prompt your students to use these words in their partner conversations during read-aloud—they may talk about how the character is feeling, using words from the word wall. When you do this, you'll find that students prompt for more categories of words, as they seek words that mean "proud" or "shy."

Students can also use these words on the Post-its they use to jot about their independent reading books. If they keep occasional Post-its that track what a character is feeling, they can revise or add to these Post-its using words from the word wall. When students write about reading (in their reader's notebooks, as they learn to write literary essays, or in getting ready to write about reading for the test), they can revise using more literary language to describe characters.

Ways to extend this word wall work include keeping word walls in social studies and science, studying words that are related to the units of study, and keeping a word wall of words that describe stories and nonfiction, such as *engaging*, *interesting*, *fascinating*, *disturbing*, *provocative*, *lively*, *fast-paced*, *informative*, and *action-packed*.

You may also want to create a "Concentration Synonym Game" or "Word Go Fish," in which students have to match the word with its definition. Creating games is fun and will be an effective way of helping your students extend their vocabulary. Who said that test prep had to be boring?

UNIT EIGHT

Informational Reading

Reading, Research, and Writing in the Content Areas

MAY

It's May. You made it. Congratulations! Many of you have the state test behind you, spring is in the air, and there is an entire month in front of you. As we exit a time in the year that is laden with pressure and high-stakes tests, we enter the year's finale. Chances are that energy and spirits are low for both students and teachers. It would be easy to coast through the next few weeks into the summer without doing much learning. But we owe it to ourselves and our students to create a unit that feels fun, not frivolous, and end the year strongly. This unit is designed to teach students to be as skilled readers in social studies or science texts as they are strong readers in literature. This means that in this unit, you'll focus not just on conveying the content of study, but teaching the reading skills to learn content successfully.

As you embark on this unit, it will feel similar to past units, like the nonfiction reading unit. Even though it might feel "same old, same old" to you, we also understand how students need multiple opportunities to practice tough new skills like reading well in a content area. This means we'll find ways to refocus and refresh this unit so that it feels like brand-new work for your students. The goals of this unit are clear: students will read multiple types of texts and gain rich background knowledge in a new subject, like local and state governments. Students will then follow their natural curiosities as they arise while reading and engage in quick forms of research (researching-on-the-go) about their topics. Students will move on and pursue a line of thinking that not only carries them into the past, but brings them into the present day, making connections between, say, historical events and current events.

This unit draws on the year's work in the Content Area Curriculum Calendar. To summarize the big reading and writing work of those units, students began the year with a focus on note-taking and using those notes as springboards to generate their own thinking in the content area. Students then moved on to using writing to learn

strategies in order to learn new content, such as summarizing, comparing and contrasting, and analyzing quotations to name a few. Students have also had multiple opportunities to practice using talk structures, such as clubs, to deepen thinking about subjects. This unit assumes that you can, in fact, gather a variety of texts, at different levels, so that all students can read texts they can understand, and that they can read more than one text on a subject—which is absolutely crucial to developing a critical awareness of perspective and point of view. If you're uneasy about these assumptions, you don't have to have every single thing in place. It feels important to describe best practices, even if we only aspire to some of them.

In a way, think of this unit as providing the "early steps in growing the future college students"—the children who will, some day, learn how to find their own texts on a subject, even if their teacher doesn't provide those texts. Students will know how to forge study partnerships, and will lean on the reading and writing strategies they are developing now, as they embark on their sociology class, or physics class. The Common Core State Standards raise the concept of students dealing with difficult texts. With the spirit of preparing students for college, you might choose to introduce excerpts of texts like *New York Bill of Rights*, showing students different strategies of how to tackle difficult texts. You may choose a variety of strategies to deal with difficult texts, ranging from the strategy of repeated readings to the method of shared reading to components of guided reading, such as the book introduction.

The drumroll of the unit will be ever-important at this time of year. As we've said before, engagement and enthusiasm might be at an all-time low due to the slew of tests students have been given. This drumroll should feel like a magic trick—something unexpected, surprising, and awe-inspiring. The first couple of days of this unit will break the routine and not be regular workshop days. To give shape to this unit, we'll look at the relationship between the government and the people. Of course, you would substitute content that is relevant to your particular classroom, at this particular time of year. You may decide to show a film or documentary, like *Liberty's Kids* (http://www.libertyskids.com/) or *Polk City Kids*. Film is an easy medium for kids to get lost in another time, developing a more instant connection before the unit begins. You might create a dramatic reenactment of the signing of the Bill of Rights or have students role-play a debate for and against the Articles of Confederation. You might encourage students to storytell by creating virtual picture stories, using images related to the topic paired with music and narration using simple, web-based software. Whichever option you choose, we invite you to spend the first few days of this unit building excitement, engagement, and background knowledge in this content area unit.

It will be important to put this experience into context for students. It's more than just watching a movie or dressing up and creating a reenactment. You'll want to contextualize this unit for kids. We imagine you'll set it up by saying something like, "Readers, we have just spent a day or two immersing ourselves in the relationships between government and the people. We are not just excited about this important historical concept; we also have a shared experience to kick off our new unit. This month, we'll be studying and researching the United States government together. We are creating a research community where we will get smart about this topic together."

This next part will feel like you are in a reality television show. As you may know from watching shows in the genre, a mission is at the heart of any reality show. The hosts of the shows set the team of contestants up with a mission, a task, or a project. You'll choose one student to act as a host and tell students that they will work in groups to creatively, originally, and accurately present their research findings to the class. End products could range from a teacher's favorite of having kids write and publish books to add to the classroom library, to students' writing and filming a newscast that briefs an audience on the big news stories from the topic. Other ideas include students writing, acting, and filming a historical event that is often overlooked when discussing state and local governments, creating a multimedia photo story where the readers compile a digital photo collage and embed narration using a software like *VoiceThread*, or writing and performing a series of Public Service Announcements to bring awareness to unjust or complicated issues during the time period. Since students will be working in groups, each group would have the opportunity to pick their own publication venue. These ideas are discussed in depth in the final part of this unit.

Doing this whole-class research is invaluable as a way to gather momentum and excitement about the journey ahead; it is also a way to begin to gather main ideas and big ideas about the topic. Very soon, your students will once again be reading lots and lots of information texts. As outlined in the Common Core State Standards, they will read for main ideas and details and they must be able to explain events and concepts based on specific information from the text. Providing your readers with rich background information on the time period will set them up to be able to contextualize and crystallize big ideas from their texts much more readily.

A Note on Materials

You'll need to gather as many resources as possible, from any sources at hand. Scour the school building for books on the study you want to launch. Visit the public library with your children, and have them bring back as many texts as they can find on the topic. Teach them about interlibrary loan, and book-request forms! Get online (you and your colleagues, not the kids yet), and sort through some of the great history websites and simulations that are out there—remembering to print some of the primary source documents that are foundational to this nation. Bookmark the sites of the Metropolitan Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, and other museums that have images and resources. Cue up a couple of clips from documentaries or history movies on one of your classroom computers, or a DVD player, or your own laptop at a station. It seems like there will never be enough money for us to buy all the nonfiction books we want—but the kids need us to teach history anyway, and they need us all to get involved in seeking texts and building libraries to support the studies that we think are important. Help each other share resources—this may be a time when you want to stagger your and your colleagues' teaching schedules, so that you can share materials.

As you gather your materials for this unit, know that this write-up invites you to organize your materials into two tiers. The first tier is a whole-class study. This is short, just a few days at the beginning of the first part. It's helpful to think of it as a survey

course—kids will be reading a smattering of broad texts about the topic. The second tier is subtopics, where you'll break the topic of, say, the relationship between the government and the people into subtopics. Many teachers have found success with organizing the materials for these subtopics into bins or text sets. For example, you might make some baskets of texts that are sorted into subtopics like the Bill of Rights, the branches of the New York State government, or local government, just to name a few examples. Student groups will rotate through these bins or text sets a number of times, three times in this write-up specifically—once at the end of the first part, once during the second part, and a third and final time during the third part. As you plan, you may have your students rotate through more or fewer subtopic bins or text sets.

If resources are limited, here are a few tips when assembling subtopic bins or text sets. First, create fewer bins with more materials in each. This means the groups of students may be larger, but there will be less content to prepare. Second, use all forms of literacy—visual literacy, like photographs; map literacy, like old and contemporary maps of an area; media literacy, like video or audio clips; digital literacy, including various Internet resources. Third, there are some helpful professional resources when compiling text sets, like Stephanie Harvey's *Toolkit Text*, Harvey "Smokey" Daniels' new book, *Texts and Lessons for Content-Area Reading*, or Lucy Calkins and Kathleen Tolan's *Units of Study for Teaching Reading, Grades 3–5*.

