Reading for Real

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Reading for Real

Teach Students to Read with Power, Intention, and Joy in K–3 Classrooms

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For Ian, Owen, and Theo,
the members of my favorite club

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Acknowledgments

When I was a graduate student, I worked full time at what was then called the Teachers College Writing Project, first as a receptionist and then as an assistant to founding director Lucy Calkins. Upon graduation from my master's program, I planned to leave behind the expense of New York City to begin my teaching life and school loan repayments. It was at that time that the Writing Project became the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) when it received a substantial grant to study the teaching of reading.

Lucy asked if I would stay on at the Project as a research assistant on the reading grant. The focus of my research, she said, would be in the primary grades. Most of my time would be spent gathering information in classrooms as I worked alongside teachers and students, and then sharing the information, data, and observations in various study groups and think tanks. By taking this job, I would work very closely with Lucy Calkins, Randy Bomer, then codirector of the Project, and Kate Montgomery, the upper-grade research assistant at that time. Although I had been longing for years to have my own classroom, I took the position without hesitation. After all, as Jacqui Getz told me at the time, "You'd be crazy not to!"

So this is the point where my acknowledgments begin, because this is the time when an image of reading clubs began to take shape at the Project. I start by thanking Lucy Calkins for offering me the job that changed my life in so many ways. Lucy nudged, pushed, and often forced me up a very steep learning curve. I continue to make my way up, and Lucy still throws me a rope, offers me a boost, and challenges me to keep on moving. I will always be professionally and personally grateful to Lucy for all the ways she's supported and encouraged me through the years and changes.

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I remember an image of reading clubs in primary classrooms first being discussed in one of our weekly very early morning meetings. Much of the conversation was based on the great work and powerful ideas of so many educators with whom we studied. Lydia Bellino, Laurie Pessah, Liz Phillips, Shirley McPhillips, and Mimi Aronson were in on reading clubs from the beginning, working closely with the

teachers in their schools and opening up classrooms so that we could spend lots of time watching teachers and students as they made their way through cycles of reading clubs. Lydia, Laurie, Liz, Shirley, and Mimi helped us keep our vision for reading clubs tethered to the real needs and strengths of teachers and students.

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Dozens and dozens of literacy educators from other learning communities from around the world have spent time making presentations and participating in study groups with the TCRWP community during school years and at summer institutes. We've learned so much in your company and from your books and articles, and I thank you.

I also must thank past and present educators and authors in the field of literacy education who continually feed us with the big ideas, the minute details, and the sparks of inspiration to teach in a way that lets us match our practice to our beliefs.

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Finally, I owe so very much to my home team, Ian, Owen, and Theo Fleischer, for all of their support, encouragement, love, and good humor... and for being so snuggly, inside and out.

Introduction

For a couple of years before I launched my first cycle of reading clubs in my own classroom, I had the privilege of working as a research assistant to Lucy Calkins, founding director of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP), and Randy Bomer, then codirector of the Project. A major part of my job was to spend lots of time in some of the most wonderful classrooms across the boroughs of New York City and in Tenafly, New Jersey. I watched closely as teachers launched reading workshops in their classrooms. I sat beside hundreds of students, listening to them read and talk about their books with each other. I watched young readers as they chose texts, handled challenges, and responded to what they were reading. I observed and transcribed dozens and dozens of mini-lessons, small-group strategy lessons, and reading conferences led by teachers who were, and are still, my icons of teaching virtue.

In those days, the Project was fine-tuning its version of the reading workshop. We were operating under the influence of work and research by literacy educators from all over the world. We were putting our ideas to the test within the classrooms of many generous teachers. We were meeting in frequent study groups and think tanks and spending weekends together at retreats in order to figure out the characteristics of a powerful reading workshop, one that would have a profound effect on our students' abilities to decode print, make meaning, and develop long-lasting positive relationships with reading. During many of our study sessions and discussions, we spent a lot of time thinking about ways to add more authentic and beneficial reading opportunities to classroom reading time.

You see, there was a concern that young students were spending quite a bit of their reading time doing activities other than actually reading. We found that instead of reading books that they could, in fact, read, they were spending more time doing tasks such as the following: writing responses to stock questions about assigned texts; completing worksheets on which they were to color all the objects that had a short *e* sound; listening to books on tape; making mobiles, hats, puppets, and other crafts based on stories that had been read aloud to them; and so on. Although one can argue that some of these tasks are closely connected with and helpful to students' reading development, there was widespread concern that these activities were taking up too much of the precious time that students could spend actually reading, thinking, and talking about books they read themselves.

We also worried that students viewed the act of reading as simply a means to an end. For many children, the reward or purpose of reading was not in the reading itself, but rather in the follow-up activity, the opportunity to make a puppet at the end of the story, the time to circle all the words ending with *th* in the worksheet packet, or the chance to use the sacred felt-tip markers to draw an alternate ending, for example. For these kids, the purpose of reading was to do the work that followed, and the work that followed was always initiated or assigned by the teacher. We wondered if our students were learning that the reason they were reading in school was to complete some sort of task or to answer someone else's questions.

Sure, many students enjoy these tasks and activities. I know I sure did when I was little. There were not many things that I liked more than the scent of slightly damp worksheets that came right off the ditto machine. While it's true that children may enjoy many of these tasks, there are certainly a number of kids in any class who hold a different view. They're the ones who say aloud, or at least think quietly to themselves, "Ugh, I have to write a report on this book after I finish it?" or "I don't want to draw a new cover for this book because I can't draw elephants with lips." For those children, the act of reading carried with it a low-grade tension because of their anticipation of the dreaded tasks that usually followed.

We thought long and hard about how to ensure that the structures and teaching methods we used during reading workshop were research based and featured the most effective teaching practices. We wanted reading workshops to be characterized by high expectations and great results. Yet we also strived to create reading workshops in which there were opportunities for teachers to implicitly and explicitly show their students that reading offers its own rewards. We wanted students to experience real-life motivations for reading. We wanted to teach them that people read for many different purposes: for pleasure, for escape, for the sake of getting lost in a story, for finding information and gaining knowledge, and for so many other reasons that probably don't have anything to do with puppets, written response, or other externally assigned follow-up activities. We also held on tight to a vision of a reading workshop in which children are joyful, playful, and purposeful with texts. We wanted to "give children opportunities to construct their own responses" (Clay 1998, 190) to their reading. We wanted reading workshops in which our students both learn to read and love to read.

Our vision for reading workshops and our observations of children who were highly engaged with their reading were the catalysts behind implementing reading clubs at various times of the year in primary-grade classrooms. This is the idea I want to share with you in this book.

Reading clubs arose out of a deep commitment to helping each of our students develop a resourcefulness in using strategies to read the words and understand the texts, a flexible and confident reading identity, and a sense of joy, playfulness, enthusiasm, and intention toward their reading.

I hope you'll see the many ways in which reading clubs provide opportunities for students to orchestrate all the reading strategies they know in order to do purposeful, self-directed, and joyful reading that is full of intention and investment. I will share stories of children talking with depth and excitement about things they wonder, what they've noticed, and what they are thinking about texts. I'll show you how reading clubs can be a stable bridge that spans the reading our kids do in school and the reading we hope they do throughout their lives.

In Part I, I provide a rationale for and a vision of reading clubs as they're implemented in hundreds of classrooms around the country. I will help you envision reading clubs by sharing stories of the reading, talking, and thinking that takes place. I pull back the curtain so you can see the nuts and bolts and the behind-the-scenes work. In Part II, I offer suggestions for instruction and tips for setting up successful reading partnerships that will support students in any kind of reading club. In Part III, I describe different kinds of reading clubs in detail and offer tried-and-true ideas for planning instruction and for dealing with challenges that may arise. When you finish this book, it is my hope of hopes that you will be inspired to launch reading clubs in your own classroom.

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Part I

A Behind-the-Scenes View of Reading Clubs

Some of you may know that for many years the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project community used the term reading centers *instead of* reading clubs *to describe the structure I've written about in this book. Over a dozen years ago when teachers such as Hannah Schneewind, Susana Gonzalez, and Tricia Lyons were pioneering this work in their classrooms, the name* reading centers *stuck for some reason, although those of us involved were never quite satisfied calling this structure* reading centers. *As the work of the TCRWP expanded well beyond New York City and the tristate area, it became more evident that the name* reading centers *was problematic.*

The term was confusing because people tend to have deeply ingrained ideas about centers, whether the term conjures up the image of literacy centers or word study centers, pretend-play centers or math centers. When we taught workshops and institutes for teachers, we would have to begin our sessions about reading centers by essentially asking teachers to let us redefine what they already knew about them. That wasn't easy. It was obvious that the term centers *was already taken.*

In addition to being unclear, the name reading centers *was also a bit misleading because it didn't quite capture the essence of what went on between children and their texts when they got together in what we're now calling* reading clubs.

In Part I, I introduce reading clubs by showing you what they are and how they work, offering some behind-the-scenes insights and providing a view of what reading clubs look and sound like. For those of you who like to dive right in or are familiar with reading clubs and interested in getting into the specifics of instruction, you might decide to go straight to Part II—and that would be okay with me.

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Chapter 1

A Rationale for Reading Clubs

Every free moment they had, Alex and Sulima would head straight for the tank that housed their classroom's new arrival, the Yet-to-Be-Named turtle. They were like sideline play-by-play announcers narrating the turtle's every move, which tended to involve very little narrating and lots of waiting. As days passed and the turtle remained mostly stock-still and hidden, Alex and Sulima began to worry. They hunted through the classroom library, gathering books containing turtle information. They asked their teacher, Susana Gonzalez, if they could put their book collection in a basket next to the turtle tank. They rifled through the texts to find pictures of turtles that looked like theirs, and they read those sections of the books to find information that would help them energize their turtle, or at least diagnose the problem.

Unfortunately, after a couple of days, Alex and Sulima realized they were not satisfied with the information the books offered. Their teacher told them that if the books didn't help, they could think of other ways to find the information they needed. Alex and Sulima decided to write a letter to the Bronx Zoo containing their questions about turtle care and about how to determine turtle gender. They included a drawing of their turtle, labeling its different parts because they noticed such diagrams in many of the turtle books they had read.

Every morning, in the classroom I shared with Jessica Borg Weinberger, Emily and Jordan would huddle over a children's yoga book as they waited for the morning meeting to begin. They would mimic poses from the yoga book, and they'd make up their own new poses, complete with yogalike names such as the Flying Bird or the Stretching Cat. After a few days, other children began to join them in this corner of the classroom meeting area for a kind of yoga study. Max brought in one of his mom's yoga books from home, and the group compared poses between the grown-up book and the kids' yoga book. They used sticky notes to mark cool poses and jotted notations on them rating the level of difficulty (super easy, so-so, and super hard). They asked if they could have time to teach the other kids some of the cool poses that they discovered in the books. "It'll be good for us," Emily assured me. "Yeah, Max's mom told him that if you do yoga, you won't get stressed out," Jordan added.

These vignettes from real classrooms are examples of kids' organic, adult-free interactions with books and with each other. Both of these anecdotes, and any others like them they bring to mind from your own classroom, tell the story of children who are highly engaged and purposeful with texts. Their concerns and interests affect their reading, and their reading affects their lives. We treasure these moments and often tell others about them, but they do leave us with questions: What are the conditions that lead to this sort of highly engaged, childlike play/work, and what

are the characteristics of it? Can we formalize and then replicate this kid-initiated, joyful, authentic reading in order to extend the learning opportunities it affords to all of the students in our classrooms?

The children in these stories didn't really know it, but we could say they were participating in self-made reading clubs. The term *reading clubs* may very well suggest many different things to teachers. The reading clubs described in this book were created to provide opportunities for students to orchestrate all of their reading skills and strategies for authentic reading purposes and to develop the kinds of reading habits that will likely encourage a lifelong relationship to reading. The reading clubs I describe are a formal structure giving students time to read and talk about books with a high level of engagement, purpose, and joy, much like the way Alex, Sulima, Max, Jordan, Emily, and their classmates approached reading.

So, What Do Reading Clubs Look Like?

Here is a simple, bare-bones description of reading clubs: a reading club is a couple of kids reading and talking about a small collection of books that go together in some way. During a cycle of reading clubs, partners choose a reading club of interest that contains books they can read, and they determine their own purposes and plans (with a healthy dose of teacher support and instruction, of course, especially during the first couple of reading club cycles).

Whenever I try to explain reading clubs, the idea of a group of musicians getting together to jam comes to mind. When I imagine musicians getting together in a garage or basement or living room somewhere, I picture one of them sharing a new piece of music that she's been working on lately. As others join in to offer their musical contributions, the original little groove is adjusted, revised, or moved in new directions as a result of the musical improvisation and collaboration. The whole process is energetic and joyful, exuberant perhaps, and there is a feeling among the musicians that they are making something important and new.

Reading clubs are a kind of reading jam session. Readers, usually working in partnerships, get together with a basket of books in which they are interested. They read, then stop and talk back and forth to find clarity, exchange thoughts, and grow ideas. Just like a musical jam session, there is improvisation in reading clubs—the book talks may cause the readers to revise, alter, or move their thinking in new di-

rections. The readers are engaged because they're reading and talking to serve their own purposes, to satisfy their own interests, and to meet their own goals. There is a growing sense of agency (Johnston 2004), a habit of exploration, and a feeling of exuberance shared by reading club participants. (For a detailed explanation of reading partnerships, see Chapter 5.)

We can imagine that during a nonfiction study in a kindergarten reading workshop, the teacher launches a cycle of nonfiction reading clubs. Malika and Jeremy decide to study dolphins in their reading club because they want to look for information about how dolphins raise their young. Their club basket contains a couple of books at Levels C and D (Fountas and Pinnell 1996), which they can read conventionally. The other books are too hard for them to read with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, but there are detailed photographs and illustrations for them to study closely. For a week or so, Malika and Jeremy read texts about dolphins, grow ideas from the illustrations and photographs, and talk about what they're learning and what they're wondering. They use their background knowledge to help situate the new information they're acquiring, and they use a variety of strategies, skills, and nonfiction reading habits to make sense of the information. In a second-grade class down the hall, the teacher has launched character reading clubs to support the study of characters in texts in an effort to strengthen students' abilities to infer as they read. Sara and Natasha want to become experts about Poppleton. Sara says she likes Poppleton because she's "into" pigs, and Natasha agrees to study Poppleton because the Poppleton books are her favorite chapter books. They gather several books into a basket for their Poppleton club. They spend their time reading and talking about the texts and share their ideas about Poppleton. They both agree that Poppleton "acts crazy sometimes." They make a plan (with a bit of teacher nudging) to reread the books in order to figure out why Poppleton sometimes acts this way. Natasha suggests that they each read a different book, put sticky notes on the parts where Poppleton acts crazy, and then get back together to talk. They read by themselves for a bit, and when they get together again, they talk about the parts of the books they've noted. Time runs out, so they jot their plan for the next day on the to-do list they keep in their reading club basket. Natasha writes, "Keep talking about why Poppleton acts crazy."

Then, in June, during a whole-class study called Readers Set Goals and Make Plans for Reaching Them, first graders Hans and Stephanie gather books that they want to practice reading aloud. Their mothers will soon have babies, and Hans and Stephanie share the goal of reading aloud to their new baby siblings. They gather books that they think babies will like, and they spend their reading club time reading these books aloud in their best voices. Stephanie brings in a couple of stuffed

animals so that she and Hans can practice reading books while holding a "baby" on their laps. At the end of the week, Hans asks the teacher if he and Stephanie can go to the pre-K class and read to some of those little kids for practice.

In reading clubs, our students orchestrate all of the knowledge and strategies they've accumulated for reading and talking about texts in order to think deeply about topics or texts of interest. Often in reading clubs, the students' collaboration as readers, thinkers, and talkers results in their desire do something or make something out of their new expertise or knowledge, whether it's reading aloud *Goodnight Moon* in their best storyteller voice because they've determined that book is the best first book ever for newborn babies, or whether it's making a big book of dolphin information for the nonfiction section of the school library. These projects tend not to be assigned, so the inspiration for them most often arises naturally from the children's own interests and the conversations they've had around their reading. Keeping these classroom stories in mind, I think it may be helpful now to list some defining reading club characteristics:

A reading club is simply a basket of books that have been gathered together because the texts relate to each other in some way; a reading club is not a particular place in the classroom, nor does it involve a particular activity or task, other than reading and talking about texts.

In the classroom examples above, the teachers launch reading clubs during particular parts of the curriculum. The "club" is actually two to four students who meet with a basket of books over the course of a week or so. So, during a nonfiction study, for example, a teacher may pull together texts for several different reading club baskets, such as Whales Club, Mummies Club, Ants Club, and so on. Her students may invent and put together some other club baskets based on their interests as well, such as Ferocious Dinosaur Club, Dogs and Cats Club, Human Body Club, and so on. During any cycle of reading clubs, the options students can choose from are typically based on student input and interests as well as the appropriate texts and materials that are available.

During a cycle of reading clubs, the reading partners choose a club in which they are interested and work with those texts for about a week or so. Depending on their interest level and the progress they've made, the partners may or may not decide to switch clubs for the next week in the cycle. There is more information below and throughout the following chapters about pulling together texts for reading clubs and procedures for launching them.

Reading clubs are not a daily structure in the reading workshop. They are implemented at certain times of the year, usually for two to four weeks at a time. In other words, reading clubs are an intermittent part of a balanced literacy program.

In the course of a school year, a teacher might implement only five or six reading club cycles, and usually these cycles last from two to four weeks. This means that there may be only ten to fifteen weeks of reading clubs spread throughout the whole school year.

Many teachers tend to implement their first cycle of reading clubs at some point in the fall, but most of the reading club cycles tend to occur in the winter and spring, when students are quite familiar with the procedures and expectations for reading workshop, and for working and talking with a partner. There is more information about these issues in the chapters that follow.

Let's imagine it's February, and our class is engaged in a three-week cycle of reading clubs that support and enhance our nonfiction reading unit. Talia and Max, two similar kinds of readers, choose the Birds Club in Week 1 because they want to learn more about birds. The next week of the cycle, they decide to focus specifically on pigeons because Max discovered there's a pigeon family living under his neighbor's air conditioner. He watches the pigeons from his bedroom window and tells Talia he wants to learn more about them. To create a new basket of texts to support their pigeon focus, Max and Talia skim their bird books and put sticky notes on the pigeon sections for easy access, and they relabel their club basket "Pigeon Research."

About a week and a half later, the class begins the third week of the nonfiction reading club cycle. Talia and Max decide to go in a whole different direction, mostly because Talia feels like it's her turn to choose. She's tired of studying birds, she tells Max, and so they choose the Human Body reading club. During these weeks of the cycle of nonfiction reading clubs, Max, Talia, and all of the other students are orchestrating strategies to read with power, using what they know about nonfiction reading to help them grow ideas about their topics, and learning the valuable lessons that you can read to learn about things you are interested in and that you can talk about your reading with a buddy.

In reading clubs, students tend to be matched with a partner who is at a very similar reading level and who has some similar interests, and, together, the partnership chooses which reading club they'll work in.

In reading clubs, students usually work with a partner who shares a similar reading level. Together, the students select a reading club that interests them and that contains the kinds of books they can read with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. The partners make plans for the work they will do together, although the teacher offers guidance and suggestions, especially at first.

During reading club time, the partners may read a text together and talk about it, or they may decide to read texts separately and then get back together to talk about their texts. The partners may jot notes or use graphic organizers to keep track of their thinking, their ideas, and their work. There is much more information about instruction to support reading partnerships throughout the book, especially in Chapters 4 and 5.

Sometimes two sets of partners may select the same reading club basket. For this situation to work, there needs to be enough texts in the reading club basket for both partnerships to stay engaged. Usually, especially in kindergarten and first grade, the two partnerships tend to work separately, but they may end up talking together to share information, to clear up confusion, or to get ideas from each other. I've found that it's easier for older children to collaborate successfully across partnerships within a reading club than it is for our youngest readers, although this largely depends on the particular students involved and the support offered by the teacher.

The books in the reading club that the partners choose are at or very near the partners' independent reading level.

Students "need lots of books they can read right at their finger tips" (Allington 2001, 68), because in order to become stronger readers, students need to have as much time as possible with texts they can read with high levels of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. What that means for reading clubs is that it's essential that most of the books in the reading club basket are at an accessible reading level for the partners working in the club.

