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# Georgia Journal of READING

Volume 41 Number 2 Winter 2018



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The current Georgia Reading Association Executive Committee members are listed on the left side of the chart. The Georgia Reading Association will soon dissolve. The name will change to the Georgia Association of Literacy Advocates (GALA) functioning under the International Literacy Association (ILA). The future GALA Board of Directors are as stated.

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The *Georgia Journal of Reading*, a publication of the Georgia Association of Literacy Advocates is published twice a year and is sponsored in part by Georgia Southern University. membership in the GALA is open to all persons interested in the improvement of reading in Georgia. dues for one calendar year of membership are \$20 (\$10 for students and retirees) and include subscriptions to the *Georgia Journal of Reading* and to *Focus*, the newsletter of the Georgia Council. Membership inquiries should be directed to Beth Pendergraft at beth@augusta.edu. Visit the new GALA website that is coming soon to obtain more information.

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# Message From the Editor

BY LINA B. SOARES, PH.D.

As we approach the days of winter, we are reminded of the wondrous days to come and this edition is just in time to take time out from our busy lives and read the wonderful collection of articles the journal presents. Each article highlights essential literacy components that can be used in our elementary, middle, secondary, and higher education programs. As always, I would like to thank the authors who submitted manuscripts for review, as well the many reviewers who helped to make this edition possible. I appreciate your hard work to provide thoughtful comments and recommendations to the articles that are included in every journal.

“Teaching to the Test from a Parent’s Perspective” by Amy Kettle and Melinda Miller is a must read. The authors first address the unwanted consequences that come with high-stakes testing on children’s love for reading and then offer reading and writing workshops as successful alternatives to make reading enjoyable again for students.

Virginie Jackson and Kinsey Shrewsbury address the merits of integrating technology and critical literacy into a kindergarten reading program. “Reimagining the Traditional Pedagogy of Literacy” is a case study that highlights how the implementation of strategic questions in critical literacy can engage even young readers in critical conversations.

Renee Rice Moran, LaShay Jennings, Stacey J. Fisher, and Edward J. Dwyer offer a fascinating article that centers on the use of text sets to enhance reading comprehension. “Engaging Strategies for Developing Reading Competencies” focuses on The Westward Movement as just one example for classroom teachers to understand the many benefits when text sets are used in a reading program.

Laura Sandling’s “Taming the Beast: How I Took Back Guided Reading” is a wonderful read on the use of reading stations in a reading program. The author provides many helpful suggestions for implementation and to ensure success for maximizing reading.

## GALA Membership Application

Fill out the form below and mail it with a check for \$20 (\$10 for students and retirees), payable to Georgia Association of Literacy Advocates. Do not send cash.

Send form to: Dr. Beth Pendergraft, 269 Sugarcreek Drive, Grovetown, GA 30813

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**Greetings Georgia Reading Association members and literacy friends,**

Welcome! It is a time to prepare for new beginnings. A beautiful season of change, a time to reflect and take steps toward new goals. A period of transition.

Georgia Reading Association is also experiencing a period of transition. We are excited to announce that we are now an official affiliate of the International Literacy Association. Our new affiliate chapter name is Georgia Association of Literacy Advocates (GALA). Work is in process to formalize our new expanded scope to ensure maximum benefit from being an ILA affiliate. Along with a new name comes a new look and brand. You will soon see changes to our look and website. While we have fond memories of past tradition, we look forward to all the opportunities this partnership with ILA will bring.

I would like to thank the Board Members for their commitment and dedication during this process. I look forward to building on the success of our collaboration in the cause of promoting and improving literacy in Georgia.

I would also like to officially welcome our newly elected officers. Dale Ioannides as Vice President, Shannon Howrey as Secretary, and Carol Hilburn as Treasurer.

I encourage you to join us as we embark upon a new season of Literacy Advocacy. It is my hope that you will continue this journey with us as we complete this transition and beyond.

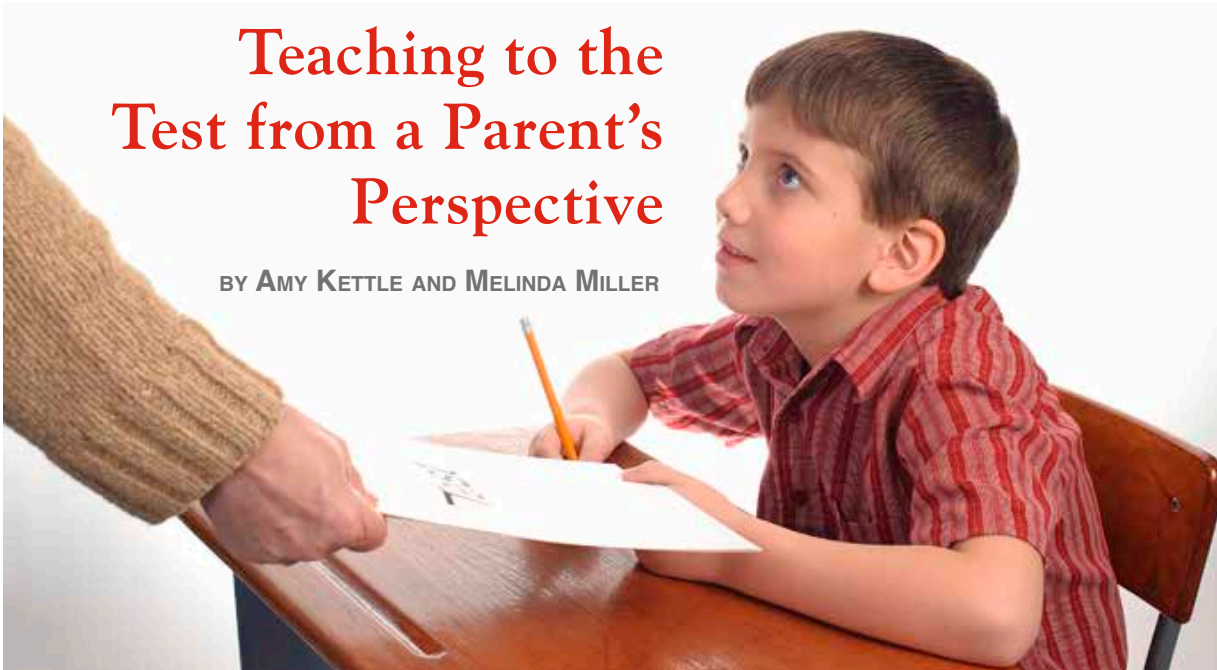
Find us on Facebook and Follow us on twitter@GeorgiaLiteracy.

*Davetta Grigsby*

*President, Georgia Reading Association*

# Teaching to the Test from a Parent's Perspective

BY AMY KETTLE AND MELINDA MILLER



## Scenario

*For the first time in his school career, my son, Brennan, struggled. He went from a kid who loved school to one who didn't care about it anymore. His grades were slipping, and he really didn't care. Reading and writing practice passages would come home with failing grades and notes from his 4th grade teacher stating, "No Strategies Used" in red pen. I would ask him why he didn't use strategies, and he would shrug his shoulders and say, "I don't know." As a former teacher myself, I would look over some questions and bring to his attention ones he missed. His response was, "I'm just not as smart as the other kids." This happened repeatedly throughout the school year. It got even worse as the dreaded standardized test approached. More practice passages came home with failing grades and tears flowed from my son's eyes. It's heartbreaking watching your very smart child, whose love of learning has been squashed; call himself "stupid" all because the focus of his class is this test.*

## Parent's Perspective

The context surrounding struggling readers, relating I became personally more interested on the topic of high-stakes testing due to the emphasis being placed on my own child and how he has been reacting to the pressure. His grades have plummeted as it has become closer to testing dates, and he does not like to read or write anymore. The excitement of learning is

being taken away to be able to prepare for a test that is shallow at best. More and more school districts have implemented a "one size fits all" type curriculum and are holding teachers accountable for their students' scores on these tests. Teachers are changing their own teaching styles in order to prepare for these tests and losing out on valuable teaching.

When I was teaching, years ago, I strived to come up with creative ways to get the students interested in reading a certain novel, writing stories, or even learning different skills. This kept both advanced and reluctant students engaged in the learning process. In everything I taught, I tried to help the students make real-world connections. I wanted my students to read stories, novels, and expository text that interested and intrigued them and helped them begin to understand the world in which we live. I wanted to take advantage of the imaginative rehearsals that great literature provides before my students reached adulthood (Gallagher, 2009). If our emphasis as educators is testing, our students will miss out on more than just passing a test.

I recently shared my concerns about the current emphasis on teaching to the test with one of my professors from my Master's in Reading program. This article is a result of our discussions about the sense of urgency we both feel that things in our schools must

change in order for our students to become proficient readers and writers who can do much more than pass a test. It is our hope that teachers and administrators who read the article will discover meaningful ways to help their students develop as life-long learners who read and write for a variety of purposes.

### **Narrowing of the Curriculum**

Higgins, Miller, and Wegmann (2007) emphasize that the current high-stakes assessment trend in the United States moves in the direction of greater standardization and uniformity, due to legislation (Campbell, 2002) such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002). "Given the on-going climate of accountability," according to the authors, "most schools and districts see no alternative other than to work toward meeting the states' standards and legislative mandates" (p. 319). No Child Left Behind (2002) had two specific goals: for all students to attain proficiency in reading and mathematics by 2013-14, and by the same years, for all students to be proficient in reading by the end of third grade (Readence, Bean & Baldwin, 2008).