Part One: Forming a Research Community and Reading to Build Rich Background Knowledge

Covering content can feel expansive, at times. There are so many moving parts and nuances of a topic, like the United States government, that we may end up covering the entirety without going in depth. This first part is designed with this problem specifically in mind. It's designed to be fast, moving students from whole (the big topic) to part (a subtopic) quickly. This way, students get a sense of how that process happens with the collective support of the whole-class research community *before* moving into the following parts, which require more independent practice in smaller research groups.

Following the initial drumroll, the first day or so of this unit begins with a whole-class study regarding the big picture of the relationship between the government and the people. You might want to start by framing their study with the essential question, "Is the government ruled by the people or are the people ruled by the government?" You will have gathered students together to tell them that over the next few weeks, you'll be working in a research community—a community of researchers who will all be on the same project—to gain information and formulate ideas about the government. And, like a football team community, not everyone on the team is an expert in each position. Teammates will take on different aspects of the topic to learn and teach others. But before this happens—before students break off into subgroups—you'll first begin by establishing some common knowledge and then assigning kids to cover a specific aspect of the topic.

Let's get a sense for how that would look. For the first two or three days, you'll probably want to teach your students that researchers read fairly quickly, trying to get a broad overview of the time period, the important historical places, events and people, the biggest conflicts, and also of important vocabulary. You may have students reading whole books at this point. It's often helpful to have some visual references for students in your room. You may include a diagram of the branches of the federal, state, and local governments; a time line showing important events in the formation of our government; and a word chart for words related to this study. Students could add to these teaching tools as they study, putting up information they feel would help the class, using index cards and markers. For instance, after a first day of reading across some of the texts on the checks and balances of the government, you could probably describe how the different levels of government—federal, state, and local—mirror each other in structure, which probably arises as important in many texts. So, too, terms such as *checks and balances*, *constitution*, *representative*, *governor*, *judiciary*, will have all popped up multiple times across texts so that students will be able to add these to the class word wall.

In these early collective inquiry stages, remind your students that right now we want to get a lot of reading done, so we're not stopping to write lots of notes in our notebooks. Instead, we're using Post-its to mark information that might be important, going on and reading more, and then sharing our findings at the end of class. Teach your readers to use the strategies they already know: how to quickly walk through a book looking at how it is organized, at how much white space there is, at how dense the text is, at how much of the vocabulary is explained; and tell them to start with a book they can read comfortably. Partners may share books, reading silently, pausing briefly to synthesize, going on, scribbling very quick Post-its as they go, and saving big conversation until they have read lots of pages.

Meanwhile, during read-aloud, you may read aloud narratives of the topic, nonfiction texts, and perhaps some primary documents found on The Library of Congress' website. This work will assist in the Common Core State Standards' supported skill of drawing central ideas and information from primary and secondary sources. After each read-aloud experience, add to your learning tools—kids will stop and jot as you read, and then at the end of the read-aloud, they might add names, places, events, and so forth, to your charts in the room. As you read aloud, model making connections between what you are studying and what you have previously studied as a class. You'll want to emphasize how the new information you are collecting is adding to the knowledge you already had. As the Common Core State Standards remind us, students should be able to summarize new information they are collecting and distinguish new information from prior knowledge or opinions. For example, if you're learning about the branches of local government, you may model or encourage students to make connections to the branches of the state and federal governments. Laura Robb stresses the importance of making connections between new content learned and past knowledge in order to increase the likelihood of remembering the information and making meaning with the new content.

By Day Four or so, you'll guide student groups to pay attention to specific aspects of the checks and balances of state and local governments. You will show them how to break apart a topic into smaller, more specialized, and more manageable subtopics. For instance, you'll gather students together and say, "Readers, for the last two days we've taken a survey course on the balance of power in the government. We've been working hard to get a broad overview of this concept. I noticed that a lot of you were reading, talking, and writing about who has the power in the government. It made me realize that this might be a way that we use our research community to help break down this topic. Power in the government is an incredibly complicated and complex topic to study. I have done something to help groups specialize in a certain area of this topic. When you return to your groups, you'll notice that I have placed text sets at your table. Know that these are not just text sets on 'power.' These are more specialized. You'll see titles of the text sets like the branches of the state government, leaders in the government, the creation and implementation of the Bill of Rights, perspectives of different political parties, making laws, and the power of citizens in lawmaking. For the next two days, you'll be reading in these specialized text sets."

Encourage students to keep up their reading strategies, like using Post-its to mark information that might be important, or keeping track of names that repeat or specific dates that begin a chapter or paragraph. We know that if students are reading a chapter on current government leaders, names like Michael Bloomberg, Andrew Cuomo, and Barack Obama will be repeated often through the passage. This is something to draw students' attention to as they read. Quite simply, look for names that repeat; it will help you stay focused on the important person in this topic. Similarly, dates that are listed in the beginning of chapters or paragraphs often signify important moments in history. Teach students to search for dates as a place in the text to reread and gather important information.

At the end of this part, students will set up teaching round tables for the research community to learn about other subtopics. In other words, kids will find a way to teach others about their specialized topic. These teaching round tables could be informally constructed where one student from each group (one from the Bill of Rights, one from making laws, etc.) come together and share their new understandings. This will be quick and informal. Some teachers will opt for students to bring some of their favorite texts to the teaching round table to share important facts or pages; others might opt for students to prepare a short index card of information to share with the round table; other teachers may prefer to have students bring a reading notebook of preplanned writing to the group to share. Either way, this will mark the end of the first part. It will be informal but informative as students share a bit of their newly acquired expertise.

Use this time to reinvigorate classroom wall space. If you haven't had a moment to clear your walls of old test-prep charts or charts that may be browning or bleaching from the sun, this is the time! The nice part about a research community is that knowledge will be co-constructed. We know that publicly documenting this new knowledge is one way to revisit it often and retain it. Imagine clearing enough space to include something similar to a concept map. Using this example, power in the government would go in the middle with all of the subtopics branching off (e.g., citizen's power,

making laws, etc.). As a way to bring closure to the teaching round tables, students could list out a few important facts they learned from someone's presentation to put up on the concept map. Teach students to read and interact with each other's concept maps. Students could pose questions of other groups' maps or make connections between information in different concept maps. Imagine if students could write long off of the information gleaned from studying each other's maps. Use this time to continue to fuel inquiry and knowledge-building. If more information is discovered that can be added to the time line or word chart, don't hesitate to display it!

If you haven't already taught your children how to make on-the-run teaching tools for a classroom study, take a moment to model how to use an index card or Post-it, and markers or pencils to *swiftly* contribute to the classroom word charts, time lines, and so on. These types of visuals will support the Common Core State Standard of interpreting visual representations of information and realizing how the information contributes to the understanding of a topic. A teaching tool might, for instance, be a card that says: "*Theodore Roosevelt: 33rd Governor of New York*." Another partnership might add to this card with a Post-it saying: "*He Became the 26th President of the United States*!" Or, on the time line, a partnership might put a Post-it that says "*1787: The New York Bill of Rights Is Enacted*."

Note for Those Working with Strugglers

Some of you might be thinking that your students would benefit from a second round of reading through these specialized text sets. For instance, it might be helpful for students to try this work again with a new text set. Students who read about the Bill of Rights might switch and read through the "government leaders" text set. Reinforcing what they learned during the teaching round tables might be just the thing students need to retain the new information. Remember, this is not a writing-intensive part of the unit. You are pushing students in these early collective inquiry stages to get a lot of reading done. This way they cover a lot of content, using talk and presentation as the major ways to internalize and learn the content. Writing about reading has an important place in the parts that follow.

Part Two: Becoming Specialists and Reading as Researchers—Synthesizing, Analyzing, and Exploring Essential Questions in Subtopics

In this part, students zoom in on more specialized subjects and work in small groups reading about an aspect of the government—the checks and balances, political parties, important governors and mayors, the role of citizens, or rights of citizens. This part will begin simply by reading in their new reading bin or text set. There are a few helpful things to push in the first couple of days. First, review your conference and small-group notes, as well as your minilessons from the first part. There may be reading strategies that kids need to be retaught or lessons you did not get to. This would be a perfect time to teach or reteach. Secondly, we want to build up the support for generating meaningful, powerful, and potential essential questions. The Common Core State Standards

emphasize the importance of short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic. The generation of questions and pursuit of answers in this part will support these skills. To begin this questioning work, students can and should be annotating the text, writing their initial thoughts, reactions, and questions on Post-its. However, it's at this point that you'll want to nudge kids to begin focusing and revising their questions to become springboards into inquiry. Some of you have been laying the groundwork for questioning and categorizing information in your past units. Informally assess your students—are they familiar with the practice of looking over their notes, seeing what larger categories emerge and what questions they could pursue? If so, you should bring out some of the charts the class did earlier in the year to remind students of this work.