Although we want students to choose their own reading clubs, sometimes we may need to guide them toward reading clubs containing books they can read well. As Sharon Taberski says, "We need to match children with books that are appropriate for their stage of reading" (2000, 63). During a character study one year, I remember having to gently direct Deanna and Reina away from the Junie B. Jones Club and toward the character study clubs that contained books written at levels they could read conventionally, with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Al-

though they were disappointed at first, I explained to them that in order to do their best work and have the most fun, they needed to choose a club that had books they could read together. I briefly (and enthusiastically) introduced them to the characters in a couple of reading club baskets that were closer to their reading level.

While it's true that for the vast majority of reading club work, it's essential that students can read the books in the club with high levels of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, there may be exceptions. In nonfiction reading clubs, there might be a book or two in the basket that would not be characterized as a just-right book (Routman 2003, 93). For example, the partners working in the Whale Club might find mostly accessible texts in their basket, but there also might be a book or two that the partners aren't able to read conventionally, such as a Dorling Kindersley book containing fascinating photographs and a grown-up layout. In situations like this, which usually happen during nonfiction clubs, we can teach students to be resourceful, using their prior knowledge and strategies to study illustrations and photographs to further their understanding of their topic.

In Appendix A, I offer suggestions for the kinds of texts that are found in a comprehensive classroom library and necessary for students to participate in reading clubs that capture their interests, pique their curiosity, and appeal to their ability and potential as readers.

Partners read and talk about the texts in their reading clubs, and then they share ideas, ponder questions, celebrate discoveries, develop theories, and so on.

In a reading club session, a visitor to the classroom would likely observe a high level of engagement in a variety of work. Visitors would observe partners talking about their books, or reading their books, or jotting ideas, questions, or thoughts on a variety of media—sticky notes, graphic organizers, and so on. Although there is no set recipe for how students have to approach their work in reading clubs, the teacher models things they can do during reading workshop mini-lessons and conferences, as well as during read-aloud time.

Although the students in each reading club might be working toward different purposes, there are typical ways they tend to approach their work together. In many cases, the partners might begin by reading a text in the basket by themselves and then talking about their texts with each other. Sometimes they might decide to read a text or portion of a text together, depending on the type of text and their purpose. In many classrooms, partners keep a folder in their reading club basket that contains their notes, plans, and other artifacts of their work.

In many clubs, just like in real life, the students might have an initial purpose in mind for their reading. ("Let's read and find out information about how dolphins take care of their babies.") In other clubs, also like real life, the students' areas of interest and lines of inquiry arise after they've read some of the texts. ("I've noticed that Poppleton sometimes acts crazy. Let's reread to figure out why.")

The work that students do in their reading clubs enables them to become experts about their topics and increases their comfort and familiarity with different kinds of texts and reading strategies.

During a cycle of reading clubs, the whole class works in similar kinds of reading clubs that are connected by an overarching theme, purpose, or genre, although partnerships tend to choose a specific reading club based on their own interests, and also on the accessibility of the texts in the club. Students grow more familiar with different types of texts, different approaches to reading a text, and different purposes for rereading. They become more proficient at integrating reading strategies with authentic reading purposes and habits, which is one of our main goals as we implement reading clubs.

One of the primary intentions students have in reading clubs is to gain some sort of expertise about the topic of study. After all, partners choose a club of interest and are presented the opportunity to read multiple texts on a topic and talk about their ideas and wonderings with a partner. In many classrooms, the teacher tells students that careful readers often find ways to share their new learning or new ideas by doing something, making something, or presenting the information somehow. In reading clubs, the teacher tends not to assign specific culminating projects or tasks. Instead, she supports, encourages, guides, and sometimes even collaborates on the students' own plans for projects or actions. In Chapter 6, there is information about projects and celebrations.

During reading clubs, the teacher confers with reading club partners. The teacher actively supports and extends students' work by teaching them helpful strategies or by offering ideas for how to push their thinking further.

During reading clubs, the teacher moves about the room conferring with partnerships in the same way as he or she would confer anytime during the reading workshop (Calkins 2001). The instruction offered during reading club conferences tends to teach reading strategies and habits of proficient readers. During conferences, the teacher may also help students make plans for their work, and she might show them

a way they can keep track of their thinking and talking. The teacher may also support the partner conversations in order to nudge the talk and ideas to a higher level. There are several examples of reading club conferences in the upcoming chapters.

When engaged in a cycle of reading clubs, there is still time in the day devoted to independent reading. Reading clubs do not replace independent reading.

It's essential that students have as much time as possible to read books with fluency, accuracy, and comprehension, so my colleagues and I at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project have figured out some options for fitting in reading clubs in addition to time for independent reading. These options are described in Chapter 2.

* * *

As you can see, the reading clubs described in this book differ from other structures that teachers typically implement to support reading instruction. Reading clubs are different from literacy centers or literacy work stations in which students are working on mostly teacher-initiated literacy tasks around the classroom while the teacher is conducting guided reading groups or alternative versions of small-group instruction. In reading clubs, students are reading and talking about books they *can* read, with their own intentions front and center while the teacher confers with them.

Reading clubs are different from what some teachers call "center time," during which groups of children across the room are engaged in a variety of work and play, from building with blocks to making art, from science investigations to math explorations, and much more. Reading clubs are centered on reading and talking about books and topics of interest.

Reading clubs as described in this book are not quite the same thing as literature circles or book clubs either, although they certainly have elements in common with these structures. In most versions of book clubs or literature circles, a group of students tends to read one book and talk about it, and then they move on to another text, which may or may not be connected in some way to the text they've just read.

It's important to say that the other structures I mentioned above, literacy centers, work stations, center time, literature circles, and book clubs, offer valuable support and important experiences for readers. My intention here is to simply add another idea to the vast collection of approaches and structures for teaching reading in ways that matter to our students' reading lives, as well as to their reading scores.

Why Add Reading Clubs to Everything I Already Do?

Implementing reading clubs at various times in the year is worth our while because they are a powerful component of a balanced literacy framework and offer unique opportunities for both teachers and students. For one thing, when we confer with our students during reading clubs, we are able to draw upon our real-life reading experiences to support and extend their work. In *By Different Paths to Common Outcomes*, Marie Clay writes about the power of personalizing our instruction and suggests that "instruction needs to meet an individual learner on a personal level whenever learning is challenging" (1998, 31). In reading clubs, our students are reading in ways that are closely related to the ways that proficient and enthusiastic readers approach their reading. Because we can connect with our students in profound and genuine ways as readers, our teaching can become more personal.

During reading clubs, we become more than our students' instructors, evaluators, timekeepers, or behavior managers. We become their reading mentors. I've heard Dr. Richard Allington talk of how critical it is for students to have relationships with richly literate adults, and through the structure of reading clubs, we are able to develop more intimate and rich reading relationships with the students in our classes. In reading clubs, it feels so natural to share joys and struggles, habits and helpful hints around literacy. I have come to see how much easier it is to connect our more experienced reading lives to our students' nascent reading lives when they are engaged in reading clubs.

There is yet another compelling reason to have cycles of reading clubs interspersed throughout the year: reading clubs provide opportunities for students to solidify their newly acquired reading skills and strategies by applying them in real-life "readerly" ways. What I deeply appreciate about reading clubs is that the work young readers do in them is very similar to the work that proficient, joyful readers do in real life: We do things like read a slew of books in a row by an author we have fallen in love with. We find books about building stone walls and compare the techniques they describe as we plan our own building project. We gather and swap books and magazines for brides and compare notes on the ideas in them with a friend who is planning a wedding at the same time. We follow a new interest in a genre and read science fiction for a few weeks straight. We use all we know about reading, all the strategies we've ever used and all the prior knowledge that we can apply, to understand the text in front of us.

How Are Reading Clubs Like Real-Life Reading?

At this point, it may be helpful to examine how the experience of students who are participating in a classroom reading club might mirror a particular real-life reading experience (see Figure 1.1). By laying these stories side by side, it is my intention to show how the work and purposes of reading clubs in school are very similar to the kinds of reading that many of us do in real life.

Figure 1.1

Real Life Reading Club	Classroom Reading Club
Planning a Trip to Alaska	***Becoming an Expert On Insects***
Aaron, Ken, and Scott are going to Alaska over the summer. The first cycle of their "reading club" work is to create an itinerary. They cull through travel books to decide where they want to go in Alaska. They talk to people who've lived and traveled in Alaska to get recommendations. They compare and contrast information from different travel books and blogs to help them create an itinerary. After they decide where they're going, the work in their "reading club" changes a bit. Ken reads about Alaskan history and Native cultures; Aaron reads about Alaskan hiking and outdoor activities and looks into what they need to pack; Scott researches digital cameras because he wants to buy a great one for the trip. Aaron, Ken, and Scott talk about the information they've collected, and they trade texts back and forth. They start to pay attention to stories about Alaska in the newspaper and on the news, and Scott records a televised documentary about Alaska so they can watch it together. As their trip approaches, they begin looking at weather reports online, and they pack and repack their bags accordingly. All this reading and talking results in a fun-filled Alaskan adventure with no bear mishaps or camping disasters and lots and lots of beautiful pictures.	Dito and Margot are reading partners who decide to study insects in their nonfiction reading club. Their teacher has put together a basket of several books on insects that are at their reading level, and Dito and Margot decide to add another book to the collection because the photographs are so gory and fascinating! They talk about what kinds of things they want to learn about insects and make a plan for which books they'll start reading. After a day or two of reading and talking about lots of insects, Dito and Margot decide that they really want to learn more about ants because they believe that ants have a fascinating life, in comparison with other insects. They decide to reread the books in their club for information specific to ants, and they put sticky notes on the ant pages. Dito and Margot talk a lot about ant colonies and study the ant colony illustrations because that's what interests them most at this point. Dito asks his mom for an ant farm, and Margot and other kids try to build an ant colony in the block area of the classroom. One day during recess, Dito notices ants at the edge of the playground, and he runs to get Margot so they can do some ant research. They find two orange pylons and use them to block the area so kids won't stomp on the ants by accident.

The two scenarios in Figure 1.1, the real-life adult "reading club" and the in-school first-grade reading club, share some characteristics. First, for a period of time (either days or weeks), the readers are reading and talking about several texts that are related in some way. In these cases, the texts are connected by topic—for Aaron, Ken, and Scott, most all of the texts they are reading are about Alaska, and for Dito and Margot, the texts they focus on are about insects in general, and then ants specifically.

In both of these reading clubs, the readers' lives were affected by their reading. Aaron, Ken, and Scott read to help them make informed decisions and wise purchases for their trip to Alaska. Dito and Margot read to discover more about insects, a subject of interest to them. Their growing knowledge resulted in Dito's plans to raise ants in an ant farm and in Margot's plans to recruit friends to build a supersized model ant colony in the block area of the classroom. They both felt empowered enough to declare themselves ant researchers and to create a safe haven for ants on the playground.

Dito and Margot are learning very early on in their reading lives that a powerful chain reaction can begin with the words on a page. This is a priceless reading lesson, one that is more likely to create lifelong readers than any of our strategy or skill lessons. Of course, strategy and skill instruction is important because we need to teach our students to read well and to read with power. But we also need to teach them to value reading, to see how reading can feed their lives and fuel their hopes. These are the lessons that will keep our students reading with interest and enthusiasm well beyond their forty weeks in our classrooms, and these are the lessons they can learn in reading clubs.

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Chapter 2

How Reading Clubs Fit into the Day and Across the Year

I can easily recall the last few weeks of that summer before I began my first year of teaching. Let me just say that they were not restful or relaxing, nor were they restorative. I would wake up in the middle of the night, sweaty with terror. I had a recurring dream that it was the first day of school, but my classroom wasn't ready when my students arrived. In the typical version of this nightmare, I was usually dressed in running shorts and a ratty, old Yankees T-shirt with my hair pulled back into a messy ponytail while the children and their families arrived, all shiny and clean. I was moving tables and chairs from this spot to that spot, and I continually wiped my sweaty brow with my grimy forearm as I greeted my students. There's more to it, but I'll spare you. Let me just say it was horrifying and involved mice. I'd wake up looking like the figure in Edvard Munch's painting, *The Scream*. Show me the research that says dreams tend to last for only a few seconds. This one, I'm sure, lasted for hours.

The daytime version of this nightmare was a nagging worry about how I could possibly fill a whole day for first graders. You see, I had no experience with primary grades at that point. The first day of first grade would be the first time I spent a full day with students that young. My student-teaching experience took place in a high school for new arrivals to the United States. Consequently, I could fill forty-five minutes for teenage English language learners, but planning for a whole day for five- and six-year-olds—yikes!

When I drafted plans for that first day of school, I realized the actual challenge was not filling up the day. Instead the challenge was filling the time in worthwhile, meaningful ways until the three o'clock dismissal. I'd stretch things out, add a million little activities to the day, but no matter what I did, I struggled to get to three o'clock in a way that seemed to matter. I was worried.

Phew. Once school began, I quickly realized what a needless worry that was. As anyone who has taught for a minute would know, concerns about filling the day very quickly turn into struggles to fit in everything. Since that first year of teaching, my questions about scheduling the day have evolved from "How am I supposed to fill a whole day?" to "How do I fit everything in?" to "What is worth fitting in?" After all, as Lucy Calkins often reminds us, choosing to include something in our daily schedule is, by necessity, a choice to reject something else (2001).

Year in and year out, I've chosen to make reading clubs an important part of literacy instruction in my classroom. I value reading clubs, not just because they provide a structure in which students get the chance to orchestrate all they know about reading well, but also because reading clubs are one of the only structures that enables my students to apply what they've learned about reading in ways that closely resemble the reading people do in real life, outside the boundaries of school

grounds and beyond the confines of class assignments. I believe that any chance we get to cut away at the imaginary paper wall that separates in-class reading and real-life reading is worth every minute of time it takes.

The structure of reading clubs has inherent characteristics that make it easy to implement in any classroom, whether or not you have an ongoing reading workshop (although it certainly helps to have an ongoing reading workshop); whether or not you are a kindergarten teacher, a third-grade teacher, or a teacher of any grade, really; whether or not your students are proficient readers or emergent readers; whether or not you are a very experienced teacher or a brand-new teacher; whether you live in a warm climate or not; whether you have vanity license plates or not; whether you wear your keys on a lanyard or not... I could keep going, but I'll stop to say that reading clubs are easy to implement in any classroom because they are flexible in two essential ways:

1. There's a variety of kinds of reading clubs to meet the needs of your students and your curriculum.
2. Reading clubs are easy to fit into a day and to schedule across the year.

Variety in Kind: The Wide World of Reading Clubs

There are many different reading clubs that we may implement in our classrooms, and this gives us plenty of flexibility and choice from year to year. In order to make wise decisions about what cycles of reading clubs to launch given the many options we have, it's essential to consider our students' strengths, needs, and interests, as well as the demands of the curriculum. In the following section, I describe three broad categories of reading clubs: genre-based reading clubs; reading power reading clubs; and healthy habits reading clubs. Specific kinds of reading clubs within these categories and ideas for instruction will be elaborated upon in Chapters 7 through 9.

Genre-Based Reading Clubs

In many of our classrooms, we spend time throughout the year engaged in genre studies during reading workshop. After all, when we consider the characteristics of

well-rounded or avid readers, it's most likely the case that they read a variety of genres with proficiency and interest. Of course, an avid reader may have a genre of choice, yet he is likely to be versatile enough to read and enjoy other genres.

In the classroom, many of our students "lock in" to particular genres. Many teachers notice that once students are able to read chapter books, they rarely look at anything else. Picture books might seem too babyish compared to text-dense chapter books; poetry might seem insubstantial compared to the number of pages in a chapter book, and nonfiction might not hold a child's interest as much as a character from the chapter book series they are reading at a particular moment in time.

Of course, we don't want to rip a genre of choice from a child's hands and say, "You will read poetry, and you will enjoy it. Got it?" What we do want our students to know is that there is a wide range of genres in the world of text, and it's important that they know how to deal with them. We could also tell them if they enjoy reading chapter books that have a main character who is a boy their age, they can also find pleasure in reading *Nathaniel Talking*, a book of poems by Eloise Greenfield, for example.

Some typical genres that teachers most often study in their classrooms through the structure of reading groups are the following:

- nonfiction
- poetry
- fairy tales/folktales
- mystery books
- concept books
- biographies

In Chapter 7, I'll provide more information about launching and planning genre-based reading clubs.

Reading Power Reading Clubs

I call another category of reading clubs "reading power reading clubs." I willingly acknowledge this is a clumsy and vague title, and if I had time and $500,000 in prize money to offer, I'd be tempted to launch a nationwide contest to name this

category. For now, anyway, "reading power reading clubs" will do because it does act as a unifying term for the kinds of reading club cycles that I have put together in this category. Each of the cycles of these reading clubs may be quite different from one another, yet they do share a big characteristic: they're designed so that students use all of their reading skills to dig into their texts and to read and talk about their books with greater focus and deeper comprehension.

Within the upper-grade reading curriculum developed at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, this kind of reading has been called "close-in reading." The reading clubs in this category provide instruction to teach even our youngest readers how to read in a close-in way so that they can move beyond surface-level comprehension, retelling, and plot summaries.

The following are some examples of reading club cycles that are part of this category:

- Readers care about the characters in their books (character clubs).
- Readers notice, talk about, and think about themes in their books (theme-based reading clubs).
- Readers find series they love (series book clubs).
- Readers have authors they love (author study clubs).

The reading clubs in this category will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

Healthy Reading Habits Reading Clubs

The reading clubs that are part of this category are designed specifically to help students transfer all they know about reading to the reading they do when they are outside of our classrooms. The objective in these reading clubs is to teach students how to be active readers who create and maintain their own vibrant, unique reading lives, rather than passive readers who rely on class assignments and reading homework to keep their reading lives going.

These are the reading clubs that I envision to be part of this category:

- Readers set their goals to become stronger at reading (reading goals clubs).
- Readers invent their own reading projects that affect their lives (reading project clubs).

This category of reading clubs differs from the other two categories in one fundamental way, which also makes them a bit more challenging when planning instruction. These reading clubs are not whole-class studies in the same way that genre-based reading clubs and reading power reading clubs are.

In other words, during these healthy habits reading clubs, each set of partners might be doing very different kinds of reading work. One year, during reading goals clubs, I had four students who wanted to learn more about particular topics, four students who wanted to become experts about the body of work of particular authors, two students who wanted to put together their own anthologies of poetry, four students who wanted to read all the books in particular series, two students who wanted to make their own Top Ten Lists of Favorite Books for Six-Year-Olds, and so on. The thing that unifies these healthy habits reading clubs is that all of the students are working on getting better at something as readers, even though their purposes and work may be very diverse from one partnership to the next. The challenge for teachers, then, is to develop plans for whole-class instruction that will matter to everyone.

Compare this with a nonfiction reading club cycle, for example, in which all the students are reading and thinking and talking about nonfiction texts. The teacher plans whole-class lessons to support everyone's work in nonfiction even though each set of partnerships might be studying a different nonfiction topic. Similarly, during a character study reading club cycle, all of the students have selected a character about whom they will become a sort of expert. Again, during a character study, the teacher will teach everyone how careful readers get to know their characters well, and so on, even though the students are all getting to know a different character (who lives in books at the students' just-right reading levels). During these reading clubs, all of the partnerships are engaged in similar kinds of work, even though the details of their club topic may be different from one another. We call these whole-class studies because all of the reading clubs are connected by an overarching whole-class topic, such as nonfiction, character study, thematic study, fairy tales, and so on.

Over the years, I've tended to save the healthy habits clubs for the end of the year in order to capitalize on my students' greater capacity for independent work. In Chapter 9, I'll offer details about how to plan for and what to teach in these healthy habits reading clubs.

Reasons to Use a Variety of Reading Clubs

As a final note about the variety of kinds of reading clubs, I would like to suggest that over the course of a school year, it makes sense to launch at least one cycle of reading clubs from each of the three categories. There are a couple of reasons I make this suggestion. First, each of the three categories offers different experiences for our students: the genre-based reading clubs expose them to genres they may or may not pick up on their own; the reading power clubs teach students ways to dig into their texts to deepen their understanding; and the healthy habits clubs allow students to have quite a bit of ownership over their reading. Second, for teachers, the experience of launching one cycle of reading clubs within a particular category makes launching any cycle of reading clubs within that category much easier, because there are similarities in the ways we approach reading clubs within a specific category.