With the pressure created by the new legislation came the push to teach to the test, which more often than not, came in the form of one-size-fits-all test preparation activities. The problem is that each student learns at a different pace and brings different experiences to the table. Though proponents of NCLB (2002) may proclaim that higher test scores prove NCLB is working, the reality is rising test scores are primarily the result of repetitive drilling for the narrow content the exams cover, not real educational improvements. The unfortunate result is that groups that have traditionally fallen behind such as minority groups, students with special needs, and English language learners, may be falling further behind (National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2007). When testing drives instruction, subject areas that are not tested are frequently not taught, and the current trend is to eliminate science, social studies and electives altogether in order to focus on reading and math. When this happens, students miss out on content-rich lessons in other subjects that would ultimately help them on a state-mandated test. Additionally, such practices remove important opportunities for students to widen and deepen knowledge that is foundational to developing readers. Without a broad knowledge base, our students stand no chance of being excellent readers

(Gallagher 2009). Students involved in massive test preparation classes receive massive amounts of shallow instruction (Gallagher, 2009).

### **Teaching to the Test**

When the curriculum is narrowed, many teachers lose the opportunity to teach in ways that are compatible with their professional identities (Berliner, 2009). Teachers often feel pressure from administrators to teach to the test, which results in changing of teaching styles to "better fit" teaching to the test. This type of teaching instruction sacrifices students' critical thinking. According to Miller and Higgins, (2008), "Nationwide, teachers have even departed from what they know about effective teaching and learning because the effects of low test results have strong repercussions, such as students failing to pass a specific grade or to graduate" (p.124). Administrators also hold teachers responsible for their students' test scores. Being "held responsible" really means one thing to classroom teachers—teaching to the state-mandated exams administered each spring (Gallagher, 2009). Many teachers who teach to the test tend to teach skills in isolation, and rich, meaningful curriculum instruction is replaced with kill and drill practices.

Gallagher (2009) coined the term "readicide," which he defines as "the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools" (p. 2), which can be caused by "a curriculum steeped in multiple-choice test preparation" which "drives shallow teaching and learning" (p. 8). He further states that "rather than lift up struggling readers, an emphasis on multiple choice test preparation ensures that struggling readers will continue to struggle" (p. 8). Schools spend so much more time prepping for the test that quality reading time is being taken out of schools. Read aloud time was my favorite part of the day.

My students were attentive when I read to them, and they wanted me to keep reading because they were immersed in the story. Even my reluctant readers were in engrossed in listening to my read aloud. On the other hand, it has been my experience that reluctant readers do not do well with test prep curriculum. According to Gallagher (2009), in recent years, test practice type reading has overshadowed the reading of novels and other authentic text, and many high



school seniors have graduated as good test takers, but not as avid readers. There is no excitement in learning reading and writing skills in isolation. If students are bored with the curriculum, they tend to lose interest in school, they are not motivated, and they grow to be nonreaders. It becomes less and less surprising that one in three high school students drops out (Gallagher, 2009). Even the students who do not drop out could experience reduction in college readiness and even future preparedness for the job market as a result of the narrow test-prep curriculum. Emphasis on “centralized curriculum, standardized testing, accountability, required courses of study—could kill creativity, the United States’ real competitive edge” (Zhao 2006). Gallagher (2009) implores teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators to recognize how our current practices are harming students and take a stand to do what is right for our students. As he puts it, “We need to find this courage. Today. Nothing less than a generation of readers hangs in the balance” (p. 118).

Fletcher (2001) posits that students perform better on standardized tests when their teachers focus on best practices, rather than teaching to the test. Frawley (2014) states “The practice of good writing development needs to be facilitated despite the demands of the high-stakes environment...” (p. 23). Manzo (2001) compares students who have been subjected to the drill and practice of isolated skills to those who have received effective writing instruction. The author reports that students in the latter category score better on standardized writing tests. According to Higgins, Miller, and Wegmann (2007), “High-quality, evidence-based instruction need not be sacrificed in preparing students to succeed on standardized writing assessments” (p. 310). Fortunately, there are many ways teachers can help students become proficient readers and writers who read and write for a variety of purposes without teaching to the test.

### **Integrating Good Teaching Methods**

To integrate good teaching practices, it is important to look at strategies that have been identified as best practices over the years. Decades ago, Murray (1972) described writing as a process and emphasized the need for teachers to focus on the process of writing, rather than the finished product. Flower and Hayes (1981) and Hayes and Flower (1986) added their

thoughts when they offered that the writing process is made up of the following components: planning, translating, and reviewing. Atwell (1987) described her version of the writing process as “in the middle.” The author included prewriting and planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. For Atwell’s writing workshop, she combined the writing process with peer and teacher conferencing and mini-lessons. In addition, Giacobbe (1982) named time, ownership and response as essential for writing.

More recently, Fletcher (2017) posited that the writing workshop provides sustained time, ideally every day, for students to experiment with the written word and practice the craft of writing. As students are allowed to choose their own topics during writing workshop, they feel ownership over what they have written, and they receive response to their writing from teacher and peers through conferences. In addition, Votteler and Miller (2017) have identified the writing workshop and the writing process as best practices for writing instruction. Higgins, Miller, and Wegmann (2007) stated that the writing workshop and the writing process combined with the 6+1 Traits of Writing and scaffolding through different modes of writing enable students to “write creatively and communicatively” and “...pass all necessary standardized tests in writing” (p.311). The 6 + 1 Traits include: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation. The traits fit naturally into the writing process as students use the traits as a tool for revision. Students are taught in mini-lessons the art of assessing their own writing through the 6 + 1 Traits and they quickly become proficient at wordsmithing and editing their masterpieces.

When considering good writing strategies, it is important for a teacher to scaffold writing instruction for students by first modeling how he/she learns and what he/she is thinking, then gradually releasing writing responsibility to students. Cooper and Kiger (2003) describe the modes of writing instructional routines, which include write-aloud, shared writing, guided writing, collaborative or cooperative writing, and independent writing. This idea is based upon Pearson’s (1985) idea of gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student. If teachers model metacognition as well skills and procedures, students will eventually emulate them and become successful writers.

According to Miller and Higgins (2008), "...effective instructional practices and mandated testing demands can coexist if teachers choose methods that not only provide authentic learning experiences, but also prepare students to pass state tests. Reading Workshop and Writing Workshop are two such methods that enable students to practice authentic reading and writing for sustained periods while honing their skills" (p.124). Reading and writing workshops go hand-in-hand. In reading workshop, students are engaged in reading and responding to a variety of texts for sustained periods of time. According to Ivey (2000), "Giving all students, especially those experiencing difficulty, more time to read in school is the most certain way to help all students become more skilled and engaged, and even to be more prepared to achieve on standardized tests." (p. 43). Gallagher (2009) stressed the importance of providing a wide variety of interesting authentic literature from which students can choose. In a typical reading workshop, the teacher provides an extensive range of books on a variety of levels, catering to many different interests and representing various genres. Classroom libraries should also include multicultural books that represent the cultures and ethnicities of all students in the classroom, as well as others. According to Leland, Harste and Huber (2005), students develop identities as cultural and literate people through interactions with others, critical literacy instruction, and multicultural literature in classrooms.

A typical reading workshop format includes sustained silent or quiet reading time, reading response activities, teacher-student conferences, mini-lessons on reading strategies, read-aloud, shared reading experiences, partner reading, literature circles, and book talks or book sharing by teacher and students. Students work at their own level and at their own pace on self-selected reading materials (Tompkins, 2015). Teachers may work with small groups of students on similar levels in a guided reading format during this time as well to listen to and observe students and to give prompting on strategy use. In addition, the teacher spends time observing and collecting anecdotal records on students as they work independently or collaborate with others.

Reading workshop stands in stark contrast with the

reading passage format typically seen in today's classrooms. When teachers hand students a passage to read and answer the questions, they are not reading for any other purpose than to simply answer the questions. If there is no purpose set before the reader before they begin, they will likely not pull out the information that was intended. Additionally, the student has had no choice in what they will read, and often the passage is likely not something the student would find interesting.

The following is an example of a mini-lesson that can be done within reading workshop to address the requirement set forth by some districts to include reading passages in reading instruction. The topic of the mini-lesson is purpose for reading.

- Students receive a one-page passage entitled, "House." The first time they read it, they are to highlight what words they felt were important to the story.
- Students are then instructed to read the story again and highlight words that a burglar would find important.
- Students are then instructed a third time to read the passage, looking for words a real estate agent would find important.
- Students and teacher then discuss the importance of having a purpose for reading.

Reading aloud is an important part of reading workshop that is often left out of the school day in order to "fit in" other requirements that have been mandated by the district or state. In some schools, reading aloud is even frowned upon or thought to be wasted instructional time (Layne, 2015). Shannon (2002) states, "The first rule of teaching literacy is to read to your kids" (p.6), and according to Routman (1991), "Reading aloud should take place daily at all grade levels, including junior high and high school" (p. 32). If a teacher brings reading to life with interesting books, there is a possibility of peaking the interest of even the most reluctant readers. Teachers serve as a model of fluent reading and expose students to a variety of genres and topics through read aloud. Layne (2015) states that reading aloud to students helps to improve their comprehension, syntactic development, vocabulary, engagement, fluency, and attitudes towards reading. The author goes on to explain that he places a "Do Not Disturb" sign on his door during read

aloud time to demonstrate to his students and others in the school that “something they might presume to be less important than ‘real instruction’ was actually just as important as everything else we did” (p. 27). Avery (2002) puts it nicely when she states, “I realized that both the literature and the way I conducted the read aloud sessions provided a foundation with written language that touched every aspect of the children’s learning—and was indeed ‘teaching’” (p. 216). Read aloud time should be part of every school day and should not be squeezed out in favor of other subjects. Trelease (2006) suggests setting aside a certain time each day that is sacred as the reading time. In addition to that, the author recommends reading as much and as often as time allows.