Questions are at the base of developing a strong research practice. The art of posing and pursuing questions as a research practice is worth revisiting and definitely worth teaching. You'll find that students will often begin with basic questions like "What is this? What just happened?" or "Why is this happening?" Stephanie Harvey and Harvey Daniels call these "definition questions," important fundamental questions for kids to begin using during their initial research process. Students then parlay the answers to these questions into more developed questions, like "Why does this matter?" or "What difference does this make?" or "What parts are important to explore?" Harvey and Daniels refer to these types of questions as "consequence" questions. This is a helpful differentiation, which will give you a lens through which to gauge the level of questioning happening in your classroom and guidance to teach into more developed questions.

You might think of developing a visual way to show the development of a question. For instance, you might notice a student's annotations beginning with a question like, "How is a law developed?" Then, upon finding out a mayor is referred to as the chief executive of a city, the question developed into "How do laws affect the rights of citizens?" Further evolution of this question led the reader to ask and find answers to questions like "How as citizens do we make sure that laws are fair? Do certain groups have more power to make laws than others?" This is one possibility for teaching students to take hold and guide their own reading and research process. Encourage them to continue generating and refining questions as they read and collect more information about their subtopic during these first few days of this part of the unit. Remember, students are in groups, trying this work on their own group's subtopics. So, one group might be working with the subtopic of "The Role of Citizens" while another group is working on "Important Leaders."

When there is some reading, questioning, and researching momentum built in small groups, you might begin to notice some trends in the types of questions students are generating and finding answers to in their reading. You'll either set up students to collaborate with another group, sharing their best questions, looking for possible overlap or themes, or you might model this for the class by saying something like, "Class, I must stop you because I found the coolest thing when reading through your notes! I'm realizing that many of you are pursuing similar types of questions. For instance, I've noticed that three groups are all researching how laws affect people, while these two

groups are wondering about how political parties affect the government. This makes me realize that we might want to combine forces and come up with some essential questions—questions that we all want to read and research for as we read about our subtopics." You might build a chart of some sample essential questions like:

- How do laws affect us, as citizens?
- What causes laws to be formed?
- Why do big conflicts arise and what can we learn from them?
- How are grand conflicts resolved in the government?
- What systems are seen replicated through the different levels of government?
- How has the way the government is structured affected our country?
- Is the government ruled by the people or are the people ruled by the government?

Teach your students how researchers use those types of essential questions to guide research. Teach your researchers to return to their books, reading now to develop more knowledge about the essential questions the classroom is researching. What's great about this kind of study is that it helps young readers sort out significance as they read. Students will be reading as researchers, specifically reading closely, determining importance, and synthesizing information to create explanations to questions. You'll teach readers to carry an essential question in the forefront of their minds as they read and collect important information. Readers might work with a partner to lay out all the possible facts that might help address or explore a question, wondering how they all fit together. You'll teach readers to look across several possible explanations or answers to their questions, thinking, writing, or talking about what big idea or theme ties these possible explanations together. Of course, as they read, they may decide to add to the essential questions and expand the scope of the classroom inquiry—or they may decide that one question is too broad, and you'll teach them how to create smaller, more focused questions.

A predictable problem that may arise during this part is that students may need to break apart what they are reading in order to collect information around their essential questions. Teach readers that when learning something new it's helpful to think about the categories the information fits into. When readers acquire information, it's important to think about the whole topic while also thinking about the smaller parts within it. This might help to gather information about those smaller parts: for example, a group might be exploring the essential question, "Why do big conflicts arise and what can we learn from them?" As they explore, they might break the question apart into smaller parts, such as "types of conflicts," or "levels of conflict," or even "effects of conflict." Then, group members might take on one of these smaller parts to read and research, rather than the essential question in its entirety.

At this point in the unit, kids will be reading a lot. This is a great thing, especially for this time of year. By nature of reading like a researcher, your students may not be

reading each text in their bin from beginning to end. Instead they are pouring over multiple texts, collecting information from a lot of different sources. The Common Core State Standards remind us that students need to learn this process of gathering relevant information through multiple print and digital sources, as well as draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. Some students will soar with this type of reading, while others might become overwhelmed. Teach kids the powerful tool of signal words—*all*, *most*, *few*, *but*—these words almost always indicate important information for readers. This means, as kids are reading potentially at a quicker pace than usual, they can be on the lookout for those words as cues for when to slow down and take note.

Additionally, capitalize on the fact that students are working collaboratively in this unit! Have students stop and share often, processing the information they are collecting and learning about the essential question they are pursuing. Many teachers find it very helpful to remind or teach partners or groups to make quick lists of information, describe an important scene, explain something using a boxes-and-bullets structure to organize the information, discuss a specific cause-and-effect relationship, or explore the dynamics of a topic by comparing and contrasting.

One last note about the questioning process: Teachers have found great success when modeling their own reading and research process, generating their own questions as they read. We put the highest regard on modeling our own reading and writing for our students; Harvey and Daniels remind us of the importance of modeling your own research process, including modeling your own curiosity and pursuing your own questioning. Carry this modeling beyond the content-area study—demonstrate this inquiry process in other subject areas or even everyday occurrences. Begin a connection of minilessons by saying, "You know, class, I have been noticing all these orange flags that have recently been put in, lining the sidewalk outside my house. I began to wonder what these mean. I'm especially interested in this because the flags go right past my favorite old tree that my grandfather planted years and years ago. I'm worried about it! Can't you see why? So I did a little research." You might bring out a printout from a recent Google search or perhaps a book that you checked out from the library on Urban Planning and Preservation. Or even an informal transcript of an interview you did with a worker who was putting down flags in other parts of the neighborhood. Examples like these model how natural and curious the research process can be for people. It also models the quick, on-the-run, responsive research the Common Core State Standards highlight.

As your students embark on their research, you may wish to return to prior units, such as the nonfiction reading unit or even the content-area calendar, to see if there are any particular strategies that you want to reinforce with small groups of readers. Continue to give students time to read, to talk to their partners, and to share some of what they've learned with other students. They'll probably no longer be putting as much up on the walls of the classroom, since they'll be busy filling their notebooks with the Post-its and notes they're jotting as they read. You may find it helpful to reteach some quick note-taking strategies, including boxes-and-bullets, tables and charts, time lines, and labeled drawings. You'll also want to revisit how readers use

their strategies for narrative and expository texts to read across hybrid texts that contain features of multiple genres. This is of the utmost importance, especially because of the quantity and variety of materials they'll be reading. Show how you look across a page and synthesize the information you gain from the captions, the sidebars, and the main text. The specification of students' research will align with several of the National Social Studies mandates, such as getting information, organizing information, interpreting information, looking for patterns, applying information, synthesizing information, and supporting a position.

Part Three: Connecting the Past with the Present—Exploring Point of View and Perspective of Texts when Forming Ideas and Theories

The big message of work inside this third part is for students to realize that when they arrive at new, larger understandings of the world they are no longer the same as they once were. The goal is for the new content to not simply wash over them, easily forgotten, but to be internalized and carried into new understandings. Therefore, there is an extension of the synthesis work from the previous part of this unit, where students take a more analytical stance. This important critical and interpretive work will also address several of the National Social Studies mandates, including looking for patterns, interpreting information, supporting a position, and synthesizing information.

One way to read more analytically is to study different perspectives in texts. We first might teach students that all texts have a perspective, a point of a view the text represents. For instance, *Encounter*, the well-known picture book by Jane Yolen, is the story of Christopher Columbus' discovery of America, yet told from the point of view and perspective of the Native Americans originally living on this continent. This alternative perspective allows the reader of the text a different side of the story, thereby constructing a new layer of meaning to that moment in history. Questions that help students access this concept are "Whose voice is heard? Whose voice is not heard? Which people are represented most in this text? Which people are left out most often in this text? Which side of the story do you hear more about? Which side of the story are you left wondering about?" Survey your students. If students lack a background in this type of critical reading work, you might begin with an activity that helps students clearly see different perspectives that texts carry. For example, in addition to having a copy of *Encounter* out, find a retelling of Christopher Columbus' expedition from the 1950s and 2000s or perhaps find an article on Columbus from a site like *Facing History*, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide a well-rounded, multicultural transmission of historical events. Reading different versions of similar historical events is a helpful and easier way to begin critical reading.

You'll support this work in your read-aloud and minilessons, emphasizing reading across texts to compare information, perspective, and point of view. You might, for instance, compare texts addressing the development of democracy in the United States, imagining the different points of view that are represented in the texts, as well as the perspectives that are left out. Help your students to notice, for example, that few of the texts in our classrooms take the side of, say, communists or dictatorships,

and encourage them to wonder why that is. Show them how to use or find other resources that help them find out the other side of the story. Empower students to find the answers to these questions in multiple ways: they could ask another group, ask a librarian, scour other books, research using an online search engine, or interview another adult, for instance a history teacher. The most important part of this work is to model how to lead this type of curious reading life and care about finding out the whole truth.