The Importance of Flexibility

Every year, I launched a cycle of poetry reading clubs in the spring. I chose to do this based on my own interest in poetry, my students' enthusiasm for writing poetry, and my school's annual Poetry Month. One year, however, instead of launching poetry clubs as I usually did, I chose, at almost the last moment, to launch a cycle of author study reading clubs instead.

The idea to toss aside my plans for poetry reading clubs developed as I noticed how fixated my students were on particular authors during interactive read-aloud time. They wanted me to read aloud (and then reread) every text written by Ezra Jack Keats, Kevin Henkes, and Mem Fox, to name a few. If a new book came out by one of their favorite authors, my students begged me to read it aloud to them. When I would finish reading the new book, it was like my students had just finished a sublime meal. There was a brief moment where they sat quietly. They seemed blissfully sated, as if they were savoring a veritable feast provided by their beloved author.

One time, Julie brought in a wizened copy of *Pet Show* by Ezra Jack Keats that she found at a stoop sale. (A stoop sale is a Park Slope, Brooklyn, version of a garage sale or yard sale.) With much fanfare, Julie showed the book to everyone. It was such a celebrated discovery that you would have thought she had dug up the intact teeth

and jawbones of a Tyrannosaurus Rex right there in our Brooklyn neighborhood. My students asked—no, actually, they demanded—that I put aside our chapter book for that day and instead read aloud *Pet Show* during read-aloud time. I resisted slightly (just to have a little teacher fun), but I was privately enchanted by their persistence. At that point, I decided I would find a way to capitalize on my students' passion for Ezra Jack Keats by launching a whole-class author study and a cycle of author study reading clubs instead of the poetry study that I had originally planned to do. So, this was a year that I chose to put aside poetry reading clubs in order to fit in a cycle of author study reading clubs. I share this story to show the flexibility we have and the ability to be very responsive to the idiosyncrasies of each class due to the wide variety of reading clubs from which we can choose. The chapters in Part III offer detailed suggestions about how to launch a variety of reading clubs.

Flexibility in Scheduling: Almost Any Time of the Year Is the Right Time for Reading Clubs

Within the large community of teachers who regularly implement reading clubs in their classrooms, I know at least a dozen different ways teachers have scheduled them throughout the year. In my own classroom, I've tended to spread out reading clubs across the year in the way illustrated by Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1

Time of Year	What Kind of Reading Club Cycle?	How Long Did the Cycle Last?
Mid-October	Concept books/ABC books	Two Weeks-ish*
February-ish	Nonfiction	Three Weeks-ish
March-ish	Character	Two Weeks-ish
April–May-ish	Poetry or author study	Two Weeks-ish
June	Reading projects/reading goals	One to Two Weeks

** As you know, -*ish *represents approximation and variation based on each year's idiosyncrasies.*

Reading clubs are flexible because they can be condensed into a brief two-week cycle or stretched out into a four-week cycle. How long they last depends on a variety of factors, including the curricular unit in which we implement them and our students' strengths, needs, and interests as readers. In my classroom, a cycle of nonfiction reading clubs typically lasted about four weeks, which tended to be the longest cycle of any kind of reading clubs. My students always exhibited incredible energy for nonfiction reading, and there were many different ways that I could approach nonfiction clubs. In contrast, whenever my class engaged in author study clubs, they tended to last no longer than two weeks.

Although Figure 2.1 shows how I typically scheduled reading clubs in my classroom across the school year, I think it's important to say that I would not hesitate to vary the kinds of clubs and the timing of them from year to year, depending on the students in my class. For example, if I had a class full of strong first-grade readers who were able to read books at high levels, I might implement character reading clubs earlier in the school year, perhaps in December, because my students would be reading books with a bit more character development, presumably. I would then consider doing a series books reading club cycle in March. During these series books reading clubs, I would guide my reading club partnerships toward series books at a level that is just right for them or slightly higher, especially if I scaffold their reading by providing a book introduction (Fountas and Pinnell 1996) and an introduction to the series itself.

If I had many students who were struggling readers, I could schedule a reading club cycle called Getting Stronger as Readers in place of, or in addition to, the other reading clubs listed in the chart. During this type of reading club cycle, my students would be part of clubs designed to work on what is challenging them most as readers, such as a Reading Like a Storyteller club to work on fluency or a Building Reading Stamina and Focus club for those students who are beginning to read longer books that tend to have more characters and multiple story lines, or a Super Word-Solvers club for those students who need more work with word-solving strategies.

It's important to make clear that if I had many students who were struggling as readers, these reading clubs would not be their only source of support or guidance. In conjunction with the Getting Stronger as Readers clubs, I would, of course, meet with my students in guided reading groups and provide strategy lessons. I would utilize everything at my disposal, including shared reading, interactive writing, one-to-one conferences, small-group instruction, and so on, to offer them the instruction they need to grow stronger as readers.

Ease in Daily Implementation: Fitting in Reading Clubs

One of the most advantageous characteristics of reading clubs is we can easily fit them into the day without having to move or cut out other components of balanced literacy or other content areas. I tended to tuck cycles of reading clubs into the reading workshop by temporarily replacing existing partner reading time with reading club time.

In order to accommodate a cycle of reading clubs, I altered the typical format for my reading workshop. I tried different things with varying success, and I've found that it's easiest and works best to temporarily replace regular partner reading with reading clubs. This isn't an enormous change to the routine or flow of the reading workshop. Figure 2.2 shows a few options for how teachers might rearrange their reading workshop when they are engaged in a cycle of reading clubs.

Figure 2.2

A Typical Reading Workshop (with no reading clubs in place)	A Reading Workshop During a Cycle of Reading Clubs: Option A	A Reading Workshop During a Cycle of Reading Clubs: Option B
Mini-lesson 5–10 minutes ***Independent reading time*** Also known as private reading time; students read individually while the teacher confers with individuals or instructs small groups of readers. ***Mid-workshop instruction*** 1 minute or so during which the teacher calls for students' attention and offers strategy support, reminders, encouragement, etc. ***Partner reading time*** Students meet with partners to read and talk about books while the teacher confers with partnerships or instructs small groups of readers. ***Teaching share time*** 5 minutes or less	***Mini-lesson that supports reading club work*** 5–10 minutes ***Reading clubs*** The students work with reading club partners while teacher confers with partnerships; students may read together or read independently and then meet to talk about texts. ***Teaching share time*** Five minutes or less spent sharing student work from reading clubs. ***Individual reading time*** Also known as private reading time; students read individually while the teacher confers with individuals or instructs small groups of readers.	***Abbreviated mini-lesson*** This lasts a few minutes at most and is meant mostly to rally students to have a successful and focused reading time. ***Individual reading time*** Also known as private reading time; students read individually while the teacher confers with individuals or instructs small groups of readers. ***Mini-lesson that supports reading club work*** 5–10 minutes ***Reading clubs*** The students work with reading club partners while the teacher confers with partnerships; students may read together or read independently and then meet to talk about texts. ***Teaching share time*** 5 minutes or less spent sharing student work from reading clubs

There are other options in addition to those shown in Figure 2.2, including the choice to split the reading workshop into two distinct parts that occur separately in the day. In this case, one portion of reading workshop is composed of a mini-lesson and independent reading time during which the teacher confers as students read their just-right books. This tends to happen in the morning. Then, usually in the afternoon, the reading club portion of the workshop occurs. It begins with a mini-lesson to support reading club work and is followed by reading clubs and share time.

No matter how reading clubs are scheduled in the day, one thing that all of the options have in common is that students still have independent reading time with their just-right books. Maximizing the amount of time students spend reading these books is essential and nonnegotiable; private reading time when students are reading their just-right books as the teacher confers with individuals or small groups happens every single day, even when cycles of reading clubs are occurring. It's worth repeating that we try to make sure that even during reading club cycles, our young readers are spending as much time as possible reading books that are just right for them.

When Is the Right Time for Reading Clubs?

Because reading clubs are not an ongoing, daily structure throughout the school year, I consider reading clubs as more of a seasonal offering. Teachers tend to implement them strategically at different points of the school year on an as-needed or as-desired basis. When you plan the times of the year when you'll launch a cycle of reading clubs, there are some helpful things that you'll want to consider:

Reading clubs fit well into various studies.

There are a variety of reasons for scheduling reading clubs at particular times in the year. Reading clubs can enhance or complement the reading, thinking, and talking work that students do in certain studies or units.

As I look across the year of teaching reading, I want to think about the studies that seem to be a natural match for a cycle of reading clubs, specifically the studies in which reading clubs can enhance the work students do. When planning for a nonfiction reading study, for example, I always include reading clubs in my plans. During a nonfiction study, I want to make sure that I not only teach my students the

strategies they need to read nonfiction well, but also teach them about the pathways that nonfiction readers take in order to become experts about topics of interest. I rely on nonfiction reading clubs to provide my students with authentic purposes to read nonfiction texts and opportunities to talk about what they've learned, what they wonder, and what they think about the topic. Actually, this rationale for implementing reading clubs during a nonfiction study holds true for most any genre-based unit of study, whether it's nonfiction or biography, poetry or mystery books, and so on. For many studies, I find that implementing reading clubs provides students with an opportunity to read texts of interest for authentic, self-directed purposes, using all the skills and strategies they're learning about reading and book talks.

Reading clubs can also complement the work that we're doing in particular studies by offering balance to the study's content. When we spend time in the reading workshop emphasizing print strategies or the "in one's mind" work of reading, I find that putting reading clubs into our workshop helps my students remember to talk and grow ideas about their books in addition to figuring out the words.

Typically at some point during October, when I tend to spend a lot of time teaching my students strategies to figure out words in mini-lessons, during shared reading, and so on, I would notice that highly engaged book talks seemed to fade out of view. My students were focusing closely on figuring out the words in their books, sometimes to the exclusion of having big thoughts about the stories. At this time, it was helpful to put a cycle of reading clubs into place. I would usually launch a reading club cycle that focused on alphabet books, or ABC books, as my students called them. It's true that most of my first graders would know the alphabet and letter/sound relationships by this time, but my objective here wasn't alphabet recitation or letter/sound practice. My intent was to get my students talking well and excitedly about books again, and ABC books offer lots of talk and big idea potential.

My students would spend time figuring out characteristics of the genre of ABC books, making comparisons among books, reading the words and using all the clues the illustrations, book theme, and context offer when the words are tricky. In this case, the ABC reading clubs complemented the work my students were doing during a particular study in reading workshop.

Reading clubs energize the reading workshop and the other components of a balanced literacy framework.

Another reason I would decide to schedule reading clubs at particular times of the year was because they have a rejuvenating effect on our students' approach to

their reading. We have to admit that there are times of the year when, at best, our students go through the motions of the reading routines in our classrooms—or when, at worst, the routines fall apart.

It helps enormously that the work readers do in reading clubs tends to be purpose driven. In other words, students aren't reading just-right books simply because it's "what they do" during reading. In reading clubs, the partners read books that have been gathered because they connect in some way, and the students themselves figure out the work they want to do with them. For example, during our ABC book clubs, some of the plans my students made included the following:

- figuring out the trick of ABC books (i.e., trying to find all of the items on the page that start with the letter of that page)
- comparing and contrasting ABC book structure (i.e., noticing that some books used only uppercase letters, some used both upper- and lowercase, some put X,Y, Z on the same page, etc.)
- categorizing different kinds of ABC books (i.e., piles of ABC books that give information, ABC books that have animals, ABC books with tricks in them, etc.)
- studying wordless ABC books (i.e., trying to figure out what the words on each page would be and putting sticky notes on the pages with their ideas)
- singing the ABC song while reading the texts and tracing the letters with their fingers

Because students make their own plans and invent their own purposes for their reading work (sometimes with a teacher's gentle nudging, of course), there is a high level of engagement during reading clubs. Many teachers notice that after a cycle of reading clubs, the reading workshop is revitalized because students transfer the energy and sense of purpose they experienced in reading clubs into the other reading opportunities we provide our students.

Reading clubs strengthen and deepen students' book talks.

Reading clubs are perfect antidotes to low-energy, low-motivation downturns during partner reading time in the reading workshop. There are times of the year, usually after the first few months of school, when we observe and confer with reading partners, and it seems as if students are merely cooperating but not collaborating much to grow ideas about their books. You may notice this when you kneel down to listen in to reading partners' conversations, and the talk follows the same pattern day after day. You'll hear things like, "Retell your book first, and then

I'll retell mine," or "Show me the most important part of your book, and I'll show you mine," or "Let's read this together and then talk about it," or even "Show me the part that made you think that." It's not that these are bad ways of talking, but after the first month or two of school these ways of working together might be just a kids' version of "the same ol' same ol'." It's these times when a cycle of reading clubs can add a little fuel injection to the partner work.

The very nature of reading clubs helps students talk well (or better) about books. During a cycle of reading clubs, the partners dig into books that go together in some way, so there are many connections and comparisons they can make across books. These connections and comparisons offer a concrete base from which students can develop theories, ponder questions, and grow new ideas.

In reading clubs, the books are all connected in some way, so the reading partners can make plans for their reading and thinking work that often continues for days. For example, during a cycle of character study reading clubs, the partnership trying to get to know Poppleton might decide to reread several of the books to figure out whether or not Cherry Sue is really Poppleton's best friend. As they reread, they make a plan to focus on Poppleton's friendships, and they are energized whenever they find evidence that helps them answer their question about whether or not Poppleton and Cherry Sue are best buddies. Across the room, another partnership is reading Biscuit books to find evidence to prove their idea that Biscuit is a good puppy. At the next table over in the Junie B. Jones Club, the partners decide to compare the causes of Junie's trouble across books to see whether there is a pattern of behavior. In reading clubs, the partners can set purposes for their reading more easily, because the books go together in some way.

In contrast, during regular reading partner time when reading clubs are not in place, partners meet daily and bring their independent reading books together. The books in their independent reading baggies will tend to connect in just one way: they will all be at or near the same level. Other than that, the books may not have much in common at all. For instance, Kadeem and Jonathan were partners, and their combined books had a range of topics, so their talks tended to be more book specific and brief, rather than idea based and deep. Now, this is not to say that regular reading partners can't have strong book talks. I'm simply suggesting that the nature of reading clubs offers support mechanisms that enable students to talk well about books. Just the fact that the books in a reading club go together in some way serves to support and scaffold students' conversations. For these reasons, many teachers use a cycle of reading clubs to ratchet up the books talks, and then when the students resume regular partner reading after the reading club cycle has ended,

they will have set higher standards for themselves with regard to book talks within partnerships.

Of course, reading clubs alone can't spark powerful conversations. Teaching students to talk well about books is an all-day, everyday enterprise. We model good conversations, teaching the form (etiquette) and the content of strong talk across the day, during interactive read-aloud and shared reading, through formal and informal conversations with students in the morning, after lunch, at recess, and so on. In Chapter 5, I offer some ideas for supporting talk for reading club partnerships.

Final Thoughts on Fitting Reading Clubs into the Classroom

My hope is that this chapter showed that reading clubs are easily integrated into a reading curriculum. Reading clubs are not an ongoing, daily part of reading workshop, and teachers often plan to do four or five cycles of reading clubs per school year in coordination with particular parts of the curriculum. If a cycle of reading clubs usually lasts for two or three weeks, that's about fifteen weeks of the school year at most. Rest assured, you can still teach math if you're also adding reading clubs to your literacy instruction. Reading clubs are an incredibly malleable structure that provides opportunities for our students to apply the reading, thinking, and talking skills and strategies they are learning in ways that closely match the reading work that proficient and avid readers do with text outside of the classroom. For more information about the details of implementing reading clubs, please check the study guide materials in Appendix I.

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Part II

Focusing on Reading Club Fundamentals

I'm writing this book in the loft of a beautiful house. The walls are full of artwork, and the large windows are full of views of the Chugach Mountains and the big, dramatic Alaskan sky. On most days as I write, my mouth waters from the scent of spice-rich desserts or artisan breads baking in the kitchen below. In many ways, this is my dream home. Okay, so it's not my home!

Ayse Gilbert, a family friend, invited me to use space in her home to write. This is a good thing, because I can't work at my own house, what with mounds of laundry growing in baskets, piles of bills and to-do lists pointing their fingers at me, phone calls to return . . . oh, yeah, and a three-year-old and a five-year-old. So it is with great pleasure that I show up at the Gilberts' home a few mornings a week for a few hours at a time. I make some tea and then sit myself down to write and stare.

Ayse is known around town as an amazing cook. Sometimes, if she's in the kitchen when I'm brewing my tea, I'll ask her a question about cooking. The other day we talked about immersion blenders. I confided that one of my well-worn excuses for not cooking often is that I don't have the right gadgets. Truth be told, one of my secret pleasures is to lie in bed thumbing through a Williams-Sonoma catalog and thinking, "If only I had that Dutch oven, in Sonoma green, preferably, I would definitely make a savory stew," or "Until I have one of those deluxe angled potato ricers, I will not dare to make mashed potatoes!"

As we talked about kitchen gadgets and essential kitchen tools, Ayse told me to open a drawer in the cabinet behind me. I opened it to find only about four gadgets in it. "Now, look in the drawer below," she said. Again, less than a half-dozen cooking tools. She said

that she regularly uses only a handful of tools when she cooks, whether it's a meal for her family or a fund-raiser dinner for seventy-five people. The humbling lesson I learned from Ayse that day is that it's not necessary to have every cooking gadget under the sun, even if they look so cool and necessary and come in beautiful colors. Although, after our talk, I realized I must get a Microplane grater (with a cool design) because it can be used in many ways: to zest the skin of a lemon for a fruit tart, to grate Parmesan cheese over a dish of pasta, or to shave dark chocolate onto the top of a fancy birthday cake.

This idea that the most impressive and efficient cooks often rely on just a handful of essential, multiuse kitchen tools resonated because I could see a clear connection with teaching. As a teacher, there are certain kinds of instruction that are essential and multipurpose and serve as vital tools in a teacher's repertoire for reading clubs.

In the chapters of Part II, I share ideas for multiuse instruction helpful in whatever kind of reading clubs you plan to cook up in your classroom.

Chapter 3

Effective Teaching Practices for Reading Clubs

It's one thing to set a schedule for implementing reading clubs at points during a yearlong reading curriculum, but it's quite another to make plans for the daily instruction that occurs within a cycle of reading clubs, especially when each cycle of reading clubs involves quite different texts, talk, skills, and habits. To make planning easier and to keep priorities for reading clubs in the foreground, it's helpful to first consider some of the background that all kinds of reading clubs have in common. First, we want to make sure that we're teaching with the best practices for instruction in mind so that we can most effectively support our students. Second, we want to consider the skills, strategies, and habits for reading and for talking about texts that our students will need in order to do their best work.

We Rely on the Best Practices for Teaching

The teaching we do in reading clubs adheres to what are widely considered to be some of the best practices in reading instruction:

- teach skills, strategies, and habits through demonstration and modeling
- maximize students' time with books they can read with high levels of fluency, accuracy, comprehension, and interest
- provide time for students to have self-initiated and self-maintained talks about books
- balance whole-class, small-group, and one-to-one instruction

We Teach Through Demonstration and Modeling

"Children learn from what is demonstrated to them, from what they see others doing" (Smith 1988, 55). During whole-class mini-lessons, small-group instruction, and conferences with partnerships, there are built-in opportunities to model what we want to see our students doing on their own. Additionally, "explicit modeling and gradual release of responsibility can be applied to whole-class teaching, small-group teaching, or individual interactions" (Johnson 2006, 9).

In a mini-lesson, we tend to state the teaching point and then say, "Let me show you what that looks like," before demonstrating exactly what we want to see our students doing (Calkins 2001). We can use this demonstration technique in any

format, whether we're teaching the whole group, a small group, or working with a partnership during a reading conference.

Demonstration teaching is different than narrating what we want our students to do. Compare the two excerpts, shown in Figure 3.1, from a mini-lesson during a cycle of fairy tale reading clubs in a kindergarten class. These excerpts are intended to teach the children to study the illustrations to help them figure out the characters' thoughts and feelings. One is an example of demonstration teaching, and the other is an example of narration.

