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Spelling, Writing & Reading
Standards & Benchmarks
Balanced Literacy

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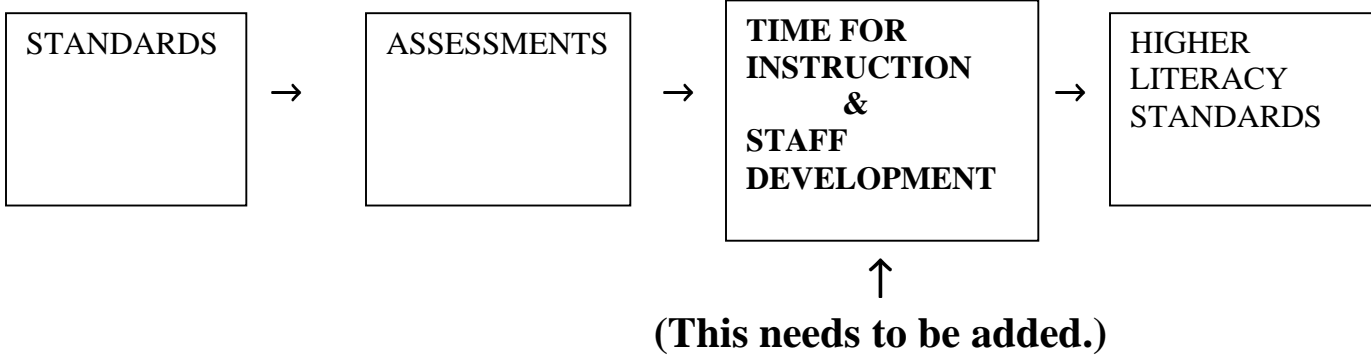
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At www.JRichardGentry.com you will find handouts from Dr. Gentry's most recent seminars. You will also find links to important educational sites and articles of interest.



Standards Based Reform



TIME FOR INSTRUCTION—THE LITERACY BLOCK

Reading Workshop

Independent Reading Teacher conducting a Guided Reading Group/Conferencing Time: 20 minutes
Shared Reading Whole Class Teaching Time: 20 minutes
Guided Reading Children in Literacy Activities. Teacher and intervention teacher conducting guided reading groups. Period often extended to 40 min. Time: 20 minutes

Writing Workshop

Shared Writing Teacher conducting a mini-lesson Time: 15 minutes
Independent Writing Time: 15 minutes
Small Guided Writing Groups / Independent Writing Time: 15 minutes

Spelling Workshop

Do you observe and assess each one of your students individually?

Do you *know* each student as a reader? What is her/his reading level? Can you describe his or her reading habits? What are her/his strengths? Does he/she have weaknesses? How well does he or she comprehend? What about the student's fluency and reading rate? What books is he/she reading? Can you comment on the quantity and quality of the reading? What are his/her reading habits out of school? Could you comment on each of the following strategies for each student?

- Recognizing words on sight
- Solving unknown words
- Monitoring and self-correcting
- Maintaining fluency
- Maintaining an appropriate reading rate
- Reading for different purposes: skimming, scanning, gathering information
- Making predictions while reading
- Summarizing
- Inferring
- Analyzing
- Synthesizing
- Critiquing
- Making text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world knowledge connections

Contrast Beverly Cleary's *Beezus and Ramona* (beginning fourth grade level) and Jim Murphy's *The Great Fire* (fifth grade level)

The story structure in *Beezus and Ramona* is straightforward and concrete as compared to the abstract sequencing of eyewitness accounts interwoven to tell the story of *The Great Fire*.