Reading and writing workshops offer a natural setting in which children have sustained times each day to practice reading and writing and orchestrate all of the strategies they have learned through mini-lessons, read-alouds, conferences, think-alouds and modeling done by the teacher. In addition, students are encouraged to collaborate, which brings in the social nature of language (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Higgins, Miller, and Wegmann (2007), “learning is constructed as students are given a variety of experiences, ideas, and relationships with peers and teachers” (p. 311). The authors state that the learning that occurs as a result of these experiences helps students to become better at reading and writing, and in turn, improves scores on high stakes tests.

Tompkins (2017) suggests teaching using reading and writing workshops throughout the school year to provide students with time to read and write and instruction on reading and writing strategies. She goes on to state that a couple of weeks before a standardized test, it is a good idea to familiarize students with the testing format. Other than that, reading and writing should be taught in a natural setting in which students are provided meaningful, joyful, authentic experiences with literature (Routman, 2018).

### Conclusion

In this article, we have offered reading and writing workshops as alternatives for monotonous kill and drill regimens, lack luster lessons, test-like writing prompts and reading passages with benchmarking every few weeks. We believe that through reading and writing

workshops, students can experience meaningful and authentic literacy activities that excite them and help develop them as not only proficient readers and writers, but as people who love reading and writing. If students are taught to read and write well, they will perform well on mandated reading tests. But if they are only taught to be test-takers, they will never learn to read and write well (Langer, 2002). Through this article, we hope to be a voice for students and teachers to help alleviate the pressures that come with high-stakes testing. We hope Brennan and other students will grow to love reading and writing again. We further hope that they will not be anxious or scared when it is time to take the standardized test, but that they will feel self-assured and well prepared because reading and writing are something they can do well because they do them every day in meaningful ways. We hope to have reached a parent, a teacher, or an administrator who will stand up for what is right for our students so they can not only become confident at taking and passing high stakes tests, but they can grow into lifelong avid readers and writers who find joy in writing for themselves and for others.

## Georgia Reading Association



- Empower members of the GRA and local councils to become effective leaders in the field of literacy.
- Provide quality reading education services to all Georgia educators.
- Recognize exemplary individuals, local, and state literacy efforts.
- Achieve maximum involvement of members at the local, state, and international levels to receive maximum benefits.
- Promote the goals and objectives of the International Reading Association of Georgia.



## Reimagining the Traditional Pedagogy of Literacy

BY VIRGINIE JACKSON AND KINSEY SHREWSBURY

### Abstract

This case study examined the perceptions of a pre-service teacher during the implementation of critical literacy with the integration of digital technology into a kindergarten classroom setting. A formative experiment (Bradley & Reinking, 2010) model was used to understand the perceptions of the pre-service teacher better while implementing critical literacy in a kindergarten classroom setting. The teacher-centered, continuous mentorship focused on critical literacy, and technology integration served as the intervention. This case study showed how teachers could fit critical literacy through technology integration into the literacy block by engaging students in shared or interactive reading activities with predetermined critical literacy questions as discussion points throughout the story. The results of this study also indicated that teaching critical literacy appeared to affect elementary grade students positively. The pedagogical goal is for teachers to modify mandated curriculum so that they build learning experiences about students' lives in engaging multiple, multimodal, and multifaceted ways.

Critical literacy is the "new basic," a necessary life

skill. Our youngest learners are able to start thinking critically at an early age. Despite popular belief, literacy, is not taught in isolation-it involves social and political acts that can be used to influence people and can lead to social change (Comber & Simpson, 2001). Readers and consumers are bombarded with text daily that usually include underlying messages, and stereotypes. This is especially true with technological communication in which electronic media often carries no accountability, and many texts are unedited, heavily biased and are not attributed to any named or even credible author(s). Because of this, teachers should be aware of the text that they are using to teach students literacy skills and they should teach students to critique texts instead of merely accepting them, as early as elementary age.

Critical reading as a manifestation of critical thinking has become significant in living a more competitive life in the 21st century and beyond. Critical thinking involves higher order thinking skills and more complex cognitive processes necessary in the 21st century to achieve success in life (Greiff, Niepel, & Wustenberg, 2015). This form of reading develops the student's

ability for “problem find” and becoming better observers which enables the scales to fall off their eyes.

### **What Is Critical Thinking?**

Critical thinking, as defined by Fisher (2001), is a reaction to something we have seen or read and which results in examination, intellection, and reflection. Through reflection, the reader will decide whether to accept or to reject the text as a course of action. Furthermore, rejection can then lead to pursuit for a greater dissemination of additional information at the classroom level through discussion and debates. This provides students with opportunities to question and scrutinize many meanings and insights. McInulty (2013) states that of paramount importance, however, is that, if teachers want to develop their students’ critical knowledge they must then provide texts from which students can extrapolate meaning then expound and challenge attitudes and suppositions.

### **What is Critical Literacy?**

All forms of communication are social and political acts that can be used to influence people and can lead to social change (Comber & Simpson, 2001). Critical literacy occurs when readers inspect the social, political and cultural purposes and values of a text. It encourages readers to question, explore, or challenge the power relationships that exist between authors and readers and promotes reflection, transformative change and action. It is important to understand that critical literacy is not the same as critical thinking. The approach that a reader takes on when interacting with a text is what differentiates critical thinking from critical literacy. When a reader approaches a text with a number of biases and strives to apprehend the meaning of the text by abandoning his or her prejudice, that reader is involved in critical thinking. A reader who, on the other hand, starts with the assumption that all varieties of text, from print to multimedia, have a goal of transmitting knowledge and power are engaged in critical literacy practices. Critical literacy aligns with the social critical theory, as it characterized by the reader asking the following questions while interacting with the text: Who wrote the text? Why and for what consumers was it written? Is there any distortion or falsification or even missing voices within the text?

### **Evolution of 21st Century Education**

The United States is becoming more diverse. In 2015, enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools was 66.8% White, 15.3% Black, 25.1% Hispanic, 4.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1.1% American Indian/Alaska Native (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Despite this diversity among the student body, the teaching profession remains largely homogeneous with 83.1% of public school teachers were White (National Center for Education Statistics,

2015). Accordingly, it is important that teachers are prepared to teach children from cultural backgrounds different from their own. By applying critical literacy in the classroom setting, children and teachers can explore and begin to understand and appreciate the similarities and differences that they have and share these with each other (Clarke & Whitney, 2009). Our research has shown that even kindergarten students are ready to examine multiple perspectives, writers’ motivations, and how a text compares to their own reality.

Since the early 1990s, schools, districts, and the federal government have invested heavily in instructional technology. Teacher and student access to technology in schools has improved dramatically. Today, all public schools are connected to the Internet, with 97% connected via high-speed connection. The student-to-computer ratio dropped from 4.4 in 2003 to 3.8 in 2005 (Wells & Lewis, 2006), and hundreds of schools and districts are experimenting with or have put in place one-to-one laptop programs that provide each student with their own laptop. Today, many students are able to type at least 60 wpm in 2nd grade. There are students using twitter, facebook, instagram, and text messaging instead of emails. These students are managing networks of hundreds of people, publishing creative work, and even earning a salary in their spare time online.

Additionally, critical literacy explores media texts, such as advertisements. In the world that we are living in today, these kinds of texts flood readers and consumers daily and usually include underlying messages, prejudices, and stereotypes. This is due to the fact that electronic media does not carry accountability, is heavily biased, and is not attributed to any named or even credible author(s). Because of this, teaching students to critique texts and not merely accept them uncritically as early as elementary age is paramount.

Since education is about adapting to a changing world, how and what we teach has to change as well. Today’s pen and paper has changed and will continue to change. Therefore, we must keep pace and stay relevant to keep students engaged.

21st century education must be student centered and personalized. These educational experiences must provide students with opportunities to apply knowledge. 21st century students will use a multitude of technology to access content, demonstrate mastery, publish their work, maintain a portfolio of their skills and interact with the world.

While there is a great deal of research on the positive

effects of implementing critical literacy in the classroom setting with secondary education students, there is not a lot of research available on the impact of using this strategy in elementary grades and the perception of teachers while using this practice with younger grade students. Furthermore, there is very little research on the effects of using technology to enhance the critical literacy skills of elementary age students in order to prepare them for the 21st century. This study will add to the body of research in the context of the implementation of critical literacy through technology integration in the elementary setting, by encouraging teachers to modify mandated curriculum so that they build learning experiences about students' lives in engaging multiple, multimodal, and multifaceted ways.

### The 21st-Century Literacies

The International Literacy Association (ILA, 2017) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, 2009) published position statements on new and 21st-century literacies that provided a foundation for our work. The NCTE defined 21st-century literacies as the following abilities for teachers and students:

1. Develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology.
2. Build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought.
3. Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes.
4. Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information.
5. Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts.
6. Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments

ILA's (2017) position statement complements this definition by focusing on paradigmatic shifts in pedagogy and curriculum development to help understand the following:

1. Digital tool use requires new social practices, skills, strategies, and dispositions for the tools' effective use.
2. New literacies are rapidly changing as defining technologies change.
3. New literacies are multiple, multimodal, and multifaceted; thus, they benefit from multiple lenses seeking to understand how to support our students in a digital age better.

Furthermore, this position supports research on connecting pedagogical practices to meaningful life experiences (Hammond, 2014). Research shows a correlation between connecting students' lives and cultural norms to classroom learning and

achievement (Hammond, 2014). Contrary to the research that supports the need for meaningful connections, schools continue to use the traditional one size fits all pedagogical approach to teaching and learning. Historically, learners from different cultural backgrounds and experiences have not been acknowledged in the schooling process and resulted in differential outcomes (Banks, 1987, 2001; Delpit, 1993; Sleeter, 1987). This resulted in the disconnect and disengagement experienced by these students (Gay, 2010), which is why culturally responsive teaching is necessary.