Figure 3.1

Teaching with Demonstration	Teaching with Narration
So, today I want to teach you that careful readers really study the pictures of the characters to figure out what the characters might be thinking and feeling. Watch me while I do this: I'm going to read the picture in this version of Cinderella because I want to figure out what she might be feeling in this part. Watch me. (The teacher thinks aloud, actually using the strategy in real time the way the students could use it, too.) Hmm, Cinderella isn't smiling here. Her face looks sad, so I'm wondering if she's sad. Hmm, look at her shoulders. They're slumped down. I think she's really bummed out because this is the part where she thinks she won't get to go to the ball. She looks like she's sad and probably really disappointed. Okay, so readers, did you notice how I really studied the picture of Cinderella to get more information about how she might be feeling in this part? I looked really closely at her face to see her expression. I looked really closely at her body to see if her gestures gave me information. When I did this, did you see how I was able to say, "I think Cinderella looks sad, and she's probably disappointed too that she couldn't go to the ball"?	So, today I want to teach you that careful readers really study the pictures of the characters to figure out what the characters might be thinking and feeling. When you look at the characters in the pictures, look at their faces really closely to see what the facial expression is. Look at this illustration of Cinderella. See her face? Look at the body gestures too. Look at Cinderella's shoulders all slumped over. Sometimes gestures, like slumped shoulders, can tell us stuff. Turn and tell your partner what you think Cinderella is feeling in this picture. (Kids turn and talk about illustration.) Okay, so remember to look at the pictures closely, study the characters' faces and their body language because that will help you figure out how they might be feeling or what they might be thinking.

Although these are excerpts from a mini-lesson taught to the whole class, the demonstration teaching here could easily be replicated during a strategy lesson for a small group of children or within a reading conference with a pair of partners. Some characteristics of demonstration teaching include the following:

- The teacher does what he wants his students to do or uses the strategy he wants the student to control; he uses materials in the demonstration that are similar to the materials the students use.
- The teacher thinks aloud about what she's doing as she demonstrates.
- The teacher shows students what to do/how to do something; she doesn't simply tell them or list directions for the task.
- A phrase that cues a demonstration might be something like, "Watch me as I try this," or something more specific like, "I'm going to read this page. Watch how I try several strategies to figure out a tricky word that I'll encounter."

The next part of the sample mini-lesson excerpt would be to provide students with opportunities for guided practice, or active engagement, right there in the middle of the mini-lesson. Having students try the strategy in the moment that follows the demonstration portion of the lesson enables the teacher to do a quick assessment to see who gets it and who might need more support. It also provides students an experience with the skill or strategy in the moment because they may or may not need to use that particular strategy in their own work that day, or for many days for that matter (Calkins 2006).

We Keep the Level of Texts in Mind and Match Students to Books They Can Read

One spring, during a cycle of reading clubs in our unit of study on characters, my instructional plans had to account for several very strong first-grade readers as well as those children in my class who were struggling. The types of character clubs available for students to choose from acknowledged the range of readers in my classroom. I had two sets of partners who chose to read Judy Moody books. At the other end of the continuum of readers, my students chose among the Mrs. Wishy-Washy Club, Biscuit Club, and the Moms Club. This Moms Club didn't have a true character like the other clubs because I took lower-level texts that had moms

in the stories and gathered them into a basket. The students studied the moms in these books in much the same way that the other students studied their characters. One of my big goals is to have enough satisfying reading club options so that all of my students, from the strongest to the most struggling, participate in reading clubs in which they can read the books with comfort and interest. And when they encounter text difficulties, they are likely to "own" the strategies that will help them overcome the challenges.

As important as it is to make sure that students can read most of the books in their reading clubs, there also may be compelling reasons to allow students to have a difficult, yet high-interest, text as part of their reading club basket. As I mentioned earlier, I tend to let my students keep a higher difficulty, high-interest text or two in their reading club basket during nonfiction reading clubs.

One year during a nonfiction study, Jonah and John gathered books about outer space for their nonfiction reading club. They found several books that were at their just-right reading level for nonfiction, but they also wanted to include an eyewitness-type of book on space that had amazing photographs and an engaging layout. Although they wouldn't be able to read the text conventionally, I did view the book as worthwhile because they could "read" and interpret the photographs, illustrations, and other graphics, as well as use the text features to find information.

In fact, John and Jonah did just that. They would look between photographs of the planets in the different books and make up theories about why some of the planets are so colorful and why some are "pretty boring looking." They used the index to find the sections about asteroids and comets, and so on. Although they weren't using their print strategies in this text to read with accuracy, I would still argue that Jonah and John were doing resourceful, purposeful, and very worthwhile work as they moved between this book and the others, reading the texts, studying photographs and illustrations, and making connections and comparisons.

The idea of making sure that reading club baskets are filled with mostly books the students can comfortably read leads us to consider another aspect of reading clubs: the partnerships. I think it makes sense that during reading clubs the partnerships are mostly ability based (Collins 2004). If our partners share similar reading levels and their reading club basket contains texts that are just right for them, then both partners have equal access to the texts in the reading club, and neither partner becomes dominant by virtue of having more of the reading power. There is more information about reading club partnerships in Chapter 5.

We Provide Opportunities for Student-Initiated Talks About Books

"Children of all ages, preschool to high school, need frequent opportunities to formulate their thoughts in spoken language... Children need to ask their questions, to explain things to other children, to negotiate meanings between themselves and other children, and between themselves and adults" (Clay 1998, 28). In order for our students to talk well about books with each other, we need to provide ongoing modeling of good conversational habits, and we need to hold the belief that even our youngest students can and will be invested in book talks that they initiate on their own. This sense of trust is critical because without it, we'll tend to hover over their book talks by assigning talk topics, and we'll continue to worry that without our presence, our students won't have high-quality conversations about books.

During reading clubs, students tend to have a purpose in mind as they read, and these purposes often drive the talk between partners. Even though the whole class might be engaged in nonfiction reading clubs, each partnership is engaged in their own nonfiction reading club topic (although sometimes two or three partnerships may be part of the same reading club). For this reason, it is a necessity that the students' talk arises from their own work together rather than in response to a whole-group prompt. For example, during an author study, each reading club partnership is becoming an expert about a particular author, but each might have a different focus for their thinking and talking about their particular author. It would be virtually impossible for a teacher to direct or prompt or mandate the content of everyone's talk by saying something like, "Readers, today your job is to talk about where you think your author got his or her ideas." Of course, we can teach them that this is a possibility for their talk about an author because, after all, if we think of adult readers, we know that people often talk about where an author may have gotten his or her ideas for a text.

What teachers can do to support reading club talk is to teach students the characteristics of strong conversations throughout the day and to teach students a repertoire of things readers can talk about, without mandating what they must talk about. There is more information about how to support students' talk in Chapters 5 and 6.

We Balance Large-Group, Small-Group, and One-to-One Instruction

During reading clubs, we have several ways to convey strategy and skill instruction. We teach students in whole-class mini-lessons, in small-group settings, and during reading conferences with partnerships. Typically, a reading club session begins with a whole-group mini-lesson (Calkins 2001). We try to keep this as brief as possible so that students get maximum reading time, but also because there is no way that a whole-class lesson can ever be perfectly gauged for the immediate needs of every reader in the classroom. Even so, a mini-lesson is an efficient way to transmit information, and for both instructional and community purposes, it's worth our while to gather our students for a brief mini-lesson before sending them off to their own independent reading work.

After the mini-lesson, our students will go off to places around the room with their reading club partners to read and talk about their books. During that time, the teacher offers instruction to students in a couple of ways: through reading conferences with partnerships or through small-group instruction, usually in the form of guided reading or strategy lessons.

Maximizing the Impact of Instruction

Although our conferences, mini-lessons, small-group instruction, and teaching share time for reading clubs are very similar in structure and tone to our conferences, mini-lessons, small-group instruction, and teaching share time at other times of the day, there are some things to consider that will maximize their impact for students' reading club work.

Whole-Class Mini-Lessons

No matter what my teaching emphasis is during cycles of reading clubs, I have found that it's very helpful to teach mini-lessons as if I were participating

in a reading club myself. Many of us have found that when we demonstrate skills and strategies using texts from one of the actual reading club baskets during mini-lessons, we provide our students with demonstrations that are closely connected to the work they will do in their own clubs.

There are a couple of things worth considering when choosing which reading club basket you'll use as your demonstration club for mini-lessons. One year, during a nonfiction reading club cycle, I selected the Ants Research Club for demonstration because Reina and Deanna, two of my most challenged readers, had chosen to be in the Ants Research Club that week. By modeling strategies with texts from their reading club, I offered them more support and helped to jump-start their work together. Also, while I demonstrated from the Ants Research Club during mini-lessons, I noticed an extra benefit that I hadn't originally considered. Over the course of the week, as I used the texts from their basket for teaching demonstrations, I was, in effect, giving Reina and Deanna book introductions (Fountas and Pinnell 1996). Then when Deanna and Reina went to their reading club after the mini-lesson, they would often begin by replicating the work I demonstrated, which helped them get started right away and stay focused.

On the other hand, you may decide to select a neutral club, one that no students are working in, to be your demonstration club. When we demonstrate from a reading club basket that no partnerships have chosen for the current week, that reading club basket becomes a more appealing option for the next week. In some ways, it's as if we're offering previews and doing publicity for the books in that basket. Also, in the case of nonfiction, your students can easily become experts about two topics when you pick a neutral club: the topic they've chosen to study in their own club and the one you've chosen to use as your demonstration club for mini-lessons.

Reading Conferences During Reading Clubs

After the mini-lesson, my students leave the whole-class meeting area to go to their reading club spot. After giving them a quick moment to settle in, I move around the room to conduct reading conferences with partnerships (Anderson 2000, Calkins 2001, Goldberg and Serravallo 2007). We use reading conferences to offer precise instruction that's fine-tuned to an individual's or a partnership's needs. This direct instruction is efficient teaching that will have immediate and long-lasting effects on young readers.

Conferences are often characterized as instruction delivered in a personal, intimate way, yet we can also use the details of our conferences with a particular partnership in ways that serve the good of the whole community of readers. For example, after a conference with Herbert and Ryan, I quietly asked the other partners working at their table to stop for a moment and gather round. "Hey, readers, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I just had to share the great work that Herbert and Ryan were doing today because I think it would be helpful for everyone. As they read one of their poems, they decided to... " This only takes a minute or so, but it's an efficient way to spread the reading wealth. Kathleen Tolan, TCRWP deputy director for reading, calls these "table conferences," and their power to quickly disseminate important information is great.

In a reading club variation on a typical conference, I often add a "By the way, another thing... " sort of reading tip at the end of a conference. I remember one conference with Bruce and Molly in which I taught them a strategy for reading poetry with feeling and fluency. At the end of the conference, I tagged on another bit of teaching, although this was about a reading habit or purpose, not a reading strategy. I said, "You know, now that you guys are working on reading with a voice that really shows the feelings you get from a poem, you might consider doing what some poetry lovers do—you could find a poem that means so much to you and memorize it so that it always stays with you." Although we do want our conferences to be fine-tuned, clear, and brief, it makes sense during reading clubs to tuck in some ideas about reading habits and reading options that the students may not have thought about themselves.

Small-Group Instruction in the Form of Strategy Lessons

During a session of reading clubs, we can also convene small groups of children for strategy lessons (Calkins 2001). I would tend to gather a small group after I'd had a chance to confer with two or three partnerships first. There are two reasons I would confer around the room before settling in for small-group instruction: first, by conferring with partners in different places in the room, I can make my presence felt, which serves as a not-so-subtle management strategy; and second, I've found that when I gather the small group first, right after the mini-lesson, I tend to spend too much time with that group, which means that I lose conferring time. I acknowledge that this problem is particular to people like me who have trouble keeping things tight and quick.

So imagine that we've just conferred with a couple of partnerships and now we're pulling together a group of six readers for a strategy lesson. In a strategy lesson, we meet with children who have similar reading needs to teach them a strategy that will be useful to them (Calkins 2001).

Now imagine that we're in a cycle of reading clubs in which our students are becoming experts on characters (and learning how to infer, determine importance, synthesize information, and use text evidence to support ideas, by the way). We may decide to gather the six strongest readers for a strategy lesson about how to read dialogue well because it reveals lots of information about a character's thoughts, feelings, and motivations. We decide to teach them about this because we notice that the texts in their reading clubs have long dialogue passages, and we've observed the students whipping through the dialogue without considering what it tells them about the characters.

Perhaps on another day, we decide to pull together two sets of partners who are struggling because they need more support to monitor for meaning when they get to tricky parts of their books. Then at the end of Week 2 of character study reading clubs, we notice that several partnerships continue to collect bits information about their characters. They are listing tidbits about their characters, and it looks like their goal is simply to accumulate as many little tidbits as possible. My intention in this strategy lesson would be to teach them how to take information they gather about characters and analyze it a bit in order to get a deeper sense of their characters. I would teach them to extend their thinking by saying, "I notice that my character _____, and it makes me think that _____." Rather than have separate conferences to teach this strategy, we save time by gathering the partnerships together for a strategy lesson.

Share Time After Reading Clubs as Whole-Class Instruction

When we gather students together for share time at the end of reading clubs, we have a captive audience and a fertile moment for instruction. The work the students have just done in reading clubs is fresh, and they haven't necessarily switched their mental gears toward the next thing on the schedule, unless it's lunch or recess. During the share time that follows reading clubs, I usually ask students to bring their reading club baskets to the meeting area and sit near their partners. We can use this precious time together in several ways.

We can spend the five or so minutes of share time modeling a strategy for the whole class that we just taught someone to use during a reading club conference. After we model the strategy, we can give our students a minute or two to try it themselves, right there in the meeting area. We can share a snippet of a strong partner conversation we heard in an effort to lift the level of everyone's conversations. We can get the students to name what they noticed about the conversation that made it go so well, and then we might even offer them an opportunity to try to use the particular conversation technique.

Perhaps we notice some dysfunctional things occurring in reading clubs. We can use share time to patch up the problems. We might remind students how partners make plans together, model how planning might sound, and then give students a few minutes, right there in share time, to make a plan for the next day. We can pass out index cards so they can jot down their plan to have for tomorrow.

Share time offers valuable opportunities to extend, fine-tune, or even fix our teaching. A wonderful resource about maximizing the potential of share time is *Don't Forget to Share: The Crucial Last Step in the Writing Workshop* by Leah Mermelstein (2007).

Opportunities for Reading Club Instruction Throughout the Day

Besides the period of time we devote to reading clubs in a day, we can also find other times to support our students' reading club work. We can use the other components of balanced literacy as well as the teachable moments that often arise outside of our literacy work.

Anytime our students are aligned in partnerships, whether they are line partners, seat partners, math partners, field trip partners, or any other kind of partner, we offer support and instruction for how to cooperate well with others and for how to deal with difficulty in partnerships. I often share the story of how Sereena took a deep breath as she approached me upon arrival one morning. "Ms. Collins," she said, "I've got to talk to you about my partner." She told me that she didn't want to hold hands with Edward, her seat partner, who was also her line partner whenever we left the classroom. She told me, in a stage whisper, that Edward picked his nose and didn't wash his hands. "It makes me feel sort of sick when I have to hold his hand," she said, obviously relieved to get this off her chest.

Sereena's concerns were far removed from a reading club partnership issue (although Edward's reading club partner would also benefit from any nose-picking intervention), but I tried to deal with this particular situation in a way that could be generalized for any kind of issue one might have with a partner. I told Sereena that I was glad she brought this up so she could let her partner know something was bothering her. "It's important that when you have a problem or a concern with someone that you let that person know right away so that the problem can get solved and so that both of you will be happier," I said. Then I suggested that instead of breaking up the partnership over this hygiene issue, we could talk to Edward with kindness and discretion and tell him that he needs to deal with his nose-picking habit differently. "What should we say?" I asked Sereena. She suggested three things: he could use a tissue, he could wash his hands, or, better yet, he could stop picking altogether because it's gross. During the morning meeting that day, without offering the gory details of the situation, I told the class how Sereena and Edward worked out a problem by talking about it with each other, and if anyone else wanted help with resolving partner problems, they could go to either of them for advice. These "teachable moments" tend to arise unexpectedly, and we have to be on our toes to harness their power in ways that will help our students.

Our balanced literacy components also offer opportunities to support reading clubs at other times in the day, but we can more easily plan for these. For example, if my class is spending two weeks in author study reading clubs, I could spend those two weeks of read-aloud time engaged in an author study as well. One year during author study reading clubs, I spent a week reading aloud several books by Donald Crews. The conversations we had, the strategies we used, and the plans we made for our Donald Crews study became helpful models for the work the students could do in their partnerships during reading clubs. Likewise, during shared reading, we can model the strategies we think will be particularly helpful for our students during reading clubs, and we can use texts that are similar to the ones our students are reading in their clubs.

In a school day, there are so many things to do, so much to cover, and so little time for everything. It's necessary that we become resourceful and look for teaching opportunities in the big and small, scheduled and unscheduled, formal and informal moments each day and use the best practices we know in any of these teachable moments.

Supporting Students to Do Their Best Work

When we sit down to plan for reading clubs, we may have a strong sense of how to teach because we're keeping our ideas about the best practices for instruction in mind. The challenge then becomes deciding what to teach. Whenever we plan any cycle of reading clubs, we'll want to include the skills, strategies, and habits our students need to read the texts well, and we'll want to include instruction for helping our students have strong conversations about their texts.

We consider the skills, strategies, and habits our students need in order to read with proficiency, purpose, and engagement.

When I plan for the work my students will do in reading clubs, I always begin by considering what real-life readers would do and what habits of mind they need to use if they were doing a similar kind of reading. For example, when I plan for what I want my students to learn during character study reading clubs, I always begin by considering what I and other proficient readers might do when we think about the characters in our texts.

I think about the times when I've felt keenly attached to characters in a book. When I read *Random Family* by Adrian LeBlanc I couldn't get the characters out of my mind. I carried Coco and her kids with me all the time, and I couldn't wait until the next moment I would have a chance to read. My emotions about Coco ran wide and deep—I was charmed by her, mad at her, thrilled for her, scared for her, worried for her, and so on. I would gossip about Coco with Amanda Hartman, a colleague at the Project who had just read the book. I remember reading large chunks of the book with a low-grade anxiety because I was so concerned for Coco and her kids.

So how might this experience with the characters in a heart-wrenching, adult-themed book inform my teaching to students who would be reading about characters like Mrs. Wishy-Washy, Biscuit, Judy Moody, or Horrible Harry? Well, to start, I could share what it's like to get to know a character. I could show them strategies readers use to learn as much as they can about their characters, which is an ideal time to teach them about inferring. I could teach my kids that careful readers tend to react to their characters because when we really get to know our

characters, what they say and do can surprise us, anger us, frustrate us, inspire us, and make us laugh, cry, or simply smile. I can demonstrate how careful readers talk back to our characters as we read when we hear our minds say things like, "Awww, don't do that," or "Hey, that was a brave thing to say," or "There you go again, being so mischievous," in response to the characters in our books. These are all the things that we do when we care about book characters, and these are certainly things that our young readers can learn to do as well.

So, as we make plans for specific reading club cycles, a wise way to begin is by asking ourselves, "What are the characteristics of proficient reading for these types of texts or for this type of reading?" For instance, if our students are reading books by the same author in an author study, we can name several things we do when we read books by an author we love. If our students are going to be in poetry reading clubs, we can list the skills, strategies, and habits of avid poetry readers.

In short, as you plan instruction for reading clubs:

- think about your own reading experiences with the types of texts and the kind of work that will be present in the reading clubs.
- ask other readers about their experiences, habits, and challenges with the types of texts and kinds of work that your students will likely encounter in the reading clubs.
- consider the real-life habits of mind, skills, and strategies your readers will need to read the texts in their clubs well.

We consider the characteristics of strong conversations and plan instruction accordingly.