Contrast their concept and vocabulary load:

Beezus and Ramona—exasperating, embroidering, harmonica, inhaling, defiantly, obligingly

The Great Fire—extinguished, inferno, privation, anarchist, indulged, diatribe, scapegoat, demoralization

Contrasting the demands of *Beezus and Ramona* and *The Great Fire* may provide some insight into qualitative changes in how children think as fourth grade readers versus fifth or sixth grade readers. One might postulate from Piaget's stages of development that readers coming up upon 10 and 11 years of age (which includes many fourth graders) are likely to be nearing the end of the period and approximate age range for concrete operations. I speculate that much of what they handle well as readers may require thinking "limited to concrete phenomena and their own past experiences; that is, thinking is not abstract." (Bjorklund, 1995, p. 62) In my view, a book such as *Beezus and Ramona*, with many referents to the fourth graders real life, basically requires this level of thinking.

Reading in concrete operations may manifests itself in texts that are executed more concretely in a clear-cut, step-by-step sequence, with story plots and information directed to the objects and events in the fourth grader's immediate experience as opposed to reading that requires more abstract thinking. For example, it may be difficult for many fourth grade readers to shift back and forth surveying a story or informational text from many complex perspectives. Content in fourth grade reading such as *Beezus and Ramona* generally has referents to the fourth grader's real life.

The demands of *The Great Fire* are greater. This book requires the reader "to introspect about their own thought processes and, generally ... think abstractly" (Bjorklund, 1995, p. 62). There is much more room for the reader to make complex hypotheses during it's reading. *The Great Fire* requires a great deal of internal reflection. There is more opportunity in the text for complex deductive reasoning (moving from the general to the specific) that is not limited to what the reader has experienced but includes new possibilities based on the hypothetical.

The Great Fire also presents possibilities for complex inductive reasoning (moving from specific observations to broad generalizations) as in the last chapter, "Myth and Reality." Here the reader must consider three complex theories about who was at fault, weight all the evidence, and draw their own conclusion as to who was really responsible for the colossal disaster.

What may be assessed and taught at fourth, fifth, and sixth grade level is often determined by what's in the text being used. For example, *Beezus and Ramona* lends itself to teaching and assessing strategies such as making predictions, drawing conclusions, analyzing character development, predicting feelings and reactions, making inferences from concrete evidence, and synthesizing concrete information. *The Great Fire*, on the other hand, is a powerful text for focusing on recognizing cause and effect, sequencing events, distinguishing fact from opinion, reading maps, and making inferences and syntheses that require abstract as opposed to concrete thinking.

Fourth Grade Sample: The Decision (Chapter 1 of a longer piece)

Deep in the forest lived families of bugs and rodents. One particular family of mice lived in a small hut in between roots and leaves. This family had a mother, a father, and a small mouse called Annie. Annie was a very brave mouse and had lots of friends. Many of them had families like hers, like the rats, the cockroaches, the mayflies, the lady bugs, and the lightning bugs. One afternoon Kristy Mayfly, Ralph Rat, Lila and Luke Lady Bug, Clarence Cockroach, Willie Worm, Ed Lightning Bug, and Annie were meeting in their club house and Luke said,

“We should go away.”

“What do you mean go away?” Ed demanded.

“Well, I don’t know about you, but my house isn’t very fun any more.” Luke explained.

“I know what you mean,” Ralph said.

“Last week my mom gave all my good toys to that baby fly that just hatched, and we’ve been having the same meal for weeks!”

“Yeh! The same things have been happening to me!” Lila said.

“Well, you decide Annie. You are the club president,” Luke said.

“I think we should go,” Annie decided, “and we should pack right now!”

Characteristics of Fourth Grade Writing

- Easily constructed stories and narratives
- Step-by-step sequence
- Narratives follow a chain of events and a chronology that the writer can go back and experience
- Equal attention to each story event
- Story maps are followed deliberately
- Draft written straight through; writer does little shifting of focus between reading and writing the piece while drafting
- Writer sticks to a single focus within a piece
- Abundance of dialogue in stories and narratives
- Few complex transitions
- Revising tends to be concrete and focuses on correct spelling, capitalization, and punctuation and attention to the question: “Does it sound right?”
- Paragraphing is evident but sometimes uneven and random
- Writer indents and punctuates for dialogue

Fifth Grade Sample—Camping on an Island

Camping on an island in Maine is one of my favorite things to do. Walking on the beaches, toasting marshmallows and looking for Pirate’s Treasure are just a few of the fun things my family and I do!