Critical literacy is culturally responsive teaching and is characterized as a pedagogical approach that builds on what students already know while encouraging them to embrace their culture and develop a love of learning. This pedagogical approach helps students to understand that there is more than one way of knowing. It is an approach that empowers students, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impact knowledge, skills, and attitudes. There are a variety of terms used for teaching that connects students' lives and experiences with curricular materials and daily instructional practices, some of which are culturally sustaining (Paris, 2011), culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally responsive (Gay, 2002), critical literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987), and social justice (Lipman, 2004). These approaches are common due to the critical paradigm that they operate in order to support student achievement, affirmation, and success through the utilization of children's backgrounds and experiences. The increasing diversity in schools and national changes in the demographic makeup of citizens dictate that teachers develop a better understanding of critical literacy practices in order to be culturally responsive in the classroom setting. It is important that teachers engage in explicit preparation that emphasizes the importance of honoring children's culture and critically examining their own positionality in order to increase student learning opportunities (Emdin, 2016). The research on culturally responsive teaching, while limited to mostly small case studies, shows promise for increased academic outcomes for children (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Lipman's (2004) framework for social justice is a useful heuristic for teachers to reflect on ideologies that undergird the school curriculum, question how decisions are made and who benefits, and attend to factors that lead to systemic inequities in schools. Lipman's model frames social justice as the pursuit of equity, agency, cultural relevance, and critical literacy.

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) has prompted national movements towards modifying

and heightening expectations for student learning that are more aligned with college and career readiness because of concerns about United States school system's global competency. These changes are the root of rethinking the delivery of instruction and the utilization of technology in classrooms as a way to meet those rising expectations and standards. "Digital literacy" is now essential to the success of students in the global economy and falls into at least three areas (Bussert-Webb & Henry 2016)-basic, intermediate, and advanced levels. Students on a basic digital literacy level is characterized as possessing keyboard skills and is able to navigate different apps and software on the computer. Students on the intermediate skill level is proficient at conducting digital searches on-line in order to obtain information or complete research assignments assigned by the teacher, and even for leisure. Students on an advance digital literacy level are able to evaluate the information obtained through a critical lens for biases and accuracy. Historically, the role of technology and its impact on student learning has changed and will continue to change. In the past, technology was used to improve work productivity and promoted lower level learning through flashcards, drills, and visual presentations. The function of computers in schools have shifted gradually in order to help students develop higher level cognitive based skills (Delgado, Wardlow, O'Malley, & McKnight, 2015). Jonassen (1995) argues that a technology supported learning should be used not only as productivity software, but also as tools to construct knowledge. A recent technology plan released by the federal government (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) states:

Technology can be a powerful tool for transforming learning. It can help to form and advance relationships between educators and students, reinvent our approaches to learning and collaboration, shrink long-standing equity and accessibility gaps and adapt learning experiences to meet the needs of all learners (p.1).

Developing a curriculum that builds on students' funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992), provides access to digital tools, explores social issues, and creates a platform for sharing information with others reflects how we merged this theory into practice. "Funds of knowledge" is defined as the skills and knowledge that have been historically and culturally developed to enable an individual or household to function within a given culture (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 1992).

This theoretical framework, along with NCTE's (2009) and ILA's (2017) position statements, support the researcher's commitment toward providing pre-service teachers with professional development and mentorship for reimagining the traditional pedagogy

of literacy. The pre-service teacher explored how to integrate topics such as social justice and diversity within the state curriculum while incorporating digital technologies such as X-Ray Goggles in order to provide a learning environment that promotes critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration while navigating through literature. The pre-service teacher's case could provide insight into how a 21st-century literacies perspective could support literacy practices in elementary classrooms while attending to elements of social justice through the integration of technology.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this case study was to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of a pre-service teacher as she implements critical literacy practices into kindergarten classroom settings. The researcher would like to add to the literature base on the benefits and challenges pre-service teachers encounter when planning and implementing critical literacy through the integration of digital technology. The following are the research questions:

1. What do pre-service teachers anticipate they would encounter when implementing critical literacy through the incorporation of technology in their current and future classrooms?
2. What are the perceptions of pre-service teachers on how teaching critical literacy appears to be affecting their students?
3. What are the benefits and challenges of implementing critical literacy practices with the incorporation of technology in a classroom?
4. How do teachers integrate critical literacy piece into school curricula?

The anticipated findings would be that the pre-service teacher reports how she integrates critical literacy and technology into the elementary school curriculum and the projects she was able to implement.

### **Methodology**

The researcher used a formative experiment model (Bradley & Reinking, 2010) to understand the perceptions of a pre-service teacher better as she implements critical literacy in a kindergarten classroom setting. For this study, the teacher-centered, continuous mentorship focused on critical literacy, and technology integration served as the intervention. The pedagogical goal was for teachers to modify mandated curriculum so that they build learning experiences about students' lives in engaging ways (i.e., multiple, multimodal, and multifaceted).

This study took place in a school district located in northeast Georgia. The participant of the study was a pre-service teacher who is currently placed in a

kindergarten classroom for her year-long clinical experience. As part of this project, the researcher mentored the pre-service teacher as she implemented critical literacy read-alouds to her kindergarten students and implemented a digital technology project with them. For the digital technology project, the pre-service teacher was trained by the researcher to use the X-Ray Goggles computer application. X-Ray Goggles is a computer coding application provided by Mozilla Firefox. It allows users to see the building blocks that websites on-line are made of. Once downloaded onto the computer, this application can be activated to inspect the coding behind webpages and affords users the opportunity to code in alternate versions of the webpage. For this research study, the pre-service teacher used the X-Ray Goggles as part of her critical literacy lessons by engaging students in the process of computer coding of online fairy tale stories in order to provide alternate viewpoints or missing perspectives.

The researcher, currently serving as a literacy faculty member at the University the pre-service teacher attends, provided the pre-service teacher with an online pre-questionnaire about her own perceptions of teaching critical literacy through the integration of technology to kindergarten students. During the beginning of the semester and throughout the implementation of this study, the researcher mentored, provided resources, and observed the pre-service teacher implement the new strategies learned during the literacy block of the day with her kindergarten students. At the end of each lesson, the pre-service teacher would meet with the researcher to answer some reflective questions regarding the lessons implemented.

One of the lessons implement by the pre-service teacher was through a read-aloud of a book titled, *Freedom Summer*, by Wiles (2005). This story is about two boys who are friends, one White and one African American, and live in Mississippi during the 1960s. During this era, segregation laws were prevalent, keeping them from being able to play together in the public pool because African Americans were not allowed. The story ends with the boys being excited on the day the Civil Rights Act is enacted because they are now able to go to the public pool together and dive for nickels. In order to build the students' background knowledge on fair versus unfair, the pre-service teacher engaged her students in making personal connections using a smartboard. The pre-service teacher asked students to come sit on the rug with her. While they were all facing the smartboard, she explained that there is an important decision they must make today. She showed them a column labeled red and the column labeled blue on the smartboard

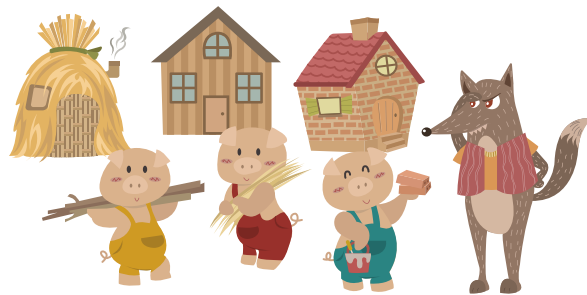
with each student's name underneath the t-chart. The students were told to come up and move their individual names to the column that was labeled with the color they liked more, red or blue. When the students were finished, the pre-service teacher told them that the blue side was going to get extra recess because that was her favorite color. She also told the class that the red column would not get any extra recess.

In the beginning of the lesson, she asked the students to make some observations about the illustration on the front cover. They, then, discussed who the author and illustrator are. When the pre-service teacher began to read, she made observations about how the first couple of pages were making her feel. She also thought aloud about who was talking in the pages of the book. Then, as she continued reading, the pre-service teacher asked the students the following questions:

1. "Who is not talking?"
2. "How would you tell the story?"
3. "How does this book make you feel?"
4. "If you could change the ending, how would you change it?"

At the end of this lesson, she engaged her students in a writing activity focused on something they would change in the story.

Another critical literacy lesson implemented through the integration of technology by the pre-service teacher happened during a read-aloud of *The True Story of The Three Little Pigs* by Scieszka (1989) (see Appendix A). This is the story of the three little pigs



told from the perspective of the wolf. The beginning of the story starts with the wolf baking a cake for his grandmother's birthday and runs out of sugar. He decides to go to his neighbors to ask for some sugar. While at each of their doors, he sneezes because of a cold that he has and accidentally blows down the first two houses. At the end of the story, the wolf is arrested when he arrives at the third little pig's house sneezing because of what the community perceives him to be, and his grandmother does not get a birthday cake. To activate students' prior knowledge of common stories, the pre-service teacher asked how many students



had read the story *The Three Little Pigs*. She, then, discussed the summary of the story and key elements of the story, including all of the key elements of the story. The students were scaffolded to think about whose perspective is missing in that classic and what that character may say or think about during the events in the story. This led into introducing the book titled, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*.

As the pre-service teacher read *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* to students, she stopped to question them throughout the story. She asked them the following questions:

1. "How are you feeling about the wolf right now?"
2. "Does he seem to be mean and scary?"
3. "What are some words and descriptions they have used to describe the wolf?"
4. "What about the pigs?"
5. "How does this story make you think about what has happened compared to the three little pigs?"

There were other applicable questions that required students to think of the story critically.