You might then teach how you ponder not just the information presented in multiple texts, but also the feelings that are instilled by the stories and images you encounter. For example, by now some readers in your room will know a lot about significant people in your chosen time period. Let's imagine one group of readers has become quite knowledgeable about James Madison, author of the Bill of Rights and fourth President of the United States. Teach readers to read between the lines, tracking the feelings these stories instill in us as readers. Is James Madison portrayed as flawless or always the hero? Does the author show the political motivations as well as the personal incentives that motivated Madison to draft the Bill of Rights? Teach readers to step back from their reading and notes to ask, "How am I left feeling about this person? This topic? Am I left with an extremely positive or negative feeling? Do I suspect that I'm missing a part of the picture?" As students are reading through text sets, teach them that as they begin to read each new text to make sure they are comparing it to ones they've already read. What new information does each text offer? What new perspectives are included? Does any group of people continue to be left out, to not be represented? This type of analytical reading work will fuel productive, meaningful conversations in your research groups.

You might be tempted to end this part here, excited to launch into the teaching portion of this unit. I invite you to stay a few days more, teaching kids how to make connections between the past and the present. This is a time where children can reflect on previous time periods studied in class and examine how patterns emerge, specifically the patterns of points of view. For instance, look for connections between groups of people who were for or against change—people who feared losing power if things changed versus people who embraced shifts in power so that others could be heard or represented. Show how this was true during the evaluation of the Articles of the Confederation and the creation of the Constitution. Go on an academic scavenger hunt, looking for bigger ideas that people struggle with across multiple time periods—power, representation, justice, discrimination, or fairness. Imagine the time line in your classrooms. Instead of factual, event-based time lines, this is the perfect time to move into idea-based time lines, showing how ideas have changed or repeated over time.

This is one of the highlights of this unit, where students are making connections, moving back and forth between time periods where they see these ideas and concepts reemerge and repeat throughout. Readers will be comparing and contrasting, writing and discussing similarities and differences between different time periods or groups of people. Some of you might return to having students "speak like essayists," talking about big ideas of a time period and showing support gathered from their

research. Others of you might take a more persuasive approach, where students read with an argument in mind, thinking about points and counterpoints they could make if debating the issue with a partner. All of this is most likely notebook-work or research group-talk work in direct preparation for the final part.

Part Four: Building and Presenting Knowledge to Others—Teaching Others with New Knowledge Gained

As your researchers become experts, they'll be eager to share what they've learned and their ideas about all the new information they have. Students might, then, begin to turn their research into writing projects, or you might imagine small-group or classwide projects. The content-area writing unit that parallels this unit includes detailed plans and ideas for how students can use writing to reflect, synthesize, and teach the new content being learned.

One possibility is that students make nonfiction books that you can add to your library, on the subjects they find fascinating. They already know how to write all-about books, articles, essays, and historical fiction. Here, taking the structure of some of the DK Readers or the Rosen Primary Source books, for instance, as models, students might write their own books that incorporate information, images, and narratives. Teach your writers how the information they present often seems neutral and how the images and stories may implicitly create an angle on their subject. For instance, if they create a book on the Bill of Rights, they might present the important dates of its creation, or a time line of these dates. Then they might make a drawing of James Madison drafting the document. Then they might include a story about how the Bill of Rights has protected a citizen. Then maybe they even have an afterword, with a diagram of how the tenets of the Bill of Rights are carried out by the government. This is an opportunity for your researchers to use everything they know about reading and writing to stir up feelings as well as inform, as they share the parts of history they find most compelling. The creation of such a text will achieve the Common Core State Standards that emphasize the importance of student presentation and sharing of their accumulated knowledge and ideas with others.

You may prefer for students to share their new understandings through social studies projects, such as by acting out important scenes and narrating why a given moment is important in American history. Or perhaps students have a symposium where they present the issue of balance of power between the government and the people and how that balance affects us. Students could take a world approach and use film, picture books, and articles to compare the United States government to different governments around the world.

You'll need to make an important choice in this final part—will this synthesis of research and information be more *informative* or more *idea-based*? That is, the presentation of this research could be straightforward, like a piece of writing detailing the checks and balances of the United States government. Or, it could be more idea-based, like a piece of writing proclaiming that voting is the single most important act

we can take as citizens. If a more idea-based approach is taken, it opens up the doors of debate, where students weave together points and counterpoints. Look across your year, as well as the past few years of the students' writing units—how many units have been more informative, like all-about books, and how many units have been more persuasive or idea-based, like literary essays? Many of you will decide to angle this part to be more idea-based in order to expose students to the opportunity of writing about new content-rich ideas and thoughts. Others of you may need to give the students an opportunity to learn and practice how to research and present findings in a strictly informative way. The Common Core State Standards push students to draw on evidence in order to support analysis, reflection, and research. Either option aligns nicely with this new research standard.

One Additional Note

Whichever opportunity you choose, keep in mind the importance of mentor texts as students write. If your unit takes a more idea-based turn, have lots of feature or investigative articles from youth periodicals available, like *Weekly Reader*, *Time for Kids*, or *National Geographic for Kids*. If your unit takes a more informative turn, writers like Seymour Simon are helpful to have on hand.

Additional Resources

As you approach this unit, it will be important for you to read the entire write-up, not just the teaching points below, because ultimately kids learn through the work they do, not the words out of your mouth. So the really important thing in a unit of study is that you have created opportunities for kids to engage in work that matters. The unit write-up can help you issue a wide, generous invitation that rallies kids not only to work with heart and soul, but to also engage in deliberate practice, trying to get better at specific skills the unit aims to highlight. But in the end, a good portion of your teaching will revolve around the responsive instruction you provide as you move kids along trajectories of skill development. This part of your teaching relies on your assessing your students often—not in big fancy ways, but by watching the work they do—and your seeing their work as feedback on your teaching. If you have taught something and only a handful of kids are able to do that work to good effect, then you'll want to decide whether that skill was essential, whether you want to reteach it in a new way, or whether you want to detour around it. You'll want to become accustomed to fine-tuning your teaching through an attentiveness to student work, because the work your students do is not just showing you what *they* can or can't do, it is also showing you what *you* can do. From this attentiveness to student work and from your own persistent efforts to reach students one way or another, and your inventiveness in response to what they do, you'll find that your teaching itself becomes a course of study for you as well as for your students.

Part One: Forming a Research Community and Reading to Build Rich Background Knowledge

- "Researchers read fairly quickly, trying to get a broad overview of the topic, the important ideas, events and people, the biggest conflicts, and also important vocabulary."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Readers use tools like maps and time lines to help orient ourselves and others in our study. These can be collaborative efforts to which we all add as we gather knowledge. When you learn about a big important topic, you may want to use a Post-it with a quick note about the event to add to our class time line."

- "Researchers look for places, names, events, and vocabulary that appear in more than one text. Researchers push themselves to read a lot about their topic, especially at first, stopping sometimes to mark information that might be important, and then going on to read more."

- "Today I want to teach you that researchers use our research community to help us break down big topics. Researchers find that some topics, like government, are so incredibly complex that it often helps to focus in on one subtopic, using all their nonfiction strategies to find out as much as they can about their one area of expertise."

- "Researchers pay attention to dates that are listed in the beginning of chapters or paragraphs because they know that they often signify important moments in time. As you read, search for dates as places in the text to reread and gather important information."

- *Teaching share:* "Researchers hold 'round tables' to teach others about their specialized topic. Research teams send representatives from their group to spread the knowledge they have gathered about their specific area of study."

Part Two: Becoming Specialists and Reading as Researchers—Synthesizing, Analyzing, and Exploring Essential Questions in Subtopics

- "Researchers get to know more about their specialized topics by asking meaningful, powerful questions that can be followed to gain a deeper understanding of our study. One way we come up with questions we can pursue into inquiry is by looking back into our notes, seeing what patterns and categories we notice."

- "Researchers don't just ask 'definition questions,' the type of questions we ask to orient ourselves as we are first getting to know a topic. As we read deeper, we start asking questions that get at the core of the motivations and consequences of the events we study. We may ask ourselves, 'Why does this matter?' or 'What difference does this make?' or 'What parts are important to explore?'"
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Class, I must stop you because I found the coolest thing when reading through your notes! I'm realizing that many of you are pursuing similar types of questions. For instance, I've noticed that three groups are all researching big types of conflicts that arose, while these two groups are all wondering about systems that communities used to resolve conflicts. This makes me realize that we might want to combine forces and come up with some essential questions—questions that we all want to read and research for as we read about our subtopics."

- "Today I want to teach you that once researchers have developed essential questions that really get at the meat of their studies, we can return to our books, reading now to develop more knowledge about the essential questions we've developed. Researchers carry our essential question in the forefront of our minds as we read, collecting important information to flesh out our answers."