When we get there, the first thing we do is choose a campsite. It’s really fun because there’re so many different ones. My favorite site is #9 on the harbor side. There’s a huge climbing tree and a trail that leads to the rocks and the beach which makes things even more cool. Picking a site may seem dull, but it’s really fun! After we put our tent up we go walk on the beach. It’s nice to stretch our legs after the long car ride.

Where’s a log on one of the beaches that my brother, Matty and I play on. I love seeing the sunset from the beach before dinner. I enjoy the beaches on the island. They’re really cool.

When it gets dark out after dinner we roast marshmallows. I like mine golden brown, but my dad likes them black (yuck!). It’s nice to sit by the fire with a stomach full of marshmallows!

The next morning we get up early and hike on some of the trails. Lots of the trails are loops but some go places, like the trail to Crescent Beach! Sometimes you don’t know where you’ll end up.

Going on Crescent Beach is fun because I know when I get there it’s going to be really cool! There are tide pools with some really cool creatures and seaweed in them! But my favorite thing about it, even though we go in spring or fall, is it is usually warm enough to get a little wet. I always look forward to going there.

Another fun thing to do is to go kayaking. It’s really awesome! One time we went out to a couple of islands. It’s not hard work and you can explore neat places. Once, before we went kayaking my brother and I found Pirate’s treasure! Of course, it wasn’t really Pirate treasure, but it was still money! We split it in half.

No matter what you do when you camp on an island, you’re bound to have tons of fun!

Characteristics of Fifth Grade Writing

- Writing is more abstract than in fourth grade—pieces may not reveal a step-by-step process
- Direction and focus may change during the drafting
- Writer may demonstrate no clear-cut line between prewriting, drafting, editing, and revision. Each may be reciprocal, recursive, and on-going during the drafting.
- Paragraphing becomes natural.
- Writer begins to use transitions when writing several paragraphs though not with ease and sophistication.
- Writer has increasing knowledge about what constitutes good writing and reflects more polish and sophistication, especially in revising.
- Revision extends beyond what is concrete (e.g., increased sophistication in revising leads and transitions as opposed to only focusing on correct spelling and punctuation).
- Prewriting and planning ahead becomes more sophisticated.
- Writer reflects upon the content of the writing by reflecting upon his or her own thinking.
- Writer may apply his or her knowledge and experiences to new situations abstractly.
- Writing reflects more abstraction in thought: complex problem solving, discovery of alternative routes, testing and confirming hypotheses, going from specific observations to broad generalizations etc.
- Writer may roam, discover, and invent beyond the bounds of the original story map.
- Writer demonstrates ease with inclusion of elaboration and detail.
- Writer may shift beyond a single focus within a single piece.

Sixth Grade Sample—July 3rd—Gettysburg

I looked way up at Seminary Ridge where Yankee cannons were pointing down at me. I saw the round tops with more cannons, but most of all I saw the long rolling wheat fields ahead and that was what scared me; not the cannons or the Union soldiers behind the big stone wall. I wondered if the Billy Yanks could see my knees trembling or how my gun quavered in my shaking hands.

I recalled one day, Lee had said, "It is a fine thing war is so horrible for otherwise a man could get to love it." I didn't agree with him then and I still don't now. If we could get to love war, then can't we love peace?

Characteristics of Sixth Grade Writing

- May reach high levels of sophistication
- Includes lots of detail even in the first draft
- Varies beginnings, endings and transitions
- Weaves dialogue in naturally
- Allows the writer's voice to come through
- Brings voice to nonfiction
- Allows prewriting, editing, and revision to occur naturally and recursively
- Is free from distractions due to problems with spelling, punctuation, and conventions

Special thanks to Zaner-Bloser for helping to sponsor this session. Visit the Zaner-Bloser booth to see Dr. Gentry's spelling materials.

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