Because reading clubs offer a wonderful opportunity to strengthen our students' abilities to have high-quality, highly literate conversations about texts, it's important that we begin with an idea of what great talk would sound like within a particular kind of reading club while also keeping in mind the characteristics of strong conversations in general. With regard to conversations in general, we hope to see our reading club partnerships developing the ability to discuss an idea for a while in their conversations, to make room for both partners' voices and ideas, to use text evidence to support their ideas, to stay focused on the texts and ideas that arise in their reading club, and to have strategies for fixing the conversation when it lags or breaks down altogether.

We can model all of this on a daily basis during our interactive read-aloud conversations so our students have an image of what a great conversation can

sound like. Of course, the degrees to which students are able to do any of these things independently will likely be different from one grade to the next and from one partnership to the next. As we confer with reading club partners, we always look for ways to teach, support, and then extend their conversation skills.

In addition to the general conversation skills we want to teach, we can also hold high expectations for the content of reading club talk as we acknowledge that we might talk differently about different types of texts. When our students are reading poetry, for example, we might expect to hear more about author's craft than we would expect of students in series book clubs. This is not to say that kids in series book reading clubs would never discuss author's craft, but we can imagine other content that would be as or more compelling, such as characters' tendencies, plot similarities and differences, and so on.

In short, as you think about supporting talk in reading clubs:

- plan instruction to support ambitious yet reasonable expectations for your students' conversations, and consider a continuum for growth across the year.
- imagine content for conversation you'd expect to hear within the particular reading club cycle (i.e., How might kids discussing poetry talk differently than kids in a Martin Luther King, Jr., biography club? How might a conversation in a nonfiction club on snails be different than a conversation in a character club on Toot and Puddle?).
- consider the habits, skills, and strategies conversationalists need to listen intently, talk clearly, and think deeply.

When we begin our planning for reading clubs by thinking about how we can do our best work and what our students need to learn in order to do their best work, we are reaching for high goals and setting ambitious standards for both our students and ourselves.

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Chapter 4

Instruction That Supports Readers in Any Kind of Reading Club

No matter the cycle of reading clubs, we want to help our students learn ways to make plans for their work together, follow through on their plans with comprehension and focus, and then wrap up their reading clubs having gained insight and having grown ideas from their work together. In this chapter, I suggest ways to approach instruction on these matters for any cycle of reading clubs.

Helping Students Plan Well in Reading Clubs

One of the main questions teachers have about reading clubs conveys a concern with student engagement. They ask, "How do I know what my students are doing? I can only confer with a few partnerships during a reading club session, so I'm left wondering about the other kids. How can I be sure they are on task and doing good work?" This is an enormous question that isn't just a reading club question. What about during math, when we gather a few students to offer extra support? How can we be sure the rest of the students are staying on task? Well, in the case of math, there are a couple things we can do. We can ask them to turn in work for evaluation at the end of the period, or we can be clear about exactly what the assignment is and how many problems they have to figure out during that period and then check to see that they completed the task.

In reading clubs, it's not practical (or advisable) to have students turn in an assignment each day, because then they'd be spending more time writing than reading and talking about their ideas. We also can't assign them exactly what they have to do on a particular day, because each of the reading club partnerships is working in a slightly different way. For example, during a cycle of kindergarten ABC reading clubs, Eric and Malik are rereading the pictures in *From A to Z* to see if they missed any items connected to the featured letter on each page, whereas Dominick and Chelsea are singing the ABC song as they turn the pages in their ABC books. The rest of the partnerships are probably working in different ways than these, so to assign one task for every partnership will derail students from reading and talking in ways that meet their own purposes or fulfill their own interests.

Rather than designing a "one-size-fits-all" type of assignment or creating individual assignments for each partnership in an effort to make sure our students are staying on task, it seems to me that the real task is to teach our students strategies so they can stay focused and keep their reading, thinking, and talking work going

well through each reading club session and across the week. If our students have plans and purposes for their work, they are more likely to stay focused. We can teach our students how to make wise plans, and also teach them strategies for sticking with their plans and ways to revise them if necessary. In other words, we want to teach them how to launch their own work and how to proceed once they've gotten it started. Figure 4.1 contains a list of some teaching ideas to support students in planning and maintaining their work across time.

Figure 4.1

Supporting Our Students with Planning for Their Reading Club Work

Big Idea for Planning	What a Reader Can Do	Strategies for Doing It
Readers plan for how to begin their work together.	Readers make a plan for which books they will read first. *(Making a plan for which text to read first encourages students to examine the texts they've got in their club rather than jumping right in to read with no real sense of intention.)*	· Readers can survey books by skimming and scanning to see which text makes sense to read first. · Readers can survey the books by skimming through them and then deciding to read the books that seem easier at first. This can help them to warm up to their topic/subject. · Readers in series book clubs may want to survey the books to see if there's an order in which the books are meant to be read. For example, does the series have a Book One?
	Readers make a plan for how they'll read the books in their reading club. *(Deciding how they'll read the books in their club helps to ensure that both partners are engaged during reading club time. Each partner has a task.)*	· Partners can decide if they want to both read one book together (which works well if the text is a picture book, a highly illustrated nonfiction text, or an easy text.) · Partners may decide to each read a different text and then get together to talk about what they've learned, noticed, etc. · Partners may decide to read for a certain length of time and then stop to talk. · Partners may assign a focus to their reading, such as "Let's read our books and collect all the information we can about hermit crabs."

Figure 4.1 *(continued)*

Big Idea for Planning	What a Reader Can Do	Strategies for Doing It
Readers plan for how to begin their work together. *(continued)*	Readers may begin by sharing what they already know about the topic/author/genre/etc. even before they begin reading the texts in their reading club. (*Airing their prior knowledge can help make the reading easier because partners are likely to share some vocabulary and concepts that they might encounter in their texts.*)	· Readers can share prior knowledge about their topic in order to warm up to the vocabulary and concepts they will encounter in the texts. · Readers might make a list of things they already know (or think they know) about their topic.
Readers can set goals for their learning.	Readers consider what they want to learn about, think about, or what they might be wondering about before they get started. These are their learning goals. *(This can help give students an initial direction for their work.)*	· Partners can talk about what they hope to learn in their reading club. (*For example, "I want to learn how sharks can go without sleep."*) · Partners can share things they wonder about. (*For example, "I wonder why Ezra Jack Keats always writes stories about Peter?"*) · Partners can write these things down to help remind them of their learning goals.
	Readers may add new goals or change their goals. *(In the middle of a reading club cycle, it can be helpful to ask students to check to see if they need to adjust their goals or plans. This helps keep their work from getting stale.)*	· Partners talk often to make sure they are still working together on reaching a learning goal. · If partners figure out something that they were wondering about, they might say to each other, "So what do we want to think about next?"

Figure 4.1 *(continued)*

Big Idea for Planning	What a Reader Can Do	Strategies for Doing It
Readers can set goals for their learning. *(continued)*	Readers may have quantity goals to help them stay on the job. *(For some partnerships, it may help their focus if they make concrete plans.)*	· Partners can decide how much they want to read in a particular reading club session before they get together to talk. · Partners may decide they want to figure out a certain number of things. (*For example, "Let's try to find at least five things that Cynthia Rylant teaches us about Poppleton in this book."*) · Readers can write down their plans for how much, how long, etc.
Readers have ways to solve conflicts or problems that occur in their reading club.	Partners can compromise. *(This is essential partnership teaching, and it's often revisited throughout the year.)*	· Partners can take turns reading, jotting, writing, talking, etc. · Partners might need to take a short break from their work together so that they can think of a solution to their problem.
	Readers have ways to avoid a dead end in their reading clubs. *(Sometimes about halfway through the club cycle, students might feel "done," so it helps to teach them ways to add a spark to their work.)*	· Readers can reread texts or parts of texts to find things they hadn't noticed or thought about the first time they read the text. · Readers can reimagine their plans for their work by looking at what they've done so far and thinking about what they'd still like to do. · Readers might add another text to their club. · Readers can decide what they want to make of their learning and how they could present it to others. · Partners can check in with other partnerships to see what they're working on because that might provide new ideas.
Readers can jot notes about their plans and goals.	Readers can keep track of what they're working on.	· Readers can make to-do lists and keep them in their reading club basket. · Readers can use T-charts in different ways. (*For example, What we think we know/What we want to know; What we notice in the text/ What we think about it; and so on.*)

Helping Students Grow Ideas in Their Reading Clubs

One of the things I love best about reading clubs is that they provide time for students to linger with the same texts over a stretch of days. Because these texts are all connected in some way, our students are also steeping themselves in a particular topic, subject, or line of thinking for these days. I've found that this time spent in one "place" enables students not only to name and mention the things they find in texts, but also to have thoughts and theories about things they find in texts.

In a kindergarten class, a dozen pairs of children were scattered about the room with their reading club baskets nearby. Each of their reading club baskets contained a copy of *From A to Z*, a book the students knew well because their teacher had read it out loud to them a couple of times, and two other ABC books that the students had chosen themselves for their reading club basket. Some of the partnerships also had little letter books, texts that featured just one letter throughout and a picture on each page of an object beginning with the featured letter.

In this classroom, the teacher was concerned that the students were just making statements to each other rather than having actual conversations about their texts. She shared an example of one partnership where the children were simply calling out the objects on their pages. Although they were taking turns and staying focused, two positive things, the teacher was concerned that they, and others like them, rarely seemed to cross paths in conversation. She really wanted to move students toward talking with each other, not at each other. During conferring time on this day, we decided to do a little research. Our intention was to collect snippets of partner conversations in order to get a kind of baseline for the way they were talking. We felt that studying the students' talk would enable us to come up with ideas to help partners grow ideas together rather than just make statements to each other.

Sasha and Rashad were reading texts from their ABC book club basket. Here's a brief snippet of how their talk went:

Sasha is holding a book on her lap, and Rashad is looking at it with her. Sasha is flipping through the pages.

Sasha: S, this is my page. My name has two S's in it.

Rashad: My name has R. Where's the R page?

Sasha: S S S. *(turns the page)* T T T. U U U. VVV. WWW. XXX... *(She turns the pages and just says the name of the letter, three times for some reason.)*

Rashad: There's a xylophone. Look, a xylophone. That's like that other book. *(Rashad looks around distractedly trying to find another book.)* Wait.

Sasha: No, let's go. What's next? *(She turns the page.)* YYY.

At this point, I couldn't help myself. I said something, breaking my silent researcher stance. "Hey, guys. May I stop you for a second? I noticed that you're reading the pages so well, calling out the letters that you see. That's one thing ABC book readers do a lot. But I heard Rashad say something that he noticed. On the X page, here, he noticed the xylophone picture and said that another book had a xylophone on the X page, too. Did I get that right, Rashad?" He nodded and showed us the xylophone page in the other book.

"So, what do you guys think about that? What's your idea about that, about how the X pages in different books can have the same picture?" I asked

Sasha said, "Maybe they like xylophones or something."

Rashad said, "Yeah, they like to draw xylophones, and X is for xylophones, too. Look, xylophone's on our alphabet chart, too! (He points at the horizontal ABC chart that borders the top of the chalkboard.) "A xylophone!"

"Yeah, I knew that," Sasha said, sounding a bit blasé.

"When readers notice something about their books like you guys did, they sometimes take a moment to get an idea about what they noticed. Take a moment, you two. What are you thinking about your discovery... another X and another xylophone! What ideas do you have about it? Why might there be so many X pages that use xylophones?" (I didn't know exactly where we were going with this, but I wanted them to stay a bit longer with this noticing.)

Sasha said, "Xylophones are good for X pages because they have an X at the beginning."

"Maybe they can't think of other things for X," Rashad said.

Sasha replied, "Let's find more xylophones. Let's look at these books, too."

Rashad said, "We can also ask other kids if they have xylophones in their books, too."

In reflecting on this snippet of partner work, I realized that I assumed the role of the nudger in order to help the students have an interactive conversation. I kept trying to get Sasha and Rashad to say more when they made statements of observation. Posing questions such as, "What are you thinking about that?" or "What is your idea about that?" to both people in the partnerships may have a few beneficial effects. Nudging questions like these (and others) can:

- help students say more about a topic.
- help students stay longer with a topic or line of inquiry.
- help students interact more with each other, especially in cases when Partner B offers her thoughts about Partner A's observation.
- move partners toward other purposes and plans as they investigate their ideas.

When we support our students in developing the habit of saying more about what they notice, wonder, and question, we are on our way to helping them grow ideas and determine further purpose for their work. Instead of conversations that are characterized by partners taking turns to make statements that do not intersect in any way, we can help them to pearl their statements for the ideas behind them by teaching our students to say more about what they are thinking. When we do this, we're supporting our students' engagement in what Richard Allington calls "thoughtful literacy." He writes that thoughtful literacy is going "beyond the ability to read, remember, and recite on demand." In other words, teaching our students strategies for growing ideas about what they are reading provides opportunities for them to use more sophisticated thinking strategies such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis (Allington 2001, 93).

The chart in Figure 4.2 details some things we can teach our students to help them grow ideas, rather than just make statements.

Figure 4.2

Teaching Ideas to Help Students Grow Ideas About Their Reading Club Topic

Big Idea for Growing Ideas About a Topic	What a Reader Can Do	Strategies for Doing It
Readers can stay with an idea that they get from the words and pictures in texts and think more about it until it feels finished.	Readers often notice or wonder about things when they read, and they can add their thoughts to what they notice or wonder. *(Teaching students to add their thinking to what they notice or wonder about a text can help them move into deeper terrain than staying on the surface of the text.)*	· Readers can say things like, "I notice that... and it makes me think..." *(For example, a child might say, "I notice that the dad is cooking on all the pages, and it makes me think that this dad is a chef/that dads can cook too/ that this author wants us to know that dads can cook, and it doesn't have to be just moms.")* · Readers can say things like, "I'm wondering why... My idea about that is... " *(For example, "I'm wondering why Poppleton just doesn't tell Cherry Sue that he doesn't want to keep eating with her. My idea about that is that Poppleton might not want to hurt her feelings, and sometimes it's hard to say things if we think we'll hurt someone's feelings.")* · Readers can get in the habit of adding their thoughts to the statements they make about their books by saying things like, "I'm thinking that... " or "My idea about that is..." or "I think the reason is... ," etc.

Figure 4.2 *(continued)*

Big Idea for Growing Ideas About a Topic	What a Reader Can Do	Strategies for Doing It
Readers can stay with an idea that they get from the words and pictures in texts and think more about it until it feels finished. *(continued)*	Partners can help each other say more. *(It's important to find ways to engage both partners, the one who's talking about the text at the moment and the one who is listening.)*	· The listening partner can say, "Say more about that." · The listening partner can ask, "What does that make you think?" · The listening partner can say, "Show me the part you're talking about and let's say more about it."
	Partners can take one idea and keep it afloat for a while. *(Providing students with simple ways of growing their conversation stamina is essential for helping them to grow ideas that go deeper than a surface level of understanding.)*	· The listening partner can add to what his or her partner said. · The listening partner can have a different thought and share that. · The partners can ask each other, "Is there anything else you want to say about that?" · Partners can remind each other to stay with the idea by saying something like, "Let's get back to the subject we were just talking about."
Readers grow ideas by accumulating their thinking across texts.	Readers keep other texts they know in mind as they read.	· Sometimes readers make connections between books and say something like, "This reminds me of... because... " · Sometimes readers may keep the other reading club books out while they read one of the texts so they can easily move between books. · Readers can put sticky notes in books when they read something that feels compelling. Then it will be easy to find later.

Figure 4.2 *(continued)*

Big Idea for Growing Ideas About a Topic	What a Reader Can Do	Strategies for Doing It
Readers grow ideas by accumulating their thinking across texts. *(continued)*	Readers can compare and contrast texts. *(Noticing similarities and differences among texts that are connected in some way—by topic, character, genre, etc.—and then thinking about the significance of those similarities and differences can be a stepping-stone to the skills of critical reading and evaluation of text.)*	· Readers notice when one book says something different than another book, and they can reread the parts to think about why there is different information in the texts. · Readers notice when several texts have the same information, and they can think about why the author(s) say(s) the same thing across books. (*For example, "I noticed that almost every Nate the Great book says that he likes pancakes. I think it's because the author is trying to give us information so we can get to know Nate, in case you haven't read any other books about him."*)
	Readers can put ideas from texts in their own words and keep these ideas in mind as they read other texts. *(Synthesizing texts can be difficult for our youngest readers, but we can help them get started with this sophisticated strategy by encouraging them to pause after finishing a book to gather their ideas about it.)*	· When readers finish a book or a part of a book, they can take a moment to gather their ideas and thoughts about the text by saying something like, "This taught me that… " or "This made me think about… " or "The thing that sticks with me from this book is… "

Figure 4.2 *(continued)*

Big Idea for Growing Ideas About a Topic	What a Reader Can Do	Strategies for Doing It
Readers can invent a system or method to keep track of their thinking and help them grow ideas.	Readers can use sticky notes, graphic organizers, and simple note-taking methods as artifacts to keep track of their ideas across time in their reading club. *(This is essential partnership teaching, and it's often revisited and built upon throughout the year.)*	· Partners might jot down their big ideas that they've talked about to keep track of them. · Partners can look back at the artifacts that show what they thought about throughout the week of reading clubs to see how their ideas have grown or changed or both.

Supporting Reading Comprehension in Reading Clubs

Each cycle of reading clubs has its own set of comprehension issues that are worth our instructional energies. For example, we know that character studies are perfect opportunities to spotlight the skill of inferring and that poetry studies offer a perfect venue to teach students how to envision texts in ways that support their understanding of them. So it makes sense that in these reading club cycles a teacher would spend some days offering strategies to help his students infer or envision well in order to understand their texts better.

Although each reading club might have particular comprehension skills and strategies that are well worth teaching during mini-lessons and modeling during read-aloud time, it's also important to keep in mind that more generalized instruction to support comprehension is always worth our time. After all, students who are engaged in a character study or a poetry study need to orchestrate lots of comprehension strategies, not just inferring or envisioning, in order to understand their texts as best they can.

When we confer with partnerships during any cycle of reading clubs, we'll want to watch and listen for how we can support students' comprehension in ways that will help them no matter the book or the setting in which they are reading. Some of the particular ways we can support our students' overall comprehension is to help them

monitor for meaning, from the word level to the whole-text level, to show them how to tell when their comprehension has broken down, and to teach them ways to reboot their comprehension when it does break down. The chart in Figure 4.3 offers some ideas for promoting thoughtful literacy and dealing with some general reading comprehension issues we might observe during any kind of reading club cycle.

Figure 4.3

Ideas for Teaching Comprehension Within Reading Clubs

Big Idea for Comprehension	What a Reader Can Do	Strategies for Doing It
Readers can get ready to read in ways that will make their reading easier.	Readers can think about what they already know about the topic. *(Teaching students to begin by activating prior knowledge or gathering their thoughts about a topic can offer support because it can bring to the forefront specific vocabulary and concepts they might encounter in their texts.)*	· Before a reader reads about something, he can make his task easier by getting ready. He can think and talk about what he already knows about the topic. *(For example, on the first day of reading clubs, the partners might begin by saying, "Let's see. We're going to be studying beetles. Let's talk about what we think we already know about them.")* · Partners can jot down a list of things they already know and then share them with each other. *(By sharing the wealth of their knowledge, they are widening their combined prior knowledge in ways that might make reading easier and text more comprehensible.)* · Readers can think about things they already know for sure, things they think they know, and things they wonder about their topic. *(Sometimes young readers will be mistaken about what they think they know for sure about a topic. For example, Sean says, "Spiders are beetles," with an air of authority, and he may not be able to revise this idea, even in the face of text that contradicts it. It makes sense to introduce the idea of uncertainty by helping students make "I think that... " statements in addition to "I know that... " statements.)*

Figure 4.3 *(continued)*

Big Idea for Comprehension	What a Reader Can Do	Strategies for Doing It
Readers can get ready to read in ways that will make their reading easier. *(continued)*	Readers can think about what they already know about the genre and how books in the genre might go. (*When proficient readers sit down with a text, they have a framework in mind for what they expect to see based on what they know about the genre. For example, nonfiction readers approach their texts differently than mystery readers based on what they know about how these genres tend to go.*)	· Readers can skim the text to figure out how it goes and then make a plan for how to read it. *(For example, as partners skim a nonfiction book on beetles, they might find particular sections of interest and plan to read those. Partners who are in series book clubs might try to figure out if any of the texts are meant to be read first by looking closely at the book covers, the blurbs on the back, and so on.)*
	Readers can skim and scan texts to figure out an order for reading them. (*Sometimes in a reading club basket, there are texts that may be more complex than others, and when students begin with the easier texts, they are warming themselves up to read the texts that are more difficult.*)	· Readers can look for the book that seems to be the easiest and begin by reading that one because this helps them get solid with their topic. · Readers can try to identify which book makes sense to read first. *(For example, readers can check to see if the series has a Book One, a book that they've read themselves or had read to them before, etc.)* · Readers can skim and scan through texts to determine a range of difficulty. They can find books that have lots of picture support, books that have helpful features that make reading easier, etc.