- *Teaching share:* "Researchers work with partners, laying out all the possible facts that might help address or explore a question, analyzing together how these pieces all fit together."

- "Researchers look across several possible explanations or answers to their questions, thinking, writing, or talking about what big idea or theme connects these possible explanations. They look at their explanations, thinking, 'What patterns do I see in my proposed answers? What more does this tell me about the big ideas and themes of the topic of my study?'"
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "One way researchers help ourselves learn new information is by breaking down our essential questions into smaller parts so that we can more thoroughly understand all the elements that go into answering our big questions. Members in our research groups may each pursue a different part of the big question, later sharing information with each other to more fully come to conclusions about our inquiries."

- *Small group:* "One powerful tool we have to help us find the most important information is signal words. Words like *all*, *most*, *few*, and *but* almost always indicate important information. As you read, be on the lookout for those words as cues to slow down and take note."

Part Three: Connecting the Past with the Present—Exploring Point of View and Perspective of Texts when Forming Ideas and Theories

- "Today I want to teach you that one way to read more analytically, more deeply, about a topic is to study different perspectives in texts. Depending on whose point of view is expressed in a text, the topic or story is bound to be told in a different way. Researchers read across texts, asking in each, 'Whose voice is heard? Whose voice is not heard? Which side of the story do you hear more about? Which side of the story are you left wondering about?' As we sense different voices from text to text, we will likely find out not just part of a story, but instead, something closer to the whole truth."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "I noticed something interesting in the books in our classroom. Looking across the texts, there are certain voices that aren't really expressed in many of our books. One thing that researchers do as we critically read is ask ourselves, 'Are there are certain voices that are frequently heard and some that aren't? Why do certain voices continually get left out?'"

- "History isn't just facts and information. Researchers don't simply read for information. Rather, researchers are often moved by the feelings that are drawn out by the stories and images we encounter. As we read, we step back from all those names and dates, and ask, 'How am I left feeling about this person or topic? Am I left with an extremely positive or negative feeling? Do I suspect that I'm missing part of the picture?' In answering these questions, researchers find themselves with a much deeper understanding of the truth about a topic."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Researchers sometimes read with an argument in mind, thinking about points and counterpoints they could make if debating the issue with a partner. This can serve two purposes. First, it may help prepare a researcher to talk with a partner. Second, it will give you a purpose or focus while you are reading."

- "Have you ever heard the expression, 'History repeats itself'? Today I want to teach you that researchers realize there are patterns in history, specifically, patterns of points of view, and we ask ourselves, 'What big ideas keep popping up in history and in modern times? What struggles do people continue to have? How have ideas about those struggles changed or stayed the same?' Thinking about those struggles and people's attitudes towards those struggles can help you think about what actions you want to take to solve big social issues."

- *Teaching share:* "When we share our ideas about the important concepts of a topic, one way we can express ourselves clearly is by 'speaking like essayists.' Talk first about the main idea or theme you have noticed. Then support that idea with evidence you have gathered from your research."

UNIT NINE

Social Issues Book Clubs

JUNE

(Level 3 Reading Benchmark: S)

This unit has become a great favorite with teachers. It serves a few important purposes. For one, the unit continues to encourage readers to shift from reading for plot toward reading for ideas. Social issues book clubs nudge readers to read and revisit books, thinking about the ways in which books address themes and ideas. Then, too, social issues book clubs ask readers to think about ways books are similar and different, one from another. They support intertextuality. Both of these goals are important in the new Common Core State Standards. Social issues book clubs are important for a few other reasons. They allow you, the teacher, to use the books you actually have on hand with great flexibility. You aren't tied to one genre—you will create text sets that combine poems and articles and other short texts with novels from all sorts of different genres. Reading volume increases as students get more and more curious, smarter, and more passionate about the issues they are considering. And finally, social issues book clubs encourage children to see that reading can help us deal with the issues of our lives.

You may wonder about the term "social issues." You may ask, "What is it, exactly?" The term "social issues" refers to issues that affect a lot of people, not just the one character. A character may worry that she needs to wear her big sister's hand-me-down clothes. That is a personal struggle. But we can also think about her unique problem as a problem that applies to lots of people—that is, as a social issue. Lots of people worry about fitting in, and about peer pressure, so those are social issues. Poverty is a social issue, and so is the fear that one's family is falling apart. Homelessness, joblessness, bullying, racism, and bias against older people are also examples of social issues. It is helpful for kids to see that by reading we can watch characters deal with social issues, and we can learn to deal with those issues (and other issues) from books. This

is important to do as characters play more complex roles in stories. This unit can make each child feel less alone. It can also give kids reasons to read. (Alfred Tatum says that, particularly for disenfranchised or reluctant readers to keep reading, the curriculum has to answer the question, "How can I live my life every day?") This work helps children bring more to their books and get more from them as well.

This unit is unabashed teaching toward social justice. Get ready for it by wearing your own passions on your sleeve. All of us know that sometimes, when we read a wonderful book, we find ourselves welling up with a passionate commitment to everything we believe. Stories remind us that we care very much about justice and injustice, and about living lives of meaning and significance. You will be teaching children to take their books and their lives seriously. You'll need to think, as you prepare, about what books have affected *you*—the choices you make, what kind of person you try to be, the issues you care about—so that you can talk about these books and your life with your students.

You will undoubtedly find it helpful, as you prepare, to also turn to the unit on book clubs in Lucy Calkins' *The Art of Teaching Reading*, the chapter "Reading for Justice and Power: A Social Issues Book Club Unit" by Mary Coakley from *Constructing Curriculum: Alternate Units of Study* from the *Units of Study for Teaching Reading*, and Randy and Katherine Bomer's, *For a Better World: Reading and Writing for Social Action*.

As you start this final month, bear in mind that this is your last chance to provide readers with support moving up levels of text difficulty as aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Although you no doubt feel like you are ready to wind down your teaching, this is actually the month in which you are sending kids off to a summer of practice. So now is the perfect time to help students who are ready to break into another level of text difficulty. You know how to do this—put them in transitional baggies, provide text introductions and same-book partners. Support some of the new vocabulary that readers will encounter. But the real job is probably more around motivation. After all, kids will be entering a new grade next year. With a final push, they can enter that grade reading at a whole different level. And think about the texts that will become accessible to them as a result of this final push! You'll absolutely want to do the book talks/book-buzzes that create excitement around the newly accessible books, using the social energy of kids who've loved those books to energize this final push.

Organizing the Books and Other Materials

In the past we have suggested that students read in clubs, primarily from novels, with a few short pieces from other genres thrown into the mix. This year we are still recommending that students have a steady supply of novels, picture books, and short stories as well as a large chunk of nonfiction texts dealing with a variety of social issues aligning with the Common Core State Standards. These nonfiction texts can be from nonfiction books such as biographies of people, historical accounts, anthologies and expository texts as well as articles from magazines, editorials, first-person accounts, speeches, and other short texts. Additionally, you'll want to decide how important it is to you that your

readers are reading from multiple copies of texts so that every person in a club is reading the same text. It's conceivable, though not ideal, that students will read different texts but with a shared lens.

For students at or above grade level, you will likely want to create baskets of texts that are set up to have a few possible issues or themes in common for the students to uncover. While we have recommended in the past that the books be organized by issue and placed in a basket with a label, such as "bullying," part of the thrill for our young readers is for them to discover and name the issue, or even more exciting, multiple issues that begin to surface in their reading. It is also true that by labeling books as having one issue can sometimes lead to students going on a sort of scavenger hunt ("Oh, here's bullying!") for issues rather than looking at a book as a whole, and seeing that more than one issue may exist in most books, and may have many possible interpretations. So, while it is highly likely that you might put together a basket of materials based on some common issues that you already have in mind (*Fly Away Home*, *The Hundred Dresses*, an article on child poverty, a book about being unique), and you will know which issues are more than likely to emerge, you will leave the discovering to the students. For your more emergent readers, you may want to rally them around an issue for which you have just-right books and give these children a basket of mixed-genre, leveled texts that make an issue visible, or else create a basket of texts that will naturally point them to a singular issue that you know they are passionate about, perhaps even one that has been the talk of the class for a while. For example, you might have a basket of J/K books that demonstrate the pressures people feel to fit in.

We suggest you deliberately make all of your collections very small—no more than three books and a handful of short texts—so there's room for children to add to the collections. If you don't classify the books your children know best, this becomes something they can do, and they'll see how books and other texts can show many issues. You will probably want to have one basket (and one issue) for the whole class to study together through the read-aloud and minilessons. You may choose to convene the class around the same issue that a group of struggling readers will also explore, providing support and lots of dignity for those strugglers.

For suggestions of possible leveled books to include in your study, please see our website. For possible nonfiction texts, we suggest that in addition to looking for updates on our website, you begin to collect articles that deal with issues you know will likely be discussed in your classroom (in part because you know what fiction books you have available). These articles can be found in children's magazines such as *Time for Kids*, *Scholastic News*, *WR News*, *Highlights*, and *New Moon* as well as online.