To summarize their discussion about different perspectives, the pre-service teacher leads a whole-group X-Ray Goggles activity, the computer application that allows users to see the building blocks that make up websites on the Internet and inspect the code behind any webpage. In this lesson, it was used to code and remix the text and pictures on the story Rapunzel to offer a different perspective. The pre-service teacher had a fairytale summary of Rapunzel pulled up on the smartboard. The students and the pre-service teacher, then, worked together to identify another character in the story whose voice was missing and, then, rewrote the story from the different character's perspective by coding through X-Ray Goggles. At the end of the study, a post questionnaire was completed by the pre-service teacher.

The researcher collected information from a pre- and post questionnaire (see Appendix B and C), collected and observed the pre-service teacher implement lesson plans, and conducted individual coaching interviews about her experiences.

## Results

The results in the pre- and post questionnaire completed by the pre-service teacher indicated that, upon beginning the study, she anticipated that the students would react very well to critical literacy through the incorporation of technology in her current classroom. The pre-service teacher had been exposed to critical literacy theory and methods in a literacy course taken a few semesters before the implementation of this study. She practiced utilizing this strategy with

the students she tutored during the field experience component of the literacy course. During this research study, she received mentorship along with additional resources from the researcher, in order to implement critical literacy through the integration of technology with her kindergarten students.

Prior to the study, the pre-service teacher felt very confident in her ability to incorporate technology into critical literacy lessons because of her level of proficiency with the utilization of technology. It was not until she began implementing this strategy that she also realized that technology incorporation would be a difficult process. The pre-service teacher stated,

I thought it might be difficult because I was unsure of how to incorporate technology in new and effective ways. But, I encountered success in engaging students with the technology. Although the X-Ray Goggles worked while I was practicing, but not during the lesson, the students still thought they were awesome and they were encouraged to participate.

When asked in the pre-questionnaire if there were any topics she thought were inappropriate to discuss with her students, she responded, "Yes, of course." Her response after the study changed to the following:

Students are in no way too young to have critical conversations. I used to think that critical literacy had to be intense and overwhelming and sometimes sad. But, I know now that it doesn't always have to be that. It can be more light-hearted conversations about perspective. Overall, I learned that it is necessary and totally doable! I think my background certainly used to affect my book selections and classroom discussions because it's easy and comforting to read the same books you were read and discuss what you've heard and seen all your life. But now, I feel that I can better represent other backgrounds through discussions and books, and even challenge myself to think critically in the process.

One of the lessons implemented by the pre-service teacher was through a read-aloud of a book titled, *Freedom Summer*, by Wiles (2005) through the incorporation of smartboard technology which was used to build student's background knowledge of fair versus unfair. The pre-service teacher engaged the students in a discussion of the difference between fair and unfair by displaying a t-chart and on the smart board (see Appendix A), and questions that promoted critical literacy development while reading the story aloud to the students.

At the end of this lesson, she engaged her students in a writing activity focused on something they would

change in the story. The students were instructed to write about an event to change, who is talking that could change, and so forth.

The following are some of the writing responses shared by her students (all pseudonyms):

Ava: "This is a picture of me helping my friend; she had a scratch, but it was bleeding."

Laura: "We were swimming in the pool. They were playing Marco Polo, and they were splashing, and then they went home."

Landon: "They went to get ice cream together."

Emma: "They were both going to dive in the pool. And the nickel's right there."

At the end of the lesson, the pre-service teacher reflected and completed a one-on-one interview about her observations. The following are some themes that were pulled from reflections and interviews.

Her observations on her kindergarten students' ability to have critical conversations:

"They were able to talk about how unfair it was and explain a different ending better than I anticipated. They were reacting intently while I was reading, more than expected. That was really encouraging because they were reacting to what was going on, even if I wasn't asking a question. So, that ensured me that they really grasped the unfairness."

Book choice: "This book was introduced to me at a multicultural literature conference that I attended, and I loved it. I can make it developmentally appropriate and have them grapple with those ideas."

What went well or what she would change related to the incorporation of technology:

"I think the students did really well with this lesson. They were attentive during the story and engaged while writing and drawing an alternate ending. The activating activity, using the SMART board really made them think and made them sad. So, I think it was an appropriate activity before reading the book. I should have thought of a better way to have the students move their name because that got very chaotic. I loved hearing them share what they wrote and drew. It was so sweet!"

Advantages for implementing digital technology into her critical literacy lessons: "It's more engaging for students. It shows them that it can be used for other things other than watching TV and playing."

Another critical literacy lesson implemented through

the integration of technology by the pre-service teacher happened during a read-aloud of *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Scieszka (1989). To activate students' prior knowledge of common stories, the pre-service teacher engaged the students in a discussion about *The Three Little Pigs*. The students were scaffolded to think about whose perspective is missing in that classic and what that character may say or think about during the events in the story which led into introducing the book titled, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*.

As the pre-eservice teacher read *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* to students, she stopped to question them throughout the story. She asked them critical literacy questions about the wolf's feelings, the wolf's appearance and whether he seemed mean and scary, adjectives and descriptors commonly used to describe the wolf.



To summarize their discussion about different perspectives, the pre-service teacher leads a whole-group X-Ray Goggles activity which is a computer application that allows users to see the building blocks that make up websites on the Internet and inspect the code behind any webpage. In this lesson, it was used to code and remix the text and pictures on the fairytale *Rapunzel*.

The pre-service teacher had a fairytale summary of *Rapunzel* pulled up on the smartboard. The students and the pre-service teacher, then, worked together to identify another character in the story whose voice was missing and, then, rewrote the story from the different character's perspective by coding through X-Ray Goggles.

At the end of the lesson, she reflected and completed a one-on-one interview with the researcher about her observations. The following are some themes that were pulled from reflections and interviews.

Her reflection was,

*This lesson seemed to be very engaging and effective for the students! Although they were hyper and excited for break, they were responding during both the book and the X-Ray Goggle discussion. They understood and discussed why the wolf maybe wasn't the bad guy and that it just mattered who was telling the story. Then, they applied this to the witch in the Rapunzel story, even though*

*the goggles weren't working correctly.*

Student's response to questions explicitly addressing critical social issues outside the context of the stories, "They didn't want to believe it at first. They thought that I was trying to confuse them. They didn't understand the concept of perspective until we got into the story."

Student's response based on lesson topic:

"Once I began reading the story and asking them questions about what was happening, they started to understand that maybe the wolf wasn't the bad guy and maybe that they hadn't thought about how the wolf felt or what he was doing although some of them still thought the wolf was big and bad."

Book Choice: "This book was recommended to me by one of the researchers and I love the book and it is developmentally appropriate."

Student's ability to have critical conversations: "Students are not really there yet, but could be if this was a common occurrence. Since the concept of critical literacy was just introduced, there was a lot of support and scaffolding necessary. However, they were able to think critically when asked important questions about the book and perspectives."

Technology choice for this lesson: "I've used it in previous lessons and really enjoyed it. It was really effective."

What went well or what she would change related to the incorporation of technology? "I think the story itself and the conversations during the story well."

The X-Ray Goggles didn't go well because they began to glitch, but the conversations did."

Barriers for implementing digital technology into her critical literacy lesson: "The X-Ray Goggles worked right before the lesson, but didn't work during. Also, having every student use the SMART board at the same time requires a well thought out plan of action."

### Discussion

This case study examined the perceptions of a pre-service teacher during the implementation of critical literacy with the integration of digital technology into a kindergarten classroom setting. A formative experiment (Bradley & Reinking, 2010) model was used to understand the perceptions of the pre-service teacher better while implementing critical literacy through the integration of digital technology. During the course of this study, the researcher provided mentorship and resources to the pre-service teacher.

This teacher-centered continuous mentorship focused on critical literacy, and technology integration, served as the intervention.

Once the pre-service teacher was well versed in the meaningful context and pedagogical goals of critical literacy, she implemented the critical literacy through the integration of technology with her kindergarten students. The lessons were planned with guidance from the researcher; they were also observed by the researcher.

The researcher and the pre-service teacher found that students, even as young as kindergartners, are able to think and speak critically. The kindergarten students also enjoy using technology, especially in a meaningful context. The pre-service teacher found that critical literacy does not have to be another add-on to the daily schedule; it can easily be integrated into the literacy block and can be implemented with high quality children's literature. Although the pre-service teacher had her doubts about squeezing yet another thing into her instruction, she found that implementing critical literacy was an enlightening way to engage students in meaningful literacy experiences through questioning and critical conversations. The researcher and pre-service teacher also found that kindergarten students were positively interacting with the website during the X-Ray Goggles activity, learning that everything that is on the internet doesn't have to be taken as an absolute. This revealed that the technology integration provided a very broad and meaningful experience for students, as predicted.

These findings should, certainly, give educators insight into teaching students to think, read, and discuss critically. Educators should be encouraged to empower their students; to help them realize that they are more than just face value consumers of text and media, but active participants in it. Thinking and reading critically should not be left for the post-secondary students, it should begin as soon as students can see, hear, and interact with the text they are exposed to.

A limitation of this study is that one class was studied, rather than a multitude of differing classes. Having multiple grade levels, socio-economic statuses, and teaching styles, would allow the researcher to compare and analyze the results of each, observing whether the findings would reign true for each group. However, this provides an opportunity for future research studies utilizing the same research model and methods.

### Conclusion

Our knowledge of the world is constructed through the lens of our individual life experiences. In this sense, every classroom is multicultural, and the life stories of

our students are all different. Children feel emotionally secure when they find themselves and those they love positively represented in curriculum materials. When teachers are culturally responsive, they create learning environments that reflect each child's home culture respectfully while inviting children to accept and explore cultures that are unfamiliar to them. By teaching critical literacy through the integration of technology with the use of high-quality, multicultural literacy materials as part of regular classroom activities during the reading block, teachers model interest in and acceptance of differences. Technology is a valuable educational tool that should be used as a way to create new and meaningful connections to lesson content, expand students' understanding of lived experiences of others, and help to promote the development critical literacy skills that will create an inclusive learning environment.