Figure 4.3 *(continued)*

Big Idea for Comprehension	What a Reader Can Do	Strategies for Doing It
Readers have strategies to understand their reading.	Readers can retell what happened in their texts.	· Partners can retell what just happened in their books to help each other understand the stories. · Partners can retell parts of their books to themselves to make sure they've understood what has happened.
	Readers can put the text into their own words.	· Readers can read a chunk of text and then state what happened or what they've learned using their own words, not the author's words. · Readers can jot ideas in their own words on sticky notes to help them keep track of their thinking.
	Readers can talk with others about what they're learning/thinking as they read, using text evidence to support their ideas.	· Partners can make plans to read chunks of text and then get together to share what they are thinking and learning. · Partners can check in with each other as they read. · Partners can ask each other to show the part of the book where they got a particular idea.
Readers have strategies to help them deal with confusing parts of their books.	Readers notice when they are confused or when they don't understand something they've read.	· When it's hard to retell to yourself or to another person what happened in a part of the story, it may have been confusing. · Readers notice when they've been daydreaming while they are reading because that means they may not have understood that part of the text. · When it's difficult to picture what's going on in a text, it might mean that part is tricky to understand. · When a reader realizes she doesn't understand, she thinks about the best way to fix it.

Figure 4.3 *(continued)*

Big Idea for Comprehension	What a Reader Can Do	Strategies for Doing It
Readers have strategies to help them deal with confusing parts of their books. *(continued)*	Readers have strategies to deal with confusing parts.	· Readers can reread confusing parts and try to make a picture in their mind. · Readers can read aloud the confusing parts. · Readers can ask someone to help them understand the confusing parts. · Readers can use text features such as headings and illustrations to help them understand confusing parts.
Readers have strategies to figure out unfamiliar vocabulary.	Readers can figure out what an unfamiliar word or expression means.	· When readers encounter a word or expression they've never seen before, they can read back and read on to figure out what it might mean. · Readers can look closely at the word or expression and think of a more familiar synonym that would work in its place. · Readers can check in a dictionary or ask someone else to help them.
	Readers try to "own" new words and expressions.	· When readers encounter new words or expressions, they can use the new vocabulary in their speaking and writing so that the word becomes part of their repertoire.

The teaching ideas included in these charts support readers in any cycle of reading clubs. The strategies listed can be taught during mini-lessons for the whole class if many students need that particular kind of instruction and during partner conferences or small-group instruction if the strategy pertains to less than half of the students.

Random Acts of Teaching Kindness

In many reading club cycles across the years, I've found there are certain lines of instruction I often will follow that don't fall into any of the broad categories described above. They offer students strategies and support for any kind of reading club, although in many cases, the instruction detailed in Figure 4.4 is more likely to take place during partner conferences rather than during whole-class mini-lessons.

Figure 4.4

Big Idea for Supporting Readers	What a Reader Can Do	Strategies for Doing It
Readers have a variety of purposes for rereading.	Readers can go back and reread to help them understand their texts.	· When readers say, "Huh?" or find that they can't picture what they're reading, they go back and reread to fill in the blurry parts. · When readers get to the end of a chunk of text and have trouble saying what it was about, they can reread to figure it out.
	Readers reread to verify information or to cross-check information between books.	· Readers can reread to double-check their information. · Readers can reread a chunk in Book A if they find some different information in Book B.
	Readers can reread to find text evidence to support their ideas.	· Partners can ask each other to reread parts of their books to find support for their ideas. · When readers get an idea about a character, for example, they can reread parts of the book to look for more evidence to support the idea.
	Readers can reread to rethink the text and/or their ideas.	· Readers have a purpose or reason for rereading, and it usually involves rethinking.

Figure 4.4 *(continued)*

Big Idea for Supporting Readers	What a Reader Can Do	Strategies for Doing It
Readers find that their reading can affect their lives in some way.	Readers share what they've been thinking and learning.	· Readers can think to themselves, "What is it about this that I think other people would want to know?" · Readers can figure out the best way to share information (orally, in writing, drawing, role playing, etc.).
	Readers can be inspired to do something or to make something based on what they've read and what they thought about their reading.	· Readers can ask themselves, "How does this make me want to live my life differently?" · Readers can ask themselves, "What have I learned from this study?" or "What new thinking have I done because of the reading and conversations I've had?" · Readers can ask themselves, "What can I write, make, or do to share my knowledge and new ideas with others?"

Final Thoughts About Multiuse Teaching

The teaching ideas included in the charts in this chapter are meant to be shapeless enough that they can be sculpted to fit any cycle of reading clubs, yet substantial enough that they make an impact on students' work. These teaching ideas are also meant to be used on an as-needed basis. In other words, they may not be essential instruction for every cycle of reading clubs.

In your first couple of reading club cycles, for example, you may find it necessary to spend time leading whole-class lessons to teach your students how to plan well for their reading club work. After your students have been through a couple of reading club cycles, it's reasonable to hope that your students won't need as much support to plan for their work. What was once whole-class instruction on planning might turn into teaching during reading conferences for a couple of partnerships that need support.

Chapter 5

Creating the Conditions for Reading Partners to Talk Well About Texts

Today as I write, I'm in Kaladi Brothers coffee shop wearing my brand-new noise reduction headphones. Normally, I'm one who thrives on environmental noise when I write. I especially like to eavesdrop on nearby conversations, but today the conversations around me are not so interesting. The intermittent sucking sound of the espresso machine and the musical choices the baristas have made are more distracting than usual. So here I sit, in near silence, looking a little like an air traffic controller. The only thing I can hear is myself swallowing and clearing my throat.

Maybe it's the caffeine, but as I sit here soundproofed, I'm having visions of myself as a first- and second-grade reader. This sense of silence and being lost in my own noise reminds me of what my reading life was like in elementary school. These words come to mind: solitary, detached, and disconnected.

I don't remember talking about anything I read in school, not with the teacher and certainly not with another student. Well, actually, I did talk to the teacher when she would ask me questions about the story in our round-robin reading group. I'm sure they were comprehension questions, not that I remember any of them. I don't remember ever picking a book to read in school, with the exception of choices made during my class's weekly trip to the school library. Any of the books I read in class were chosen for me by my teacher. Consequently, I never felt attached to my reading in school. I was doing it because it was assigned to me, and I was a teacher pleaser.

What a difference I see in my students and in your students when I'm lucky enough to visit your classrooms. Our children don't read in isolation. During our daily interactive read-aloud time, we read aloud a variety of texts to our students and then support their growing conversational abilities by modeling characteristics of proficient, engaged reading and high-quality book talks. For many of us, our students have reading partners with whom they read and think and talk about their books. They have regular opportunities for self-initiated book talks, and they learn how to maintain conversations and grow ideas. Our students read and think about texts in the company of others, and they're so much stronger for it.

In this chapter, I offer suggestions for maximizing the power of reading partnerships in general, with the specific intention to help you strengthen the work students do in their reading clubs. It's important to remember that the benefits of strong reading partnerships extend way beyond the boundaries of reading clubs and into the realm of any kind of interaction or conversation.

A Rationale for Making Reading Partnerships

Those of us who have regular partner reading time in our literacy block have come to see that successful reading partnerships "provide a motivating format and

critical practice for students as they learn to think and talk about books" (Daley 2005, 7). Yet, once when I was doing a full-day workshop for teachers on launching reading partnerships in K–2 classrooms, a participant asked me what she should say if her principal questioned her about partnerships. "It's a little noisy, she'll tell me," said the teacher. "She will want to know the point of putting kids into partnerships."

Whenever I had presented workshops about reading partnerships in the past, I was so naive that it never occurred to me that reading partnerships in K–2 classrooms would need to be defended or rationalized. After all, everywhere in my teaching and staff development communities, we've seen how reading partnerships yield many benefits for young readers. This teacher's question left me with some homework, which was to pull together a rationale for reading partnerships for those who might not see their power and for those teachers who may be reluctant to fit them in:

Reading partnerships help to build children's stamina for attending to texts.

Early in the year during reading workshop in K–2 classrooms, our students don't have the reading stamina to stay focused on their texts for extended stretches of private reading time. When we provide time for students to meet with a reading partner, most often following private reading time, we are extending their time spent reading in a delightfully underhanded way, while also providing opportunities to talk about their texts.

Reading partnerships offer more time for children to read just-right books.

According to Dr. Richard Allington, readers need to spend as much time as possible reading books that are at their reading level, books that they can read without struggle (Allington 2001). When we add time for reading partnerships to our reading workshop, we are also providing more time for students to read just-right books. It's quite efficient, really—reading partnerships help to increase reading stamina for just-right books. Nice.

Partnerships provide opportunities for rereading and rethinking texts.

In reading clubs, partners select a reading club basket for their work during a week or so. Over the course of that week, they'll have opportunities to read and reread their books both by themselves and with their partners. They'll learn to read these texts with increasing fluency, and they'll talk about the books in deeper ways, because they're getting to know them well. Of course, some students might resist

rereading, and if that's the case, we'll want to frame rereading as "rethinking," and teach students about different purposes for and benefits they'll get from "rethinking" their texts.

Reading partnerships support children's growing listening comprehension and expressive language abilities.

When students work with partners, they can stretch their oral language abilities because working with a partner during reading time calls upon a different register and mode of discourse than playing with a friend at recess or talking to a buddy in the lunchroom. Through partnerships, we can teach our students strategies for improving their listening comprehension as well as strategies for making themselves clear to others.

Reading partnerships provide time to talk about books in authentic ways.

When students talk about books in ways that matter to them, their investment in their reading increases. According to Gretchen Owocki, "Partner reading promotes thoughtful exploration of book content" (2003, 106). In reading partnerships, there is no teacher-mandate about what kids talk about, nor is there a whole-class guiding question that they must address during partner time. Instead, if you were to walk around a classroom during reading partner time, you'd hear students talking about a variety of things, such as what they notice and wonder about, ideas they've come up with about the character or the information, connections they make between the text and something else, and so on. Some partners would be role-playing scenes together and other partners would be taking on the role of detectives, trying to find clues about their characters.

Reading partnerships give children opportunities to solve problems and resolve conflicts independent of the teacher.

Part of our instruction for partnerships is to teach students strategies to solve problems that they encounter with their partners. In any partnership, there's likely to be struggles, and we can provide students with the tools that will help them fix most problems. Many of us have found that this ability and willingness to problem-solve independently carries over into other parts of the day, whenever students have a hard time with one another.

Reading partners provide each other a cheerleader, coach, and helper when the teacher is working with other readers.

During partner reading time, students have a built-in companion for dealing with reading challenges. Instead of calling out for the teacher when encountering difficulty or stopping work altogether while waiting on the teacher to come by, students in partnerships offer each other support with challenges. This has several positive effects on the community. For one thing, because reading partners can help each other, the teacher is able to focus more on the reading conference at hand instead of dealing with the potential distraction caused by students who are waiting for help. Also, the students grow to rely on each other and become a supportive community.

Now, imagine that you find yourself at a Friday evening cocktail party or a Sunday morning brunch. The host tells a group of people you've just met that you're an elementary school teacher. You hear "oohs" and "ahhs" and the inevitable, "Isn't that cute?" And just as you're about to take a bite of some tiny finger food or pour maple syrup onto your Belgian waffle, a parent of a first grader corners you and says, "You're a teacher? Good. I have a question. What's the point of reading partnerships? My kid has one in her class. I never had a reading partner, and I learned to read... " Well, my friend, you are now armed with several handy-dandy reasons why reading partnerships are beneficial to young readers. Now, please enjoy the party or the brunch because you'll have to leave soon to do some lesson-planning for the week ahead.

Successful Reading Partnerships

Over the years within the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project community, teachers have approached reading partnerships in a wide variety of ways; some that worked rather well and others that might have been problematic for some reason. As we've gathered in study groups to talk about partner reading, we've come to realize that teacher-assigned, long-term, ability-based reading partnerships tend to work most successfully.

It's certainly worth noting, however, that every classroom has its own special chemistry and is filled with a variety of student needs and strengths. So even though

I am convinced of the effectiveness of long-term, ability-based reading partnerships because of my own positive experiences with them, I believe that teachers are best served when they create reading partnerships based on the needs and strengths of the kids in their own classrooms.

Why Ability-Based Partnerships?

One of our objectives in reading workshop is to maximize the amount of time that our students are reading and thinking and talking about just-right books, which are books they can read with high levels of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Research shows that maximizing the time our students spend reading just-right books is essential to their reading development (Allington 2001). So, if during independent reading time, Felix is reading books at Fountas and Pinnell Level F, it makes sense that he meets with a reading club partner who is also reading books at or very near that level. Both Felix and his partner will spend more time with books that will help them become stronger readers.

I used to think that precisely matching students' reading levels was the priority when assigning ability-based partnerships, but I've come to soften that stance a bit. For one thing, there's research suggesting that students can benefit from reading with someone who is a bit stronger as a reader than they are (Owocki 2007).

Although I would hesitate to create reading club partnerships where one reader is considerably stronger than the other, I've seen instances where a slight difference in levels can benefit both students. For example, Jennifer, a reader of Level F books, was partnered successfully with Andrea, a reader of Level H, during a cycle of nonfiction reading clubs. Jennifer was an ambitious reader who was on the verge of surging ahead. By partnering with Andrea, she was prepped for reading texts at a higher level. As for Andrea, she was content to read and talk about any book, even those that would be considered "easy reads" for her. These easy reads gave Andrea plentiful opportunities to improve her fluency. There was another perk to this partnership: Andrea and Jennifer enjoyed each other and had fun reading together! Although attitudes about enjoyment and levels of fun aren't assessed in high-stakes tests, I would argue vigorously that they are essential characteristics of reading workshop and reading partnerships.

If I were to match students who read at different levels because I thought it would benefit those individual readers, I would make sure that their just-right reading levels were not much more than a level or two apart. I would tend not to match a

reader such as Eliza, a proficient reader of books like Magic Tree House series, with Morgan, a proficient reader of books like the Biscuit series, during a cycle of series book reading clubs, for example. It just seems that even though Morgan and Eliza might be the best of friends and the partnership would work socially, I suspect that it would be less successful with regard to benefiting the children as readers. After all, Morgan would have very limited access as a reader if they chose the Magic Tree House Club, which would suit Eliza. On the other hand, Eliza may very well have little patience spending much time in the Biscuit Series club, which would fit Morgan's needs as a reader.

Why Long-Term Partnerships?

We've found that long-term partnerships work very well for young readers and are very good for teachers. When students are paired for a stretch of time, which typically means months, they are more likely to invest in developing conversations further, solving problems together, and offering support for each other. If partners are switched and rearranged often, we've noticed that it's difficult for the readers to develop a rhythm for working together. Consequently, when teachers switch partnerships often, the instruction is often overly focused on partnership management issues.

For teachers, the decision to assign partnerships that will last for months at a time alleviates the work of reconfiguring partnerships every week or two. This can be a labor-intensive process, and it's usually fraught with second-guessing and mismatched pairs. I recommend saving yourself the trouble and going for longer-term partnerships (in class, that is; I would not be so bold or misguided as to make a recommendation for your personal life).

Assigning long-term reading partnerships isn't easily done in the beginning of the year. In many cases, second- and third-grade teachers assign long-term partnerships after two or three weeks of school, whereas first-grade teachers might take three or four weeks to create their partnerships. For kindergarten, most teachers decide to wait until a number of students can read conventionally before assigning long-term partnerships. Prior to this shift toward conventional reading, kindergarten teachers might gradually increase the time spent with the same partner, going from a couple of days to a couple of weeks or so.

Before creating the long-term reading partnerships, it's necessary to observe students' interpersonal dynamics and assess students as readers to determine their just-right reading levels. Even though my main criterion for assigning partners is

closely matching students' reading levels, I also consider the social world of my class and my students' interpersonal needs. After all, it's my desire to create partnerships that are built to last!

How long should partnerships last? Weeks, months, the whole year? In my class, I tended to assign reading partnerships in early October (during the fourth week of school), and it was my intention to keep them together until after the holiday break. When we returned to school in January after the holiday break, I would spend time that first week back assessing my students, and I might decide to reconfigure several partnerships while leaving some to continue working together. Before that point in the year, I would only change partnerships if one partner's reading level surged far ahead of the other's.

Now for a cautionary tale: It's only fair to reveal that I vividly remember years when long-term partnerships in my class were a struggle for the students and for me. These were years when the social chemistry in my class was either volatile or vulnerable, in spite of all my best intentions. These were the years when there were several students who were hard to partner, for any number of reasons. I made the error of stubbornly refusing to reconfigure partnerships because I was committed to long-term partnerships. In this case, I was paying more attention to how I thought it was supposed to go than to the special characteristics of students right in front of me.

In retrospect, I would have handled things differently by considering the students' needs. There are several things I could have done. For instance, I could have changed partners each month or every two weeks so kids wouldn't be mired in difficult situations for long stretches at a time. In a worst case scenario, I could have had three days a week of partner time instead of daily partner time as a way to alleviate the pressure for both my class and myself. Oooh, if only I had it to do over again... but that's another story altogether, isn't it?

What Do Partnerships Need to Be Successful?

The most successful partnerships share some characteristics, regardless of the partners' reading levels and temperaments. Successful partnerships tend to be flexible. They know a number of ways of working together, and they can get past interpersonal difficulties quickly. Successful partnerships are invested and purposeful in their work. These are some of the more obvious characteristics of high-functioning

partnerships, but underneath these things, there is plenty of necessary instruction. Here are some ideas for teaching that will support partnerships in doing their best reading, thinking, and talking anytime they work together:

Partnerships need time each day to read together and to talk about what they've read.

Like anything else, partner work improves with practice. At first, we might hear stilted conversations between partners that rarely go deeper than retelling or talking about their favorite parts. As they gain more experience through daily time together, their partner conversations will improve and the partnerships will work more and more smoothly together.

Partners need to have strong images of partnership etiquette.

In many classes, the first week or so of partnership instruction is characterized by etiquette lessons, ranging from the important idea that you look at your partner while she's talking to you to courteous ways to help a partner who is stuck on a word. This partnership etiquette can be modeled and expected throughout the day, whether students are standing near their line partners, sitting next to their seat partners, talking with their writing partners, and so on.

Partners need strategies to solve problems and conflicts with invitations to invent their own strategies.

It's inevitable that partners will encounter difficulties with each other and with their work, some partners more than others. I've heard it all, from Emma's issues with being dominated in her partnership to Sereena's personal hygiene concerns about her chronic nose-picking partner. Just like any good couples' counselor, we want to give our young reading partners strategies to deal with their difficulties and invite them to invent their own ways of solving conflicts in their partnerships based on what they know about getting along well with people in the real world.

Partners need a variety of ways to work together with invitations to invent their own ways.

It's very helpful to model ways that partners might work together. For example, we suggest that partners who are reading books that are between Fountas and Pin-

nell levels A–G or so will want to hold the book in the middle and figure out how they'll read it together. For chapter book readers, we have to teach a variety of ways they can approach their partnerships. When students have many possibilities for what they can do in their partnerships, their work together is less likely to get stale or feel rote.

Partners need to have a repertoire of things readers might talk about with invitations to invent their own.

Once partners know how to work well together, we want to support them in having strong book talks. Part of this instruction is teaching them about the characteristics of good conversations in general as well as the qualities of good book talks. We can model these things during the interactive read-aloud time. It's important that we avoid mandating what partners need to talk about together. For example, if we teach our students that readers sometimes talk about the parts of the book that really stuck with them, we would say, "This is one thing you and your partner might talk about today," rather than, "Today when you meet with your partner, you'll want to talk about the part of the book that mattered to you." Mandating the content of their conversations is dangerous because this makes their conversations teacher-directed rather than authentic responses to their texts.