Part One: Reading Can Teach Us about Issues that Exist in the World and in Our Lives

You may begin the unit by showing children that issues hide within the pages of books they know well. To do so, return to favorite read-aloud books and look for social issues that exist in them. This can lead toward the creation of a chart full of social issues. Many

times children will look up at this chart and say, "Wait a minute, 'having absent parents' is an issue in this book too! Let me show you." They'll soon see that the issues they see in books also thread through their own writing. Some teachers have found that asking students to bring their writing notebooks with them to reading workshop can help make those connections. You might encourage students to reread their own entries for issues they've dealt with or find important in their own lives. These issues might be more subtly exposed in personal narrative or fiction writing, or they might have been explored in more expository work such as persuasive writing. Students will not only learn to see that they have their own issues in their lives, but they might also find themselves empathizing with characters and saying, "Me too!" This might be a good time for students to pull out their reading notebooks and begin doing some writing about those connections aligning with the Common Core State Standards.

At the start, you may choose to focus this work on characters in stories, including the struggles the characters face, how those struggles may be named as social issues, and how they deal with these struggles. This work helps children move away from sequential retelling, and helps them develop one lens for determining importance in a story. Thus, you could teach your young readers that when we read with a lens, first we read for the story, for what happens, and then we read asking, "What does this story teach us about *x*?" (with *x* being homelessness, or bullying, or losing someone, etc.). Children might ask questions such as, "Which issues seem important in this story?" "What are the characters' reactions to these issues?" "How do the characters deal with these issues?" "What perspective does each character have on this issue?" "If the perspective is different, what explains the difference?" Teach your children to get ready to talk to their book clubs by putting Post-its on moments when they see their characters first facing *x*, then struggling with *x*, then overcoming or not overcoming *x*.

Students who are reading *Amber Brown*, for instance, might read it on the surface level simply as a school story. If they read or reread it, with the lens of 'dealing with parents separating,' then they notice a lot of moments that they may have missed the first time—the way Amber looks through the photograph album of her dad, the way she thinks about him being in Paris, the way she is unsure about her mother dating. None of these events were significant to the main action of the story and so young readers may skip over them. But in order to read more complicated texts, they need to become the kind of readers who pay attention, who can notice and accumulate more complicated character development. In *Amber Brown*, the big school problem may get solved. The longer-term, more subtle problems she faces may not—which is common in more complicated, higher-level books. Reading with this lens will be an introduction to realizing that books can be about more than one thing at a time, and readers can read for more than plot. It's not important that the reader notice any single event so much as that the reader realizes that paying close attention to the details in a story, and talking about those details with others, can lead you to a richer understanding aligning with the Common Core State Standards. They'll feel like smarter readers—and they will be!

Your job in this work would be not only to teach students to locate issues in their books, but also to learn to use this lens as a way to extend their reading and conversa-

tion. One way to do this would be to find, once you have determined the issues and groups that this text will be addressing, scenes where these issues are glaring. These scenes might be hiding in parts of the text that bother us, that we feel are unfair, or that seem implausible. These "crucial scenes" can then be closely read by a book club to try and mine the scene for what the character is going through, how he or she is reacting, and what we might learn about the issue or group that scene seems to be about. This work of determining which scenes are important and then thinking what those scenes are telling us about what this book is *really* about is yet another helpful strategy for interpretation.

If your students have done thematic interpretative work this year, or in past years, they might recall using a strategy of carrying an index card with them through and across books that has a text-specific idea on one side, and then later adding a universal theme to the reverse side as a means of scaffolding from text-based to wider theme development. You might choose to build off this work by showing kids how they can jot on an index card what the character's big struggles are and what ideas you're getting about those struggles. They might then jot on the reverse side more universal notions of issues those struggles make them think of. So, for example, on one side of one student's card she might have written, "Amber's parents' divorce is really bothering her and turning her into a different person." Once the student has talked and thought a lot about Amber's life, and the issue of divorce and the struggles surrounding it, that same student might return to her card and on the reverse side write, "Divorce can turn kids' lives upside down."

Another way to scaffold children to think critically about these abstract social issues is to ask them to think, write, and talk about gender or race or class before you read a story that has one of these at the core of the book. For example, you may get children to write or talk about what they think it means to be a boy. How are boys perceived? What pressures do boys have? How do boys think or behave? Then readers could read a book that illustrates this issue, moving between their ideas and the ideas in the story. This will help them spend time thinking about who they are, what they believe, and what they care deeply about so they read carrying those lenses. Then after reading the book and discussion, have the students return to their previous thoughts and see how the book affected (or didn't) their thinking about that issue. You might also push your children to dig deeper into these issues by asking, "Does the way this story talks about gender (for example) ring true for me?" As they answer this question, they will want to examine why the text reflects or does not reflect their experiences of these issues. They can question what the values are that this text espouses. This can allow children to move between reading and thinking about the sort of world they want to live in.

One thing that we might avoid is the idea that any given book is "about" any one thing. In addition, to say that we can *only* read texts for issues that create dangerous or dramatic situations like abuse or sexism or homelessness also puts limits on the kinds of interpretations our readers can make and connect to. You will want to avoid teaching that talking about gender or race or class automatically means there is an oppressor and a victim. There is value in interpreting and inferring around these identities without necessarily always trying to find the "problem" or "issue."

Nonfiction texts will be a great help in these goals. We will want to make sure that the nonfiction texts we provide come from a variety of angles and cover many sides to an issue—as well as explore many different groups. By simply having access to these texts students will be more likely to spot the myriad of issues living in any one text. You can then explicitly teach students how, when readers have a healthy diet of fiction and nonfiction, we can't help but let one kind of reading inform another. For example, after reading a recent article about the possible connections between food dyes and ADHD, a reader might then read *Joey Pigza Swallowed a Key*, with attention to what factors might be out of his control and which might be entirely in his control. Or if the novel came first, one's interpretation of the article will absolutely be affected by the impressions left from Joey and the struggles that he faced.

Part Two: Reading with a Lens and Talking Back to the Text

As children become adept at noticing social issues, they'll often become particularly interested in certain issues. Teach them, as a next step, to come to books with certain lenses—what we might call concerns about social issues. You may find that children can read while searching for places in the text that fit with bullying or homelessness, but struggle when asked to read with the lenses of power, gender, class, values, invisibility, democracy, and the like. If so, you can help them understand what these mean by having them write or talk about the issues as they relate to their *own* lives. It is probably best if you demonstrate that each of us is a member of many groups—groups that are determined in part by our gender, race, religion, class, and so forth, but also by our hobbies, and our professions. We can talk about how a group identity shapes us. How does your position as, say, a Latina woman, or a fourth-grade teacher affect your response to today's headlines in the newspaper? Ask students to think about what groups *they* belong to and how those groups shape who they are and how they think.

As we read stories with these lenses, it will be important to talk back to the text in our clubs. We will want to teach our students that talking about these issues can sometimes be a tricky business and it often helps to keep an open mind and ask each other questions. These questions can serve not only as an entrance point to possibly difficult conversations, but they also help us to train our minds to be more active in our reading and our lives. We might teach our students to ask each other: Are we okay with how this group is being represented? Does this fit with what we have seen in the world? Is there something the author seems to want us to know about being a member of that group? Does this fit with our lives? What kind of community is this? What causes people to act this way? What would happen if the character's group was "flipped," that is, if a girl character was a boy or a poor character rich? Would that change their choices or reactions? What does this say about what we believe?

In their book, *For a Better World: Reading and Writing for Social Action*, Randy and Katherine Bomer suggest you ask readers to make webs, lists, Venn diagrams, or invent their own ways of depicting all the various groups to which they belong. This is another great way for us to teach students ways to empathize—to help them

realize that not only are the characters in their books members of different groups that might contend with particular kinds of issues, but they are members of groups as well. You might, for instance, belong to the following kinds of groups: male, female; Indian, Korean, African American, Irish American, Haitian; teacher; piano player; tennis player; over fifty; single father; bird owner, and so on. Some of the groups are fixed, such as your race and ethnicity. Others, though, are more diverse and fluid: artists, "extreme sports" fans, coffee drinkers, Stephanie Meyers fans. What makes "groups" a critical concept is when some groups, by virtue of size, wealth, and cultural power, oppress more vulnerable groups and keep the people in them from attaining a healthy, happy life. In our United States culture, females, persons of color, immigrants, and children are just some of the groups that have experienced unequal chances in life at the hands of groups such as males and Caucasians that have historically held more power and wealth. Students can carry all of this knowledge of the groups they belong to, the groups that members of their club belong to, and the groups that simply exist in the world, the texts that they are reading.