The results of this study indicated that teaching critical literacy appeared to affect students positively. The students were able to engage in the critical thought processes necessary to analyze character perspectives, make connections, and draw from their own experiences while engaging in critical literacy activities. Although some challenges were presented while implementing technology into the critical literacy lessons, the students were extremely engaged and had an avenue to express higher level of understanding by creating products that identified and solved the critical issues presented in the text that they were engaged in by going against the status quo or by giving a voice to a character whose perspective was not included. This case study showed how teachers could fit critical literacy through technology integration into the literacy block by engaging students in shared or interactive reading activities with predetermined, critical literacy questions as discussion points throughout the story. Students could use the technology as a way to respond to the discussion points discussed throughout the critical literacy lesson and as an avenue for becoming change agents. An example is how the students in this study were able to rewrite a story that their teacher read in the perspective of a different character by using a computer-coding application (i.e., X-Ray Goggles).

This research study seeks to add to the literature base on the benefits and challenges pre-service teachers encounter when planning and implementing critical literacy through the integration of digital technology during the literacy block. This case study provides insight into how a 21st-century literacies perspective could support literacy practices in elementary classrooms while attending to elements of social justice through the integration of technology.

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## APPENDIX A

### Sample Lesson Plan

Teacher Candidate: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Session Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student(s): Whole Group  
 Grade Level: Kindergarten

● **Standard(s):**

ELAGSEKSL1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

ELAGSEKSL6: Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.

● **Objectives/Goals:**

The students will identify and discuss different perspectives that can be examined in common stories.

● **Assessment(s):**

Students' verbal responses during reading and hacking online fairytale to change perspective.

**Activation:**

To activate students' prior knowledge of common stories, the teacher will ask how many students have read *The Three Little Pigs*. The teacher will then discuss with students what the story is about and who it is written by. The teacher will scaffold students to think about whose perspective is missing, and what that character may say or think about the events in the story. This will lead into introducing *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*.

**Teach:**

The teacher will read *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* to students, stopping to question them throughout. The teacher will ask them "how are you feeling about the wolf right now?", "does he seem to be mean and scary?", "what are some words and descriptions they have used to describe the wolf?", "what about the pigs?", "how does this story make you think about what has happened compared to *The Three Little Pigs*?", and other applicable questions that require students to think of the story critically.

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## APPENDIX B

### Pre-Questionnaire

Question	Answer
What do you anticipate that you will encounter when implementing critical literacy through the incorporation of technology in your current and future classroom?	I anticipate that students will react very well to it and that it will be effective! I also anticipate a strong learning curve for me, as the implementer.
Are there any topics you think are inappropriate to talk about with young students?	There are topics that are inappropriate to talk about with young students.
How do you feel about young students questioning their world? What is your role in helping students work towards changing their world?	I love when students question their world because it makes them critical thinkers and encourages them to rise above standards they don't agree with. My role is to teach them to question respectfully and to help them not only question but also analyze and interpret answers/ findings.
What strategy would you use to teach multiculturalism, diversity, or social issues to young children?	I would use a variety of resources that students can analyze and interpret on their own. I would scaffold their thinking and encourage them to form their own opinions based on the knowledge they are acquiring.
How do you think that your background, race, gender, class, culture affect book selections and classroom discussions?	I think that it can definitely sway book selections and classroom discussions to reflect my own background. It is very important that it doesn't reflect my background though, and that they reflect each students' (and some of their backgrounds may be very similar to mine).
How do you think the incorporation of digital technology will affect student engagement and learning in the context of critical literacy?	Students love technology and are more technologically fluent than ever. So, it certainly engages students more than more traditional instruction I believe. Using technology in literacy is not only engaging, but also practical, considering the amount of literacy that is in the form of blogs, articles, e-mails, and so forth.
What would you like to see happen as a result of your participation in this study?	I would love to see critical literacy effectively used in the classroom. And, of course I want to be able to use technology to effectively implement critical literacy!

**APPENDIX C**  
Post-Questionnaire

**Questions**

What did you encounter when implementing critical literacy through the incorporation of technology in your current classroom?

**Answers**

Incorporating technology was at first difficult. This was because I was unsure of how to incorporate it in new and effective ways. But, I also encountered success in engaging students with the technology. Although the x-ray goggles worked while I was practicing, but not during the lesson, the students still thought they were awesome and they were encouraged to participate.

What do you think about literacy as being a social practice for teaching young students?

I think it can and is extremely effective and is a great way to teach social justice.

How do you feel about young students questioning their world?

I believe it is great that students learn to question their world and change perspective. It shapes them into critical thinkers and good citizens.

What is your role in helping students work towards changing their world?

My role is to expose them to differing perspectives and social issues, and guide their thinking and questioning. This will then promote the critical thinking they will need to change the world.

What strategy would you use to teach multiculturalism, diversity, or social issues to young children?

I would certainly use critical literacy to teach these issues because stories are something they enjoy and can get a lot from. It's also a great way to transition into having them respond to the issues through speech and writing.

How do you think that your background, race, gender, class, culture affect book selections and classroom discussions?

I think my background certainly used to affect my book selections and classroom discussions because it's easy and comforting to read the same books you were read and discuss what you've heard and seen all your life. But now I feel that I can better represent other backgrounds through discussions and books, and even challenge myself to think critically in the process.

Did the incorporation of digital technology affect student engagement and learning in the context of critical literacy? If so, how?

Yes, I certainly think so. In my first lesson students were excited to come move their name on the smart board. In the second lesson, the x-ray goggles got students excited to change the story.

What would your read-alouds look like without the use of critical literacy?

They would most likely just be seasonal books or books related to a current letter of the week or standard.

How will your participation in this study influence your literacy practices in the classroom setting?

This study has certainly encouraged me to broaden my book selections and classroom discussions.

How has your knowledge of critical literacy evolved from the beginning of this study?

It has taught me that students are in no way too young to have critical conversations. I used to think that critical literacy had to be intense and overwhelming and sometimes sad. But, I know now that it doesn't always have to be that. It can be more light-hearted conversations about perspective. Overall, I learned that it is necessary and totally doable!



## Curl up with a **good** **group**

You live to read. You can hardly wait to get cozy in your favorite spot and crack the pages of a good book. You're also an educator. Why not curl up with a good group, too? Membership in the Georgia Reading Association will connect you to others like you who inspire and teach others about reading.

Visit us at  
[www.georgiareading.org](http://www.georgiareading.org)



The **Georgia Reading Association** is a membership organization whose mission is promoting literacy in Georgia. Services include annual conferences featuring special speakers and authors, professional publications, grants and scholarships, and involvement in special projects. College students and retirees are encouraged to join and receive membership at a reduced rate. So, from one reading enthusiast to another, we invite you to join the GRA and curl up with a good group.



# Engaging Strategies for Developing Reading Competencies

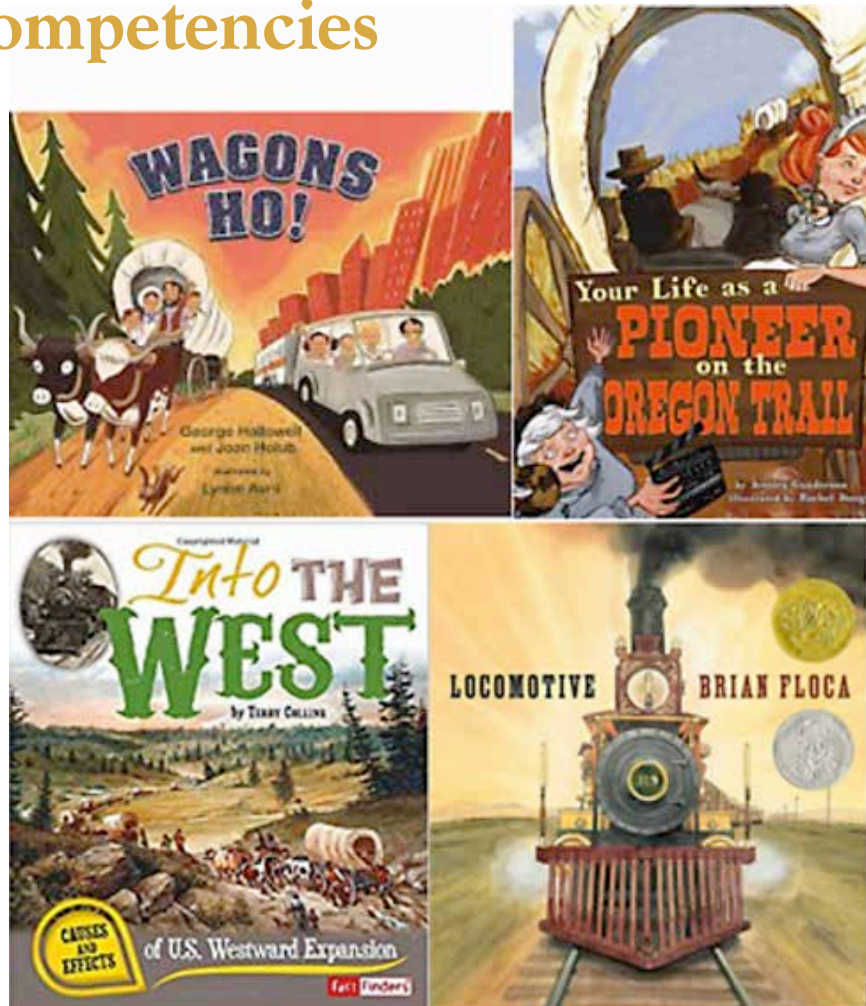
BY RENEE RICE MORAN,  
LASHAY JENNINGS,  
STACEY J. FISHER AND  
EDWARD J. DWYER

## Abstract

Students can become more powerful readers by engaging in lively and interesting print experiences. Deep study of a topic such as The Westward Movement in a text set format can provide information and also enhance reading competencies. The authors propose that enjoyment of reading and related experiences is of paramount importance for developing competent and life-long readers.