Reading partners need to have a sense of purpose with invitations to invent.

There are several approaches we can have when teaching students about having purposes for their work. Some purposes can be about the way they will work together ("How about if we read your book first and then talk about it, and we can read my book next?"), and some might be about the content for their talk ("How about if we talk about our characters? Mine did something so weird that I want to tell you about."). We also want to teach them to always consider the Golden Purpose of Reading Partnerships: reading partnerships can help readers understand their stories better and grow ideas about books, reading, and life.

Reading partners need to have opportunities to reflect and set goals.

I've found it so helpful to give partnerships time to reflect on their work together. For the first few weeks of partnerships, we might take a moment to reflect on partner work at the end of the week. We can provide guiding questions for partners

to consider, such as, "What went well in your partnership this week?" or "What do you and your partner want to try next week?" We can ask students to reflect orally or in writing, depending on their needs and strengths and our intentions.

Once our students understand the community expectations for reading partner work, we can help them to hold themselves accountable for working well together in a way that supports their reading, thinking, and talking. Every few months, my students would create or revise reading partnership contracts with each other. They used this time to determine their priorities and goals for working successfully together. Appendix B provides an example of a basic, bare-bones reading partnership contract.

The Details of Partnership Instruction

One of the most predictable things about reading partnerships is that we tend to expend a lot of instructional energy on launching them at the beginning of the year. Then, after a month or two, any time we could spend on instruction for partnerships tends to give way to all the other reading instruction that our students need. This isn't necessarily a problem for our young readers, but it is a problem for partnerships. There is a consequence of not focusing on partnerships in our teaching in an ongoing way. Many of us have noticed that by December or January, the daily partnerships may become sort of robotic or unenthusiastic. The honeymoon is over. When this happens, it's time to spice things up! This requires attention to partnerships to see what they need to become stronger and more joyful, and then a commitment to devoting some instructional time to supporting them.

How Do We Fit in Partnership Instruction?

This is one of the most frequent questions I've been asked when I've presented workshops on reading partnerships. With all we've got to teach young readers about *reading*, it may seem daunting to find places to fit in partnership instruction. It's important to consider the various structures during reading workshop that we have for teaching our students. We have whole-class mini-lessons, small-group instruction, midworkshop teaching, conferences, and share time during which we can support the work of our classroom partnerships.

One suggestion for fitting in partnership instruction across the year (and not just during the first month or so) is to devote about three whole-class mini-lessons during each study to support the work of reading partnerships. In other words, as we plan instruction for upcoming units of study, it helps to devote a few mini-lessons to instruction that would benefit partnerships and strengthen their work together. So, as I plan studies for reading, I'd want to spend some time observing partnerships at all levels to see what they need to know to help them work more cooperatively and what they need to know that will help their books talks become stronger. Then I can plan a few mini-lessons during each study that would have a positive effect on the partnerships' work.

I've known teachers who've spent several consecutive share sessions at the end of reading workshop working on improving the work of partnerships. For example, if a teacher notices that many partners seem to be stuck in a habit of retelling books together, she might pose an inquiry question like this to her students: "You know what I've noticed? Many of you meet with your partners and immediately retell your books. It's like you've gotten into this habit of retelling, and the thing about getting into a habit is that it can be hard to break. Habits can also make something feel sort of ho hum instead of fun and interesting. But you know what? There are things we can do to move past a habit. One thing that can help is to consider other things you could do, to try some new things. Right now, talk with your partner about some other things you can do together besides retelling." As students turn and talk, the teacher listens in and soon reconvenes the class. "So, readers, you guys named several different things, like acting out a scene from the story to rereading a book like a detective. This week, we are going to be the kinds of partners that try different things besides retelling. We're going to try to move past that habit and do some new things." For the rest of the week during share time, this class would spend time talking about and demonstrating other ways of working with a partner, besides retelling, that they tried during partner reading time.

Obviously, there are plentiful teaching moments to support partnerships within reading workshop, but we also have opportunities to strengthen partnerships during all of the balanced literacy components, as well as during the different subjects we teach throughout the day.

Supporting Partnerships Across the Year

Once we commit to providing instruction for partnerships all year long, we can envision what we might teach. After all, we hope that the content for September partnership instruction will be quite different from April instruction, no matter what grade we teach.

It has helped me to think about a three-phase partnership curriculum that is flexible enough to account for the differences among the grades and general enough to be adapted for different grades. I call this curriculum the Three Cs of Partnership Instruction, and I used to be very proud of that. I never had the opportunity to capitalize on alliteration before. I'm over it now.

Anyway, the phases of instruction are cooperation, conversation, and collaboration.

Cooperation

For many teachers, the first focus of instruction for partnerships is teaching students strategies for working well together—cooperation strategies, one might say. With regard to teaching students about talking with a partner, a teacher would support his students in basic conversation etiquette during this phase. In a kindergarten, this phase of instruction might last weeks longer than in a first grade, for example, and a third-grade teacher might only need to spend a week or so in this phase if his students have had plenty of prior experience working with reading partners.

Of course, the content of instruction on cooperation would also be different in a kindergarten and a third-grade classroom. For instance, a teacher might spend considerable time teaching his kindergartners how to sit side by side and hold a book in the middle so both partners can see it, whereas a third-grade teacher might teach her students how to help each other understand what's going on in each of their chapter books.

The table in Figure 5.1 details some of the objectives for this phase and the possibilitites for instruction that a teacher might pursue.

Figure 5.1

Cooperation: Getting Partnerships and Book Talks off the Ground

Partnership Curriculum: *Cooperation Within Partnerships*	**Conversation Curriculum:** *Cooperation in Conversations*
· Students will understand the expectations for partner reading time. · Students will have a repertoire of ways to work together. · Students will have a repertoire of ways to solve problems in their partnerships. · Students will begin to self-manage their partnerships. · Students will notice characteristics of positive cooperation across the day and apply them to their reading partnerships.	· Students will understand how to be an active listener. · Students will understand how to be a helpful speaker. · Students will use courteous conversation behaviors. · Students will know a variety of things they could talk about with partners. · Students will begin to pay attention to conversations across the day and in their lives.

Conversation

This is the second phase of a possible partnership curriculum, and it's the one that is likely to be the longest phase, especially in kindergarten and first-grade classrooms. For older students who have had years of experience with reading partners, this may not be a time-consuming part of the curriculum. In these classrooms, teachers might spend less whole-class instruction in this phase and do more of this teaching in small groups or during partner conversations. In any classroom, the read-aloud with accountable talk is an invaluable component for helping students grow stronger at talking about books. In general, this is the phase during which we teach students how to have good conversations in general and good book talks in particular (see Figure 5.2).

Collaboration

Our ultimate hope for book talks is that they enable students to grow new ideas and new ways of thinking about texts. We also hope that a result of regular book talks is that our students' comprehension habitually plumbs beneath the literal,

Figure 5.2

Conversation: Improving Talk and Levels of Engagement During Partner Time

Partnership Curriculum: *Talking Well with a Partner*	**Conversation Curriculum:** *Having Strong Conversations*
· Students will think toward partnerships as they read independently. · Students will have something to say to their partners. · Partners will make plans for their work together. · Partners will have strategies to stay focused in their book talks. · Partners will be able to resolve differences with civility.	· Students will talk about their books with others. · Students will have a variety of things to talk about with each other. · Students will nurture their conversations by speaking clearly and listening intently. · Students will have a variety of ways to start conversations. · Students will have a variety of ways to maintain conversations. · Students will incorporate the qualities of great conversations and strong book talks into their partnerships.

surface level of understanding characters, stories, and themes. In *Knee to Knee, Eye to Eye: Circling in on Comprehension*, Ardith Cole says, "The easiest way to get a conversation going is to create an environment that honors wondering" (2003, 23), and when readers wonder together about texts, characters, and themes, they grow ideas about these things and their conversation is more likely to be collaborative in nature.

Randy Bomer, formerly a TCRWP colleague, once said that collaboration has happened when people's ideas have changed in some way as a result of a conversation or a series of conversations. Recently, I had dinner with three friends who were enthusiastically supporting one presidential candidate while I was firmly supporting another. My friends were working hard on me, trying to get me to change my mind about who I was supporting. This conversation had several elements of collaboration, although nobody changed their mind. For one thing, as a result of this conversation, I learned things that I hadn't known before, so my thinking was broadened. My friends told me things about their candidate that made me appreciate and like their candidate more, even though the new information didn't make me want to change my position. By vocally defending my views about my candidate

in the face of alternative viewpoints, I was inadvertently solidifying my position and strengthening my view. Although this conversation didn't result in the kind of collaboration where any of us changed our minds, we each walked away with new understandings, ideas to consider, and a strengthened position, at least in my case.

In the world of the classroom, evidence of collaboration can often be more subtle and fleeting. Children tend not to reflect on conversations in the same way I did in my example, so they don't often even realize they've collaborated in their partnerships. Unfortunately we are likely to miss dozens of examples of collaborative moments because we're off conferring with other partnerships.

It may be helpful here to include an example of kid collaboration that I observed so that we have a shared vision of how it can sound. I was working in a second-grade classroom listening to a partnership talk about Junie B. Jones. Devin and Zoe were partners in the Junie B. Jones club during a character study. The day before, they each had finished reading a Junie B. Jones book, and they were planning to swap books. In the meantime, they had begun a conversation about their opinion that Junie B. Jones was really a brat even though she was funny sometimes. On the day I observed, they were continuing that conversation. Zoe said, "I agree that she's a brat, but she can also be sort of nice sometimes, like in this part... " Zoe showed Devin the part she was referring to and gave a quick overview of what Junie did that was nice.

"Yeah, that was nice, but even bratty people can be nice sometimes," Devin said.

"Yeah, that's like my sister!" Zoe said, and the girls laughed. "She's so bratty to me, but sometimes she does really nice stuff like let me play with her when her friends are over."

"Sometimes I'm bratty to my little brother 'cause he's so annoying, but mostly I'm nice. Am I nice?" Devin asked.

"You're nice," Zoe assured her. "I guess sometimes nice people can be bratty... "

"And bratty people can be nice, right?" Devin said. "Maybe people can be nice *and* bratty sometimes."

"Yeah, nobody's perfect," Zoe said.

This conversation evolved from what seemed like a statement of fact: Junie B. Jones is a brat. Through their talk together, Zoe and Devin made some connections

between real life and the life of Junie B. Jones, and their statement of fact became more nuanced, more sophisticated. They went from labeling Junie as an absolute brat to finding some ambiguity when they realized that she is nice sometimes. Then they connected this with real life—the dual nature of people. Finally, they settled on the thought that nobody is perfect—themselves, their siblings, and Junie B. included. That is an example of kid collaboration.

In order for this collaboration to occur, Devin and Zoe had to be not only invested in their texts, but also invested in their conversation. They certainly were, because they carried its content from one day to the next. They also had to have the conversational stamina to stay with one topic for a while, until it felt exhausted.

Even though Zoe and Devin weaved in personal connections, they didn't stray too far away from the book talk, which can be a common issue when young readers make personal connections. They easily can get carried out of the world of the book to the world of the connection itself.

Figure 5.3 gives examples of some things we can consider to increase the possibilities for collaboration among partners during their conversations.

Figure 5.3

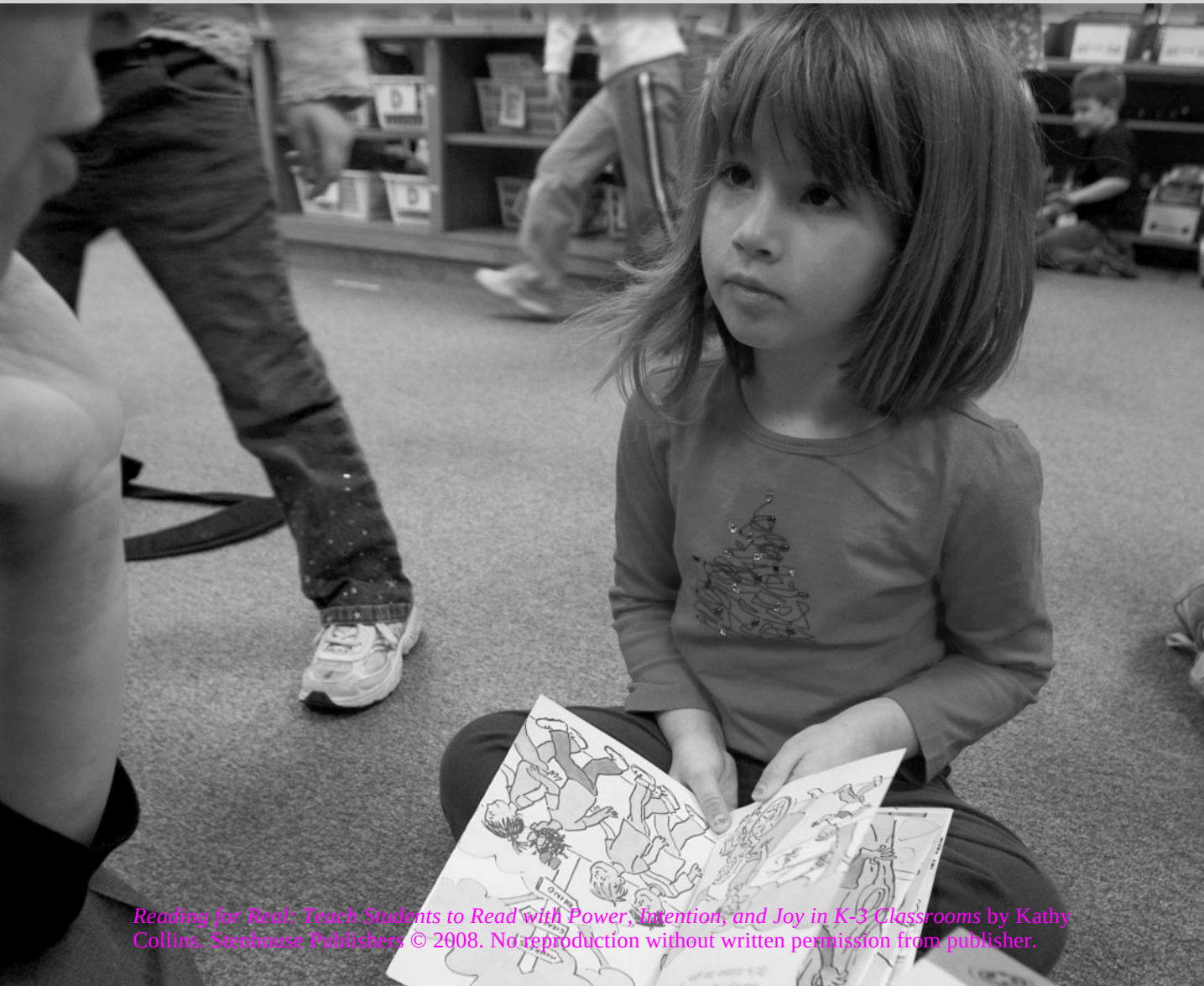
Collaboration: Growing Ideas in Partnerships and Book Talks

Partnership Curriculum: *Working Toward New Ideas*	**Conversation Curriculum:** *Growing New Ideas in Conversations*
· Students will stick with a topic of conversation. · Students will disagree with civility. · Students will make plans together for their reading, set purposes for their reading, and make goals for their reading. · Students will be more curious about and interested in each other's thinking. · Students may jot notes as they read to get ready for partner time. · Students will read with their partner in mind, and they'll be able to imagine parts of texts that will be of interest to their partners.	· Students will talk about their books and develop theories about stories, characters, genre, etc. · Students will grow ideas. · Students will express opinions and support them with evidence from the texts. · Students' conversations will be characterized by longer focus on individual topics or ideas. · Students will use a variety of comprehension and conversation strategies.

I think about the students I've taught and the ones you've taught. They are not reading in silence with only the sound of their own thoughts running through their heads. They are reading with company, talking about books with their teachers and with each other. They are initiating conversations, sharing ideas and opinions, expressing emotions, and admitting confusion. Because they choose their own books, they are realizing their own tastes and interests, pursuing their own goals and determining their own purposes, and they are learning what's hard and what's possible as a reader. They are so much more engaged as readers and tuned in to other readers and thinkers around them. So much of this is due to the wonderful work and play they experience within their reading partnerships.

Assessments and Projects:

How Have Reading Clubs Changed Us as Readers, Thinkers, and Talkers?



Assessment is an ongoing process during any study, not simply an end-product of a study. During a cycle of reading clubs, we constantly observe and assess our students as they read and talk about books to determine both the skills and strategies they are using effectively and what they are ready to learn to do. When we assess our students while they are in the act of reading and talking about texts and then turn the information and analysis from our assessments into whole-class, small-group, and one-to-one instruction, we are much more likely to make an immediate and long-term impact on our students' reading, thinking, and talking.

During a cycle of reading clubs, we'll cast a wide net of assessment. We'll assess and observe our students prior to launching the clubs to help us plan fine-tuned instruction. We'll assess while our students are engaged in reading club work to monitor the progress they're making and the struggles they're facing and to keep our instruction responsive to their strengths and needs. We'll assess after they've finished the reading club cycle to find how they have grown and changed as readers, thinkers, and talkers.

Assessment Prior to a Cycle of Reading Clubs

As we approach a study or unit in reading in which we plan to launch reading clubs, it's helpful to begin by determining what our students already know about the kinds of texts that will be part of their reading clubs and what their level of experience is with reading, talking, and thinking about these types of texts. When we begin a cycle of reading clubs with this information on hand, we are able to more closely match our instruction to our students' needs. This pre-assessment can happen in several different ways:

We can observe and take notes on what our students do and say as we let them explore the kinds of texts they'll soon encounter in reading clubs.

For a few days before we launch reading clubs, we tend to let our students explore the kinds of texts they'll encounter in their reading clubs during partner reading time. We can pay close attention to what they do and say about these texts in order to figure out how to angle our teaching for the reading club cycle. As my students explore the kinds of texts they'll soon be reading in reading clubs, I want to note the following sorts of things:

- comments they make about the texts (which can reveal their preconceptions, prior knowledge, what catches their interest in the texts, etc.)
- how students approach and navigate the texts (which can reveal their familiarity with a variety of text structures)
- attitudes they exhibit about the texts (which can reveal their interest level, reading habits, etc.)

For example, prior to a nonfiction study as my students were exploring nonfiction texts during partner reading, if I heard several students say nonfiction was boring or if they seemed resistant to put down their chapter books to read nonfiction, I'd want to be sure to find nonfiction of interest to them for reading clubs. If, prior to a cycle of poetry clubs, many of my students struggle to read unfamiliar poems because there is a lack of helpful picture support, I will be sure to gather poetry books that have stronger picture support and poetry books with easier poetry, and I will be sure to make poetry booklets full of the poems we've learned in class over the course of the year.

We can use what we know about our readers as they read their just-right books to help us plan reading strategy instruction during reading clubs.

If many of my students are reading texts with considerable picture support during reading time, I'll want to make sure that the books in the reading clubs also offer lots of picture support. If many students still need support in reading with fluency and phrasing as we approach a character study reading club cycle, I might decide to guide them into character clubs with books that are slightly easier than their just-right reading level, so they can work on both reading with improved fluency and reading with a deeper understanding of characters.

In general, I'll want to make sure that the levels of texts in the reading club baskets reflect the readers' abilities. I'll want to think about the decoding and comprehension skills and strategies readers need at different levels because it's important to incorporate that into my instruction.

We can use our read-aloud time to model proficient reading of the kinds of texts students will have in their reading club baskets and provide opportunities for conversations about the texts to determine the kinds of talk support our students will need.

A week or two before launching a reading club cycle, many teachers use read-aloud time to warm students up to the reading, thinking, and talking they'll soon

be doing in their reading clubs. During these read-aloud sessions, we can model how proficient readers read the sorts of texts they'll soon encounter in their reading clubs. We can listen for clues to students' attitudes and ideas about the kinds of texts we're reading. We can provide opportunities for some whole-class conversations to help us figure out strategies we could teach.