This part of the unit is another perfect place to bring in more work with nonfiction texts. We can encourage students to look to nonfiction as a means of learning about groups and issues that they are unfamiliar with—and as a way to back the opinions they are beginning to develop in their clubs. We can model this ourselves with our read-aloud work. When we have finished reading a fiction book, say, *One Green Apple*, we can then follow it up, saying, "You know, I don't know as much as I'd like to about what it must be like to be an immigrant and not speak the language, one of the issues we talked about. So I thought I would read this article to help me get a stronger understanding." If your students have access, you might encourage students to bring in nonfiction texts that complement the work they are doing within their clubs.

Another possible way to bring nonfiction into the work students are doing is for them to consider reading nonfiction with a lens. What issues are they seeing depicted? Do they agree with the way these issues are being portrayed in the text? How does belonging to one group or another color the way one reads a nonfiction text? For example, as a teacher, you likely read every newspaper article on education differently than your friend who is a chef. You might consider showing this to students if you want to highlight the role of critical reading in all genres.

Part Three: Bringing Our Lenses to Our World

Once readers have some understandings about critical concepts, you can ask them to turn to any texts, not just the ones readily available in the classroom baskets, with those same lenses. This is more difficult, and perhaps not yet possible for many children because their understanding of how the world operates is naturally naïve and yet to be developed. You can help by practicing looking at anything you read and wondering about how hidden and subtle sources of power, race, class, and gender operate in our culture.

Readers who are deeply engaged in their reading and thinking about a particular issue will become fired-up and begin to see that issue everywhere in their lives, as well as in their texts. This provides more teaching opportunities; you can help students see their own lives almost as other texts, laid out on the table alongside the texts of other authors. Ultimately, you want readers to be able to troubleshoot these issues, understanding their complexities and why the issues are not so simple to solve. Reading across texts and genres, and looking at their own lives as backdrops to their reading work, will help young readers see that the issues their characters face have multiple perspectives and multiple causes, some of which are not what they seem. This is a perfect opportunity for students to return to their reading notebooks and begin to use their writing to help think through their new ideas and concerns about the issues they've been studying across their books. You might teach students to revisit thought prompts they learned earlier in the year to stretch their thinking, such as, "this makes me think . . ." "on the other hand . . ." "this connects with . . ." "I used to think . . . but now I think . . ." or "some people think . . . but I think. . . ." Students can then take their writing back to their clubs and use it to base new conversations off of, as well as to angle the way they read their next texts.

Another important piece of this part of the unit is for students to continue to do everything they know about reading *in service* or developing a stronger understanding of the issues they are reading about. We have seen that often, when students become involved in an issue, they forget to do much of the good thinking work they have been studying all year. If you haven't already done so, this is a perfect time to bring back charts with various reading strategies from earlier in the year such as: ways to think more deeply about character, tips for synthesizing within and across nonfiction, strategies for understanding what a text is *really* about, and, of course, reminders for how to keep one's reading volume up even when we are stopping more often to talk and write about our reading. If you did not previously have these charts hanging in your classrooms, these might be charts you develop or present during teaching shares and read-aloud time.

You can well imagine how this looking at the world and seeing their issues playing out everywhere will likely move students to want to learn more—to possibly do something about their issue. In addition to inspirational articles and biographies, you might lead students to texts such as *Change the World for Ten Bucks*, or *101 Ways You Can Save the Planet before You're 12*, to help them to see that they have power to effect change in their lives and the lives of others. If it makes sense for your students and you have a day or two at the end of the unit, you might consider having clubs create mini–social action projects as spin-offs to their work they have done together throughout the units. These can be quick emails or letters, presentations to the class, poster campaigns, or scripted and videotaped public service announcements.

In fact, since this unit is meant to be the capstone to a year's worth of reading work and learning, you might choose to direct any desires for activism to reach into the summer months. One way you could do this is to encourage students to think about the issues that became nearest and dearest to their hearts over the course of this

unit and to then narrow down to one that they want to commit to learn more about, understand more deeply, and perhaps even take action around. Students can collect book lists for books to check out of the library, websites they can return to, and so on, which will serve as their go-to materials when they are away from school. If you are looping with your class, or simply feel comfortable lending books to your students, you might consider stuffing summer book baggies with texts connected to the social issue interests of each child. You might even consider having students create a social action proposal, where they record their plans for their summer reading, as well as any action plans they might have.

Additional Resources

As you approach this unit, it will be important for you to read the entire write-up, not just the teaching points below, because ultimately kids learn through the work they do, not the words out of your mouth. So the really important thing in a unit of study is that you have created opportunities for kids to engage in work that matters. The unit write-up can help you issue the wide generous invitation that rallies kids not only to work with heart and soul, but to also engage in deliberate practice, trying to get better at specific skills that the unit aims to highlight. But in the end, a good portion of your teaching will revolve around the responsive instruction you provide as you move kids along trajectories of skill development. This part of your teaching relies on you assessing your students often—not in big fancy ways, but by watching the work they do—and you seeing their work as feedback on your teaching. If you have taught something and only a handful of kids are able to do that work to good effect, then you'll want to decide whether that skill was essential, whether you want to reteach it in a new way, whether you want to detour around it. You'll want to become accustomed to fine-tuning your teaching through an attentiveness to student work, because the work your students do is not just showing you what they can and can't do, it is also showing you what *you* can do. From this attentiveness to student work and from your own persistence to reach students, one way or another, and your inventiveness in response to what they do, you'll find that your teaching itself becomes a course of study for you as well as for your students.

The following teaching points represent one possible pathway for this unit. Please consider the parts of the unit as places to stop, reflect, and assess how you will want to move forward into the next part in ways that will best move your readers and help them to become the most interpretive and critical readers they can be. Some of the teaching points listed below are adapted from "Reading for Justice and Power: A Social Issues Book Club Unit" by Mary Coakley from *Constructing Curriculum.*

Part One: Reading Can Teach Us about Issues that Exist in the World and in Our Lives

- "Today I want to teach you that critical readers choose the lenses through which we wish to view texts—and life. When we decide to read critically, we put on lenses that allow us to see social issues as they thread through books (and also through movies and the world). Reading for social issues can help us understand people in books, movies, and our world."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Sometimes as readers we only have our own voices in our heads—and we only have one or two lenses to look through. Sometimes it helps us to look through other people's lenses. Today, I'd like to suggest that every once in a while, while you are reading or talking to your club, that you refer to our class chart of possible social issues, or think of the issues that you already know matter to the members of your clubs, so you can have some other lenses to look through and consider."

- *Teaching Share:* "Social issues aren't just something we can find in our books, they are often things we can find in our own writing. One way we can fill our minds up with social issues that will be important to us as individuals is to look back in our writing notebooks and see what issues we've written about. Whether we look to see what the hearts of our stories tend to be, or else opinions or claims we tend to return to again and again, these are often social issues. Once we have identified one or two important ones we can not only read in our clubs for those issues, we can also compare how the authors treat those issues with the way we have treated them in our own writing."

- "Today I want to teach you that when we are onto something as readers, we bring in whatever we are thinking to conversations with other readers. If we're in book clubs, for example, and we've been reading a shared book critically, we're apt to talk about issues of fairness that we see in that book. We say things like 'I think that is fair because . . .' or 'I think this unfair because . . .' and 'This fairness/unfairness matters because. . . .'"

- "Today I want to teach you that it's not enough for readers to simply identify issues as we read. Instead, we also want to ask ourselves, 'What does this book teach us about this issue?' and then to follow that up by asking, 'Do we agree or disagree with what this book is teaching us about this issue?'"
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Readers, can I stop you? The readers in this club did something that was so wise I thought we should all consider trying it. They uncovered a few issues in the book they are reading, but they wanted to learn more about those issues. So they each grabbed a nonfiction

article about one of those issues and taught each other facts about the issue they've been pondering. They then returned to their book and saw how this new nonfiction knowledge affected the ways they understand the issues in their books."

- "Today I want to teach you that another way we can learn about issues in our world and in our lives is to study the characters in our books closely. We can study a character's desires, wondering why he or she might long for those things. Readers sometimes record characters' wants on Post-it notes or in reading notebooks and then study those notes closely to see if we can see a pattern of longing that gives us more insights into issues the characters might be facing."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "We can also pay attention to our characters' problems to see if those problems, connected or not connected to their desires, give us any insights into issues that might live in our books."

- *Teaching Share:* "Readers, I'd like to suggest something to you. For the rest of this unit, when you find yourself getting a big idea about the book you are reading, about the characters or issues, can you write down that idea on an index card? This is something we did earlier in the year as well. You can use that index card as a bookmark in that book as a way to remind yourself of some of the big thinking you want to do as you read. I'm going to write on my index card from our read-aloud, 'Amber's acting up because her parents' divorce is really bothering her.' Then, as we read forward, I'm going to keep this idea in mind, revise it if I need to, or collect evidence that shows I'm on the right track."