## Introduction

Emphasis on achieving higher test scores from well-meaning but generally uninformed political forces plays an ever increasing role in curriculum development and teaching strategies related to literacy instruction. This has led to increased focus on providing instruction that purportedly enhances students' ability to more competently provide the "right" answers to test questions. In this light, Shanahan (2014) determined that analysis of test items designed to drive literacy instruction is a misguided approach to literacy instruction. On the other hand, focus on strategies "that can make students sophisticated and powerful readers" (p. 187) is a much more effective approach for encouraging overall reading achievement with the added benefit of enhancing performance on standardized tests. We, the authors, agree with Shanahan and place emphasis on providing extensive amounts of engaging texts in a variety of formats without regard for the specific types of questions that might appear on standardized tests.



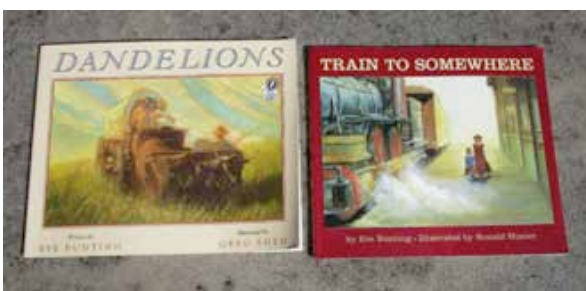
## Text Sets

Engaging and informative reading material can be presented through the text set format for fostering the development of powerful readers. In this context, a text set is a set of books with a common theme. The books range in difficulty level from approximately two years below the designated grade level of the target class and two years above that level within an overarching range from grade two to grade eight. . The text set has information about a common theme that contains both fictionalized as well as basically factual information. Often fiction is interwoven with fact in that the events depicted are couched in terms where characters experience the events within a historical context. The model text set presented herein, The Westward Movement, provides the readers with interesting and informative reading material. In addition, the study complements a text set previously studied titled The

Trail of Tears that chronicles the forced movement of Native Americans from the southeastern United States to the western territories. The movement of people from the eastern parts of the United States to the western territories primarily in the 1800s was encouraged by the federal government to secure lands. The introduction of the Conestoga wagon promised settlers comfortable traveling. The Monroe Doctrine and the concept of Manifest Destiny appealed to the patriotism of easterners what appeared to be limitless opportunities. Enthusiasm was powerfully enhanced by Horace Greeley's admonition to, "Go west young man."

A text set is a vehicle for building background knowledge through reading a variety of quality texts and eventually mastering reading of a "target text" (Lupo, Strong, Lewis, Walpole, & McKenna, 2018). The target text(s) is selected for students to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the major theme of the text set. Practice with texts at instructional level and independent level and in-depth comprehension study can lead to success in reading and reporting on information presented in the target text(s). The target text(s) is not necessarily a more difficult text relative to readability but a text(s) that comprehensively and engagingly addresses the major theme of the overall text set. In addition, Cummins and Stallmeyer-Gerard (2011) determined that study of a variety of texts with a culminating study of a target text encourages students to synthesize information leading to a broad understanding of the topic under study.

The target texts in The Westward Movement set are *Dandelions* (Bunting, 1995) and *Train to somewhere* (Bunting, 1996). These elegantly written and beautifully illustrated texts provide a heartfelt experience for THE reader. Based on earlier study in the text set, students are likely to have a high level of understanding and appreciation of the Bunting target texts.



Target texts by Eve Bunting

Information can be enhanced through Internet searches but, initially, the text set study is based on books. However, much background information for the teacher is available at [www.history.com/topics/westwardexpansion](http://www.history.com/topics/westwardexpansion) and for possible use by students

to further enhance study of The Westward Movement.

We like to stay with books to avoid over complicating study of the topic. We study maps on a large screen using an ELMO™ projector. We encourage use of songs, and poems. For example, we sing and read the words to Home on the Range in connection with The Westward Movement text set. A basic model of a text set, the Westward Movement, is presented in Appendix A with accompanying photographs 2 and 3. We have a sub-set of texts by MacLaughlin (2001, 1994, 1993, and 1985) that we use on occasion when there are students who demonstrate that they would like to read and share reading experiences when using these texts.



Books by Patricia MacLachlan

The text set provides opportunities for developing in-depth knowledge of subject matter. All too often, as the National Council for the Social Studies (2008) suggested, students experience superficial encounters with subject matter. In addition to providing in-depth study, we propose that text sets with accompanying target texts provide opportunities for encouraging reading fluency and comprehension. For example, in the Westward Movement text set there are stories and informational texts that can be made into readers' theater productions.

### Fostering Reading Fluency

We propose that fluency can be enhanced through

repeated readings of passages directly taken from text set material or in a summarized format. Students practice using such strategies as echo reading, choral reading, paired reading, repeated readings, and shared reading to foster fluency (Rasinski, 2010). In the shared reading strategy, in this context, students sit side by side and take turns reading, discussing content, and providing support for each other.

The readers' theater productions culminate in performance reading after high levels of fluency have been achieved. Readers' theater performances can be recorded and a CD produced. In addition, we produce CDs of individual students reading a selection from one of the texts. The CD demonstrates to the student that he or she can be a fluent reader. We make professional looking labels using materials such as those produced by Memorex™ and Avery™. We can Google™ the topic and under Images find an appropriate picture to add to the label. A step further is to make a video recording of the reading using a smartphone. Students are delighted with their CD recordings and video recordings. The video recordings can be emailed to the student's home while the CD can become a family treasure. In this light, Braker, (2013) determined that learning to read proficiently must be authentically interesting and enjoyable and not a quest for competence that demonstrates a "robotic" (p. 201) rendition of the text.

We prefer a CD because it is a physical product rather than just a digital file. Students like getting their hands on their very own CD. For example, a parent emailed to tell us that her son came racing out of school waving his CD and immediately wanted to play it in the van.

Students can become familiar with the evening news and the personalities who deliver the information. We invite students to watch the local evening news or other news formats and study how the reporters present the information. Students develop news reports based on information from the text set. For example, a news reporter might interview a traveler and ask about crossing a river with a covered wagon. Sometimes the news broadcast can get quite elaborate with eventual broadcast on the school closed-circuit TV system. Some teachers prefer to tape news segments to present to their students that comfortably fit their instructional goals. There is generally good community support. For example, a teacher in a nearby school invited the anchor of the local six-o'clock news program to her classroom and he graciously accepted. The news anchor noted how important it is to read the news ahead of time and use appropriate phrasing, intonation, and energy.

### Developing Comprehension

Comprehension is encouraged through repeated

readings described above and through questioning strategies. Duke and Carlile (2011) proposed that fluency is essential for readers to synthesize ideas from different sources to enhance what they proposed are "growth constructs" (p. 200). Growth constructs, according to the researchers, can never be fully mastered but can be enhanced through fluency development and application of comprehension strategies. In this light, we like a simple but comprehensive set of questions based on a model presented by Trosky (1972) (see Appendix B).

### Conclusions

Students learn to synthesize information and develop their knowledge based on a variety of printed texts. Students enhance their knowledge by presenting their knowledge of the topic through activities such as reporting events in a TV news format. Practice for news reporting encourages fluency development which enhances comprehension. Students often say, "I want to sound good!" Production of a CD and/or a video production adds to the competencies developed. We agree with Martin and Duke (2011) that application of "multiple strategy instruction" (p. 351) provides support and engaging activities for students, especially for lower achieving readers. In addition, we have found that the strategies presented herein can be modified by creative teachers for a wide variety of learning environments and grade levels.

We greatly enjoy using text sets within the contexts presented above using a variety of strategies. Study of the strategies presented suggests that the activities effectively complement a variety of standards. We especially like that the activities are enjoyable and provide an opportunity for lively and interesting study. In this light, an extensive review of research led Guthrie and Wigfield (2018) to conclude that literacy instruction must take place in a classroom environment that "generates productive and joyful literacy engagement continually" (p. 75).

We appreciate the emphasis Harvey and Ward (2017) placed on developing literacy competencies within an enjoyable setting. In this light Harvey and Ward retired the word "struggling" and replaced it with the word "striving". We hope that strategies presented herein can be a means for encouraging "struggling readers" to become "striving readers" and eventually, as Harvey and Ward proposed, "thriving readers" (2017).

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### Appendix A: Westward Movement Text Set Introduction

The Westward Movement is the story of people from the eastern part of the United States moving west to find new homes and opportunities for more enriching and meaningful lives. The students read about the journey west and what the trip was like. The level of information presented at the outset will depend on



Moving West text set



Moving West text set continued

the competency levels of the students relative to the complexity of the information presented. Not all of the books in the text set would likely be used with any particular group of students. The text set is dynamic in the sense that it is subject to change with the addition and possible elimination of texts. School and public librarians are invaluable support personnel. On the other hand, the target texts are fundamental to study in this text set context.

### Westward Movement Model Text Set

American Girl Collection (1999). *Welcome to Kirsten's world-1854: Growing up in pioneer America*. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Company. (Susan Sinnott mentioned as the author on the copyright page.)

Bunting, Eve. (1996). *Train to somewhere*. Ill. Ronald Himler. New York: Clarion.

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Collins, Terry. (2014). *Into the west: Causes and effects of U.S. westward expansion*. North Mankato, MN: Capstone Press.

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Fox, Mem V. (1991). *The story of women who shaped the west: Cornerstones of freedom*. Chicago, IL: Children's Press.