- "Another way readers can use our knowledge of characters to help us understand the issues that exist in the world and in our lives is to look at characters' reactions to the issues they face. We can then ask ourselves if we agree or disagree with our characters' reactions."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Sometimes it's challenging to try to understand a character's reactions, especially when we don't agree with them. One thing that we learned to do earlier in our character work was to try to walk in our characters' shoes. We can think and talk about what we would have felt if we were experiencing what the characters are experiencing and consider how we would feel and what choices we might make."

- "Today I want to teach you that in addition to studying characters, another way we can think more deeply about social issues in our books is to pay attention to crucial scenes in our books. We can mark those pages and consider how the issue is shown in these parts. We can notice how our characters react to the situations in these scenes and figure out what that teaches us about the issues that are present in the book."

- *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "These crucial scenes that so many of you have been marking, thinking about, and talking about in your clubs are not just helpful for uncovering social issues. They are also windows to what the book is *really* about. We might ask ourselves, 'What does this important scene tell me about what this book is *really* about?'"

- *Teaching Share:* "Readers, remember how a couple of days ago we talked about writing down the ideas we feel are big in a book on an index card and using that index card as a bookmark to remind us of the big thinking we can be doing? Well today, just like we did a few units ago, I want us to look at the flip side of our index cards as a place we can write down even bigger ideas—ones related to issues that will travel not just in the one book, but possibly in many books we are reading. So, now on the flip side of my index card where I had written, 'Amber's acting up because her parents' divorce is really bothering her,' I'm going to write, 'Divorce can have negative effects on kids' lives.'"

- "Today I want to remind you that there are multiple issues in any one book. There might be one or two main issues, and a few smaller ones, but no book is only about one issue. Readers know that issues travel in packs—much like wolves. For example, we might have spotted divorce in one book, and realized that another issue that goes with that is not fitting in, because if a character feels like her family is falling apart, or if she feels like her family is different than other people's, she might also have an issue of not fitting it. Or if the issue of sexism shows up, we can be pretty sure other issues such as power are sure to live in this book too."

- "Today I want to encourage you to look outside of your chapter books and into nonfiction resources to deepen your understanding of the issues in the books you are reading. If we are to have a full and accurate picture of the issues we encounter in our books, we need to dip outside the fiction, into real-life information."

Part Two: Reading with a Lens and Talking Back to the Text

- "Readers, today I want to teach you that it's not enough for us to stand outside our books looking in. Now that we have become experts on all sorts of issues that can live in our books, we want to look at our own lives, and the groups that we belong to, and then bring that sense of who we are to the books we are reading. For example, I might take a few minutes to jot down a few groups I belong to: (female, Latina, teacher, sister, vegetarian). Then I might take another few minutes to write or talk about what it means to be a member of that group: challenges and rewards, misunderstandings that people who are not members of this group might have, obligations that come from being a member of that group, issues that this group deals with. I can then return to my reading and

think about how the groups I belong to are represented (or not represented), and whether I agree or disagree with the books' representations."

- *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Readers, some of you have already begun doing this, so I think it's a good idea for everyone to hear about it. In addition to thinking about the groups you belong to, you might also read with the lens of the groups some of your club members belong to that you don't typically consider. It's another way to get a fresh perspective on the issues in the books you are reading."

- "Today I want to teach you that another way to read with a lens is to look at who has the power in a book. Which groups? Which groups do not have the power? And what does this tell us about what the author might be trying to teach us about the issues that live in this book?"

- "Today I want to teach you that readers can and should challenge the texts that we are reading. We can ask ourselves, 'Am I okay with how this group is being represented?' 'Does this fit with what I have seen in the world?' 'Is there something the author seems to want me to know about being a member of that group?' 'Does this fit with my life?' 'What kind of community is this?' 'What causes people to act this way?' 'What would happen if the character's group was "flipped," that is, if a girl character was a boy or a poor character rich? Would that change the person's choices or reactions?' 'What does this say about what I believe?' These questions are great lenses with which to read and talk about our books and the issues that are coming up."

- "We've been reading our fiction books critically for several days now. And alongside those books we've been picking up nonfiction texts to add to our thinking and knowledge. Today I want to teach you another way that we can read nonfiction with issues in mind. We did this work earlier in the unit when we were first reading our novels. We realized that we could carry the whole of who we were, the groups we belonged to, the experiences we had, and look at how books depicted issues that are near and dear to our hearts. We can do that same work with nonfiction. We can carry who we are as people and what we are aware of when it comes to certain issues and look to see what we can learn about a particular topic. For example, as a teacher, I read articles about education in the newspaper differently than my friend who is a chef. When we sit with our clubs and read the same nonfiction texts we should be having different reading experiences because of the lives that we've lived. And those different experiences won't affect only our interpretations of the text, but also our conversations about the text."

- "Today I want to teach you that we might want to consider reading multiple sources of nonfiction on the same topic to get an even deeper understanding of the topic. We can share different sources with our club and all read different texts

and then come together and share what we've learned, as well as discuss whether or not, based on our growing knowledge of an issue, we agree or disagree with each of the nonfiction texts we are reading. I can already hear some of you asking, 'Disagree with a nonfiction text? I thought nonfiction meant everything was factual. You can't disagree with facts.' But today I want to teach you that just as we have learned we can push back against fiction authors' portrayals of different issues of fiction, we can also push back against nonfiction authors' inclusion of certain facts, or even the way they choose to write about those facts. For example, I might read an article that says, 'Beavers use their teeth to cut down trees to build dams.' Or I could read, 'Beavers ingeniously use their teeth to create vital dams that help them and other animals survive.' Or, yet another article might read, 'Beavers destroy trees to build dams that change the natural landscape.' Even though all the articles contain the same basic facts, the way the author is presenting those facts is still worthy of being pushed back against."

Part Three: Bringing Our Lenses to Our World

- "Today I want to teach you that when powerful readers finish a book, we keep asking questions and thinking about our characters. We might find ourselves asking other readers, 'Could we have done anything to change life for this character in this book? Would we have been able to do anything realistically? What constraints might we need to have changed to make a difference?"

- "Readers, today I'm going to teach you that everything you read (or watch on TV or listen to in music) has issues tucked inside. There are no special texts that do this—it's the work we as readers do that makes the issues pop out. We carry who we are and what we know to everything we experience and we read it critically, with agreement, learn from it—or do all of the above! Today I'd like you to try something—I'd like you to return to your independent reading and choose one of your non-club books and read it today with the lens of some of the issues you've been studying and talking about in your club. It might help you to have your reading notebook out, your index cards from past books visible, and Post-its ready for any big thoughts you might be having."

- "Today I want to teach you that book clubs become so invested in the social issues we have lived with that we are likely to find ourselves proposing solutions to those issues we discuss in our groups. We might continue to collect as much information on an issue as possible, looking at nonfiction texts, even jumping online to do some quick research. We might even decide to take action. For example, sometimes we raise money for a certain cause or do a 'teach-in' for our peers, families, and/or teachers about a particular issue. We might write letters to the editor of a newspaper or propose guidelines for dealing with a certain social issue in our schools."

- "Today I want to teach you that when we take a critical lens to our books, we find ourselves bringing the same lens to our daily lives. When this happens, we write about our new or changing observations of the world, sometimes writing descriptively and sometimes writing reflectively about our ideas for social change. We then let the writing we've done influence our reading—make us see the reading through our own thoughts and reflections."

- "Today I want to teach you that, even though our school year is winding down, it does not mean that the passions we have developed for the issues in our world need to be left behind. Instead, we can look to the summer months as an opportunity for us to have more time to read about more for the issues we care most about. One way we can do that is to begin to gather books and other materials that will help us learn and think more deeply about what interests us. We can then read those texts with a running list of other possible reading materials we might want to collect to make sure we'll have everything we need throughout the summer."

- "Today I want to teach you that readers can use our knowledge to effect change. Throughout history, people who were well read allowed their reading lives to inspire them to take action for a cause. They then turned to reading again to gather the tools they needed to take the actions they thought would make the biggest change. We can do that today. We can use our reading to find information and examples that will help us make our action plans come to fruition."

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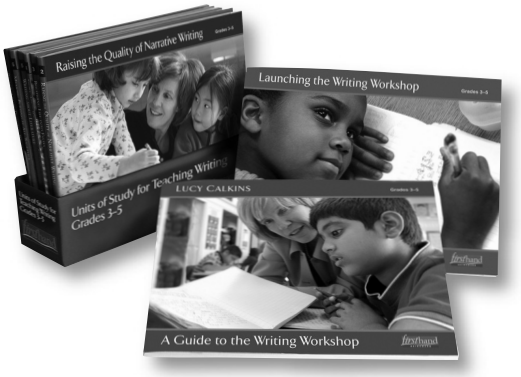

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