Friedman, Mel. (2010). *The Oregon Trail*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Greenwood, Barbara. (1994). *A pioneer sampler: The daily life of a pioneer family in 1840*. Ill. Heather Collins. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Gunderson, Jessica & Daugherty, Rachel. (2012). *Your Life as a pioneer on the Oregon Trail*. North Mankato, MN: Picture Window Books

Hallowell, George & Holub, Joan. (2011). *Wagons ho!* Ill. Lynne Avril. Park Ridge, IL: Albert Whitman & Company.

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Patent, Dorothy H. (1995). *West by covered wagon: Retracing the pioneer trails*. Photographs by William Munoz. New York, NY: Walker and Company.

Rajczak, Kristen (2015). *Life of a pioneer: What you didn't know about history*. New York, NY: Gareth Stevens.

Wright, Courtney C. (1995). *Wagon train: A family goes west in 1865*. Ill. Gershorn Griffith. New York, NY: Holiday House. (African American family.)

## Appendix B: Questioning Strategies

**1. Literal questions** wherein the answer is directly found in the text. Ex. "Where did the Santé Fe Trail begin?" Literal questions are usually easy for students to answer but are helpful for building confidence. However, we have to be cautious about asking too many literally based questions at the expense of more thought provoking questions.

**2. Inference** questions involve drawing conclusions not directly stated but based on information presented. Ex. "Why did Sacagawea help Lewis and Clark?" The text does not say precisely why something happened but the reader is asked to determine from context why something occurred in the selection read.

**3. Imagination** questions are presented to study possible outcomes of events. Ex. "What would have happened to Meg's family if their wagon got destroyed while they were crossing a river?" The text does not address this possibility but the reader can determine what might have happened based on the context of the overall selection.

**4. Evaluation** questions are designed to study if a character/historical figure acted appropriately. Ex. "Was it fair that people who got to the prairie first took the best land for building homes and farms?" The reader is invited to provide a value judgement based on the events and the characters responses to those events in the selection read.

**5. Translation** questions are asked to determine understanding of vocabulary and concepts. Ex. "What is another way of saying 'Oregon Fever'?" The reader is invited to translate terminology from one form of expression to another. This type of question encourages vocabulary building and measures understanding of terminology that is essential to comprehending the overarching theme of the text set. Students can be encouraged to keep vocabulary cards with terms on one side and definitions on the other side.

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## GEORGIA JOURNAL OF READING CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

The Georgia Journal of Reading is a peer-reviewed journal of the Georgia Reading Association. The Georgia Journal of Reading is published in the fall and spring of each year and is sent to educators across Georgia and surrounding states. The Journal publishes articles that address topics, issues, and events of interest and value to teachers, specialists, and administrators involved in literacy education at all levels. We invite those interested in improving reading and language arts instruction at all levels to submit manuscripts for publication in future issues. Please view our website for more information at [www.georgiareading.org](http://www.georgiareading.org). Information can be found under the link "publication."

### Submission Guidelines:

Articles should deal with research, current issues, and recent trends in reading or literacy programs. Appropriate topics for the Journal include project descriptions, research or theoretical reports that address pedagogical implications or issues in reading education at the local, state or national level. Preference is given to articles focusing on topics that impact Georgia's students and surrounding states.

■ Manuscripts should be submitted electronically in Microsoft Word, double-spaced, and the format should conform to the guidelines presented in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th Ed.).

■ Manuscripts should not exceed twenty double-spaced typed pages.

■ The author's name, full address, telephone number, email address, and school/affiliation, and a brief statement on professional experience should be submitted on a separate cover page.

■ The author's name or any reference that would enable a reviewer to know who the author is should not appear on the manuscript.

■ Manuscripts will not be sent out for peer review until this information is provided.

■ All manuscripts will undergo a blind review by at least two members of the editorial board.

■ Decisions will be made within 8-12 weeks of publication of the journal for which the submission was made. Only electronic submissions will be accepted.

■ Submit a copy of your manuscript for blind review to [grasubmission@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:grasubmission@georgiasouthern.edu).

Questions may be addressed to the editor at [grasubmission@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:grasubmission@georgiasouthern.edu).



## Taming the Beast:

# How I Took Back Guided Reading

BY LAURA SANDLING

Just as I was about to bring the class back together after a turn-and-talk (all names are pseudonyms), Isaiah, one of my more outspoken students, piped up and said, “Guys, stop talking or else we won’t have time for stations!” Although I shook my head at his delivery, he was right. We had to get started quickly so I could see the two groups I was scheduled to meet with that day.

I smiled as I watched the kids hurriedly quiet themselves, legs crisscross applesauce, ears ready to listen. No one can deny that guided reading is our favorite part of the day. As a teacher, I love getting to help small groups of students with a specific reading skill, while my other students interact with literacy in a hands-on way. But this has not always been the case. I used to think guided reading was the worst.

Let’s just say that in those days, Isaiah would not be rushing the class to start stations. Small group instruction was constantly interrupted by students with issues from everything to bickering with another student to “emergency” bathroom breaks. By the end of my second year of teaching, I knew I had to do something to take back my guided reading time and to give my students independence and responsibility

during station time. Somehow, somehow, I had to tame the beast and take charge of this crucial time. Through lots of trial and error and then sticking to what worked, I have found several key instructional and organizational tips for maximizing this crucial portion of the literacy block. Guided reading can go from a chore to an enjoyable and learning-filled part of the day with clear procedures and high expectations.

### **Building Our Stamina, Building Our Foundation**

“Yes, I love building our stamina!” Scarlett bounced up and down happily as I let the students get their book bins. It was only the second week of school, but my students quickly embraced the time we spent doing “Read to Self” to build our stamina to prepare for guided reading and stations. As the two sisters Gail Boushey and Joan Moser outline in their book *The Daily Five* (2014), building stamina in reading is a crucial step before the teacher can start meeting with any students. Additionally, this stamina must be built independently. Yes, independently. You may think you are already doing this, but think about when you first introduced “Read to Self” or another station.

Were you going around praising students as they read quietly, did great work on an activity, or “really focused”? When I first started to pull groups for guided reading, I consonantly wondered why my students would suddenly stop focusing and doing well, almost as if we had not just spent weeks practicing. This was because the students were not truly independent. I thought I was giving them support with my constant praise, but in reality, I hindered by students because I trained them to rely on my praise if they were doing well. Now, I know that the key to building my students’ stamina is to stay back. It is hard at first because it is natural to praise students, but they need to be able to do a great job on their own, under their own power.

It is especially important to track your students’ stamina. At the beginning of year, I use a stamina chart to graph how many minutes my students can read independently without interruptions. When they get to 25 minutes of focused reading, I know my students are truly independent. Whether you are using the Daily 5 or other literacy station models, building your students’ stamina is the first step.

### **Prepare and Model, Model, Model!**

At first, I would lose count of the number of interruptions during guided reading. I would hear, “Ms. S., can I go to the bathroom?” to the ever-distressing, “What am I supposed to do?” I stayed frustrated for almost three years until it finally clicked: my students are not going to magically know what to do if they do not know what to expect.

Along with helping your students build their stamina and establishing their independence, the key is to model, model, model. Even though it may be tempting to get every procedure and lesson over with in one day, DON'T do it! Students need many opportunities to practice with and without the teacher's help. To accomplish this, use a variety of mini-lessons to teach and model desired behaviors (Diller, 2003). Every year, I teach mini-lessons on what the students will be doing and what I will be doing during guided reading. Then, together we model correct behaviors and incorrect behaviors.

Finally, we practice! Make sure the materials are prepared and ready. Students should have their book bins or bags, word tiles, journals, headphones... whatever is needed to make your literacy activities run. I also check to see if my students are comfortable with one literacy station before I introduce another. We might spend several days or weeks to insure we have down the desired behavior and stamina. Literacy station innovator, Debbie Diller (2003), suggests giving students about six weeks of practice time in their stations before even pulling small groups.

Furthermore, just as the lesson plan is imperative to the whole-group, it is crucial for the small group table. The pioneers of all things guided reading, Fountas and Pinnell (2012), outline a helpful structure of a guided reading lesson which includes: 1) introduction of text, 2) reading the text, 3) discussion of text, 4) explicit teaching points, 5) word work, and 6) extending understanding. You can use this format or another helpful plan to keep your guided reading lessons on track.

### Use Tried and True Procedures

#### Ask Three Before Me and the Emergency Chair

I would be lying if I said that my students never have questions during our guided reading and Daily 5 time. However, I teach the "Ask Three Before Me" procedure, which means they ask three friends before they wait in the "emergency chair." Even when they choose to sit in the emergency chair, my students know to wait until I can pause in my guided reading lesson to assist.

#### Wear Antlers or a Hat for No Interrupting

Whenever I meet with a guided reading group, I put on my trusty candy-cane antler headband. Yes, the antlers are as crazy as they sound. However, when I have them on, they easily convey to my students that they are not allowed to interrupt me because I am with a small group or reading with a student. I have seen teachers wear baseball caps, flower crowns, or funky glasses. Pick whichever fits best with your personal style, but remember to teach the hat's importance!

### Give the Students Choices

Finally, one of the biggest changes I have seen from my guided reading and station time is to give students choice. I used to assign students the activity they would be doing if they were not meeting with me. However, I quickly learned that students will be much more engaged if they get to choose their activity. Once you have taught all the procedures and students have built their stamina for that activity, let your students choose what they want to do.

### Conclusion - Never Stop Reflecting

Now that you have received an overflow of information on guided reading and stations, it is time to take a step back. Remember that your guided reading groups and instructional stations should always be evolving. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2012), guided reading requires self-reflection from the teacher. Even the most experienced teachers need to evaluate their small group lessons and review what their students are doing when they are not at the guided reading table. If you are armed with the fundamentals, establish procedures that work best for your classroom and students, and reflect on your practice, you too can tame the beast!

### References

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*Once you learn to read,  
you will be forever free.*

—FREDERICK DOUGLASS