Perhaps we notice that our students have a hard time sticking with a topic in conversation. This suggests that we might plan to teach them that readers stick to a topic for a while in a book talk. We can prompt our students to turn and talk to their partners about the read-aloud text to see how comfortable they are using the strategies they'll use often in their reading clubs. If character reading clubs are coming up, I could plan to observe students' comfort with inferring because I know that's something I plan to teach them to do well during the reading club cycle. So, as I read *Koala Lou* by Mem Fox, I could say something like, "Readers, turn and talk to your partner. Tell each other what you think Koala Lou must be feeling right now." As they talk to each other, I could scoot around, listening in to get a sense of their ability to make inferences.

Most often, we conduct pre-assessment for reading clubs informally and gather information through conversations with and observations of readers. Figure 6.1 presents some guiding questions we might consider.

Figure 6.1

Questions to Consider for Pre-assessment	How Might We Get This Information?
What do my students already know about the kinds of texts they'll encounter in their reading clubs?	· Put out baskets of books that will likely be in reading clubs and let students explore them. Listen for prior knowledge that they are bringing to their work ("Oh, let's check the index to see if there's information about that."), including their understandings and misunderstandings about the genre or type of text ("We can start reading right here in the middle to find the information we want. We don't have to start on the first page in these kinds of books."). · Compile a chart of students' notions about the kinds of books or the kinds of work they'll be doing soon (i.e., What do we know now about poetry? What can help us get to know our characters well? What are some special features of nonfiction texts?).

Figure 6.1 *(continued)*

Questions to Consider for Pre-assessment	How Might We Get This Information?
What are my students' attitudes toward and prior experiences with the kinds of texts they'll encounter in their reading clubs?	· Conduct informal interviews with questions such as "What do you think about poetry?" or "Who is one of your favorite characters in books?" or "What kinds of nonfiction books do you like to read?" · Prior to the beginning of clubs, read aloud and talk about a text that would fit with the reading club cycle and note students' opinions, attitudes, ideas, etc.
What are my students' abilities with regard to the skills and strategies that are most necessary to read the texts they'll encounter in their reading clubs?	· Consider the skills and strategies that students will need to read and talk about the texts in the upcoming reading club cycle, and take a couple of days to monitor students' proficiency using these skills and strategies as they read their just-right books. · In read-aloud time, prompt students to use the strategies you plan to teach during reading clubs. Listen to a range of readers to get a sense of their comfort with the strategies. · Check to see that the reading levels of the books that will be part of reading clubs largely reflect the reading levels of your students.

In-the-Moment Assessment: Assessing in the Midst of a Reading Club Cycle

Have you ever sat alongside a child during a reading conference and wondered, "What the heck am I going to teach right now?" Perhaps the child is reading a high-level text with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, and it's hard to discern any reading vulnerabilities she has. Or maybe you're working with a child who has so many needs that it's difficult to figure out where to go first. Or maybe your principal is observing you, and your mind simply goes blank.

In those moments when I'm mentally scrambling to decide what to teach, I fantasize about having a Magic Eight Ball to shake that will tell me exactly what to do.

I imagine saying to the child, "Just a second, Jeremy. Let me check something," as I turn ever so slightly away to give the Magic Eight Ball a quick, covert jiggle while silently mouthing the question, "What should I teach this child?" Of course, I know what the Magic Eight Ball is going to say, because it always says the same thing: "The answer you're looking for is right in front of you." Thanks. Maybe I should get reading conference tarot cards.

During reading clubs, our ongoing observations and assessments while students are in the act of reading and talking about their books may give us lots of questions (and the occasional moments of instructional paralysis), but they can also help us answer several questions that reveal both what our students have learned and what we can plan to teach.

In the midst of a reading club cycle, I'll want to watch my students' use of strategies and their proficiency with various reading skills, both to plan instruction for the upcoming weeks of reading clubs as well as to plan instruction beyond the cycle of reading clubs. The information I gather during reading clubs is also useful as I plan for small-group instruction and the work we'll do in the other balanced literacy components. These are some broad categories of information I tend to look for as I watch students during reading clubs:

- In general, what are they doing well and what do they need to learn to do with regard to print strategies, fluency, and comprehension strategies?
- In particular, what are they doing well and what do they need to do better with regard to the content of our reading club study?
- What are their book talk strengths and struggles?

For different cycles of reading clubs, I've used a variety of assessment sheets. Appendix C provides a general, all-purpose assessment sheet form that would work for any kind of reading club. Figure 6.2 shows a portion of an in-progress sample of this sheet. The students' names go in the left-hand column along with the books or topic they're working with. I put partners' names one above the other. In the top row, I jot the skills and strategies for reading and for book talks that are taught during the reading club cycle. I carry these assessment sheets on my note-taking clipboard and quickly fill in the boxes depending on what I see (or don't see) my students doing. I either make notes on these assessment sheets while I'm conferring, or else I add notations on this sheet by cross-checking with my conferring notes. I can use this sheet to assess students' use of these strategies during both reading clubs time and during independent reading workshop.

In the boxes next to the students' names, I always jot the dates of conferences as well as notes about strategy use or nonuse. I also indicate whether I observed

the student using the strategy independently (without prompting or instruction) or whether the student needed a little nudging to use the strategy. If a child needs a lot of extra support, I usually highlight the box. If many boxes are highlighted for a particular child, I would develop an instructional plan to offer extra support to the student, and I'd consider how the other components of balanced literacy could help. If many boxes are highlighted for a particular strategy, indicating that many students still need extra support, I would decide whether or not to offer more whole-class instruction on the strategy or whether I should pull together small groups to teach the strategy.

Figure 6.2

Sample Assessment Sheet for Use During Reading Clubs

Reading Club Cycle *Character Reading Clubs* Start Date: _____

	Target Skills and Strategies		
Students' Names	**Knows, uses char. names in retelling and/or in talks about the story**	**Makes inferences about main character**	**Cross-checks to figure out tricky words**
Leni (Biscuit)	*3/4/08 Yes*	*3/5/08 Needs support to infer traits*	
Crystal (Biscuit)	*3/4/08 Yes*	*3/5/08 "B is playful because he always plays"*	
Michael (Horrible Harry)	*3/6/08 Yes*	*3/6/08 "HH trouble-maker…" (used HH's actions as text. ev.)*	
Alex (Horrible Harry)		*3/6/08 HH tries to make kids laugh (uses actions+dial. as text. ev.)*	

I tend to gather this information during reading conferences and small-group instruction. Yet sometimes in the midst of a cycle of reading clubs, I may have a specific skill or strategy that I'd like to assess. In this case, I'll set up a slightly more formal opportunity for assessment. For example, during a poetry study I usually spend a stretch of time teaching strategies for reading with fluency and prosody. To assess this skill specifically, I might set up an opportunity for each of my students to demonstrate their skill. One year, I asked each of my students to select a poem they knew pretty well and liked a lot, and I made them a copy of the poems. Over the course of a few days, I met with all of the students in a one-on-one setting and asked them each to read aloud the poem they chose. Twice they read the poem aloud, and I assessed their fluency. After the students read aloud their poem, we had a brief conversation about why they chose that particular poem. This gave me some insights into their ideas, attitudes, and tastes in poetry.

Another way of assessing in the midst of a reading club cycle is to examine the artifacts of the students' work. My students kept work folders in their reading club basket that held any kind of note taking, writing, or idea organizing they did in their reading club. For example, during nonfiction reading clubs, I spend some time teaching my students to synthesize and summarize text by jotting their thoughts on sticky notes as they read or on a note-taking sheet, such as an information web. I would tell my students that I'll be looking through their reading club work folders after school. "I'm going to look at your sticky notes or information webs because I want to see how it's going when you jot summarizing and synthesizing notes," I would say. This will give me information about who needs more support in the form of a conference or small-group instruction (if there are several children with similar needs) as well as information about students who are able to synthesize well and are ready to move on to other instruction. There are examples of note-taking sheets in Appendix D.

Finally, besides looking for information on how students are integrating the skills and strategies I've been teaching them for reading and talking about books, I'll also want to observe my students' attitudes about, engagement with, and knowledge of the texts in the reading clubs. I'll look for evidence that they are comfortable in negotiating the special characteristics of the texts and the work they are doing, that they have strategies to deal with difficulty, and that they can determine purposes and make plans for reading texts with a partner.

Assessment at the End of a Reading Club Cycle

It's rather simple, actually. At the end of the reading club cycle, you'll want to devote two days to administering a multiple-choice test to see what your students can do as readers. On these test days, they'll need number 2 pencils, a nutritious breakfast, and a sign on your door that says "QUIET — TESTING" in all capital letters. No, I'm just kidding. Maybe this is not really funny. Maybe it's not the time for joking about high-stakes testing in the early grades. Sorry.

Let me start this again: Because one of the defining characteristics of reading clubs is that they provide opportunities for our students to read in authentic ways, with the same kinds of purposes, plans, and intentions that proficient, avid readers often have, it makes sense that any end-of-reading-clubs assessment is also as authentic as possible.

If reading clubs enable students to become experts about a topic, an author, a series, and so on, we can ask students to demonstrate their expertise by giving them opportunities to present something, to make something, or to write something that shows others what they've learned or how they've changed as readers. There are many ways to do this. Here are some suggestions:

Self-Reflections

At the end of a reading club cycle, we can give the students opportunities to reflect on the ways they've grown as readers in general or how they've become experts on their reading club topic in particular. This can be done several ways. Depending on our students' writing abilities and stamina, we can give them opportunities to complete written reflections of the work they did or the knowledge they acquired in the reading club cycle.

These self-reflections can be responses to our questions. Many teachers create reflection sheets with questions that ask students to consider particular aspects of their work in the reading club. After students have had several reading club experiences as well as some opportunities to reflect on their work, teachers are less apt to ask prompting questions on the reflections and instead offer open-ended questions for the student to reflect as he or she sees fit. There are several examples of reflection sheets in Appendix E.

Oral Presentations

After students have worked in a reading club for a week or at the end of a whole cycle of reading clubs, teachers often provide time on the last day for the students to share their thinking and learning with others in the form of an oral presentation. These presentations usually occur in partnership-to-partnership or small-group settings.

In these configurations, partners meet with other partners and share what they've learned, what they did as readers, and what their partnership did particularly well. The teacher might prompt specific talking points by saying things like, "Make sure you tell the other partnership about the new information you learned about your topic," or "Talk about the character you got to know in your club in a way that gives the other partnership a real sense of your character's personality." Other times, the teacher may leave these oral presentations more open-ended. As the partners share with each other, the teacher might scurry around so she can listen in to what many of them are saying.

Reading Club Projects

At the end of a cycle of reading clubs, many teachers give students a chance to make a project that reflects what they know and how they've changed as readers, thinkers, and talkers. Marie Clay says, "A teacher's call for a child to construct a response, whatever form that response takes, requires the child to relate, link, remember, call up, relearn, monitor, problem-solve, and all those other powerful mental activities that help children and adults adapt and create new solutions (Clay 1998, 190). In the best-case scenario, the students would decide for themselves how best to share their learning. During a fairy tale/folktale study, then, in one classroom, many things might occur. For example, Anna and Sophia acted out their favorite scene from *Rumplestiltskin*, the fairy tale they studied, while Louis and Charlotte acted out a scene from one of the versions of *Little Red Riding Hood*. All the dramatists used props and costumes. John and Jonah decided they wanted to write another version of *Three Billy Goats Gruff*, using John Scieszka as their mentor. Several other partnerships decided to rank the versions of the fairy tale they studied using a variety of criteria, depending on their fairy tale. The Cinderella partners, for example, ranked the versions of *Cinderella* according to the nastiness factor of the stepmother and stepsisters. Joseph and Morgan practiced reading aloud one of the shorter versions of their fairy tale because they wanted to read it to the principal.

There are a couple of challenges when students work on projects at the end of a reading club cycle. First, it's difficult to find time for students to work on them. In my experience, I've offered partner reading time for a few days at the end of the reading club cycle for my students to work on their projects together. I've also let them work on their projects during our choice time, if they chose to do so. Many partnerships would do some of the work at home as well.

Second, some partnerships may not be as inspired as others to turn their reading club work into some sort of "thing." If this is the case, we can, of course, gently nudge them toward some sort of work. We might suggest some things they could do and let them choose which one they are most interested in, or we can give them time to research the other partnerships to see what they are doing. That might ignite some inspiration. If it's simply the case that Adrian and Emily are at a loss for what to do with *The Three Bears*, we can have a book talk with them as a way to find out what they've learned, what they're thinking about, and what meaning they've constructed after reading several versions.

Some teachers create whole-class projects based on the work students have done in their reading clubs. One year, for example, as a culminating project for our work in nonfiction reading clubs, my students all contributed a page of facts to our class Big Book Insect Anthology. Each student chose a piece of new information they learned about their insect and designed a page for our big book that presented the fact. They used the features of nonfiction in their pages, and then we all worked together to figure out how to organize the information. The students came up with book sections such as "Insects That Sting," "Insects That Don't Bother People," "Beetles," and so on. A small group of students divided labor to create a table of contents, an index, and a book cover, complete with a back cover blurb.

In another class, after the students studied characters in their reading clubs, the whole class wrote character riddles that they posted on the bulletin board outside of their classroom. Some of the riddles included, "I'm a pig. I like baths and the library. Who am I?" and "I'm an adventurous girl. I tell fibs sometimes, but I'm a good friend anyway. Who am I?" For homework, each child thought of three riddles they could ask about their character, and they met with their partner to decide which one they would publish on the bulletin board. The rest of the riddles that weren't published on the bulletin board were written on little pieces of paper, and the class had a new game: Guess the Character! They kept the riddles in a jar, and a few students created a game board with a spinner to go along with it.

When we decide that our students will make, do, write, or present some sort of culminating project after their reading club work, it's important that we allow them to create and execute their own self-initiated projects as often as possible.

Final Thoughts

It's important to remember that what our students have learned or have been exposed to during our instruction doesn't always appear in their repertoire of reading skills, strategies, and habits immediately. The evidence of learning may take some time to rise to the surface, because the student may still be in the midst of processing and controlling it. Don't despair! Here are some ways to track learning long after the cycle of reading clubs is over:

- Look for evidence of new habits and attitudes in students' independent reading that they've carried away from the reading club cycle.
- Watch how students think and talk about texts with their partners once the reading club is finished.
- Provide opportunities in read-aloud for students to think and talk about texts in the ways they did during reading club cycles.

You may find yourself excited and surprised by the new skills and habits your readers show long after they've completed their reading clubs.

Part III

Zooming In: Planning Instruction for Specific Kinds of Reading Clubs

I'll never forget one August several years ago when Stephanie Parsons, my friend and colleague at PS 321, reported to school with a brand-new plan book. This plan book was unlike anything I had seen before. Many teachers, myself included, share a general dissatisfaction with commercially produced plan books. The ones that are sold in teacher supply stores never seem to match the demands we have for them. There's not enough space to write plans, or the space to write plans is not organized as we would like. Many plan books seem to be produced with secondary school teachers' needs in mind as they contain several pages dedicated to class lists and grading grids. And sometimes, it is the simple (yet superficial) fact that most mass-produced plan books aren't aesthetically pleasing. Yes, unappealing fonts and bland color schemes can be a deal-breaker.

Stephanie decided to take matters into her own hands. She designed a plan book that fit her needs and that was custom-made to her own tastes and specifications. She published it herself at the local independently owned copy shop. Was I jealous! I mean impressed. Okay, jealous and impressed. Stephanie's plan book was a sight to behold. You could even say it glowed.

It's important that the tools we use in our classrooms to do our jobs well are in alignment with our teaching personalities, our organizational styles, and our belief systems. For these reasons, I think it can be frustrating when we feel we don't have any other choice but to use a particular tool that doesn't quite suit our needs.

That said, I'm about to humbly share one of the tools I've used for reading clubs, my planning guide. My reason for including this is not to suggest that this is the planning

guide that must be used in order for your clubs to be successful, but rather to make the point that all kinds of reading clubs have certain planning considerations in common. I use this planning guide for any kind of reading club because it includes all the elements I need to consider so that my plans for reading clubs are thorough and responsible. Even though the details and content of nonfiction reading clubs and independent project reading clubs are quite different, the major considerations that underlie planning for them are quite similar, and these considerations are reflected in this planning guide.

In the chapters that follow, I will use my planning guide as a framework for presenting ideas about various kinds of reading clubs. Of course, you'll want to design your own planning guide to meet your idiosyncratic teaching needs, your particular organizational style, and your deeply felt font preferences. Appendix F provides a blank version of my planning guide form and Appendix G provides several example planning guides for a variety of reading clubs.

Reading Club Planning Guide

Reading Club Cycle: _____ **Dates:** _____

Readers' needs:
I think about the issues and interests, needs and strengths of the readers in my class. I want this to be the starting point for my reading club planning. I might list several things that I want to work on with small groups of students, as well as any whole-class concerns I might have.

Featured skills and strategies that I will teach:
In this section, I try to think about the demands the particular cycle of reading clubs might put on my students. For example, if I'm going to launch mystery book reading clubs, I know my students will have to develop their abilities for reading with an eye for detail and nuance. I know they'll need support in accumulating the story across pages. In other words, I try to figure out some "survival strategies" students will need to read the texts in the particular kind of reading club cycle I'm planning to implement. These featured skills and strategies will also include instruction that helps my students talk well about texts.

Real-life purposes, habits, and goals readers might have:
If we're trying to launch reading clubs that enable students to do the kind of reading that real readers do outside the boundaries of a classroom, it's essential to think about the real-life habits, purposes, and goals that readers have and find ways to include these things in our instruction.

Getting ready for reading clubs:
I list the things I need to do to get my students and my classroom ready for the reading club cycle that is imminent. This may include changes to the classroom library, plans for familiarizing students with the kinds of texts they'll soon be reading and the kinds of conversations they'll soon be having, and considering the kinds of note taking students may do within their reading clubs.

Teaching emphasis for reading clubs, Week 1:
I tend to plan to build upon the skill set my readers already have as word-solvers and meaning-makers and also to teach my students some survival strategies for reading the texts in their reading clubs. I also make plans for instruction about partner work, talking well about texts, and so on.

Teaching emphasis for reading clubs, Week 2:
Weeks 2 and 3 are flexibly planned in advance, and I watch my students carefully during the first week of reading clubs in order to determine an appropriate direction to take my students during Weeks 2 and 3. In the chapters that follow, I will share specific ideas for different kinds of reading clubs.

Teaching emphasis for reading clubs, Week 3 (optional):
Week 3 (or even Week 4) tends to be an optional extension of the reading club cycle. If my students are highly engaged in their work, if there are curricular reasons to extend the reading clubs, I will. If we start a third week of reading clubs, we may reconfigure the reading club baskets into different categories.

Assessment:
I want to use authentic assessments that provide information about my students' reading and talking skills, as well as how they've changed as a result of their reading club work.

Possible project/celebration/outcome of reading clubs:
For many cycles of clubs, ideas for projects and celebrations arise organically based on students' interests and the direction of their work. This may be hard to plan in advance.

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What's Your Genre?

Genre-Based Reading Clubs

We were nearing the end of our book club meeting, and so it was time to decide what we would read next. It was Ellen's turn to bring the selection of books from which we'd choose. Ellen is on my Top Ten List of Well-Read Friends, so I was eager to see the choices she would offer. As she pulled some books from her bag, she told us that she wanted to do something different this time. Ellen said she chose books in genres that we hadn't yet read in our book club, and according to her informal research, the books she brought were said to be highly regarded in their particular genres.

After explaining her plan, she handed out the books to the group. We flipped through them, skimmed some pages, read the blurbs, and made comments to each other as we passed the books around. As usual, we took a vote to select the next book we'd all read, and characteristic of this particular book club, there was a considerable amount of influence peddling, voter intimidation, and quid pro quo in the air.

Although I don't remember all of the titles or genres Ellen brought, I do remember that we ended up reading *Something Wicked This Way Comes* by Ray Bradbury. It wasn't only a choice for a particular title, it was also a choice for a particular genre. And it wasn't my choice. By a long shot.

A few days later, I went to the local independent bookstore to buy *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. The knowledgeable clerk directed me to an unfamiliar area in the store. I had never set foot in this section before, not even to take a shortcut to the café! As I moved along the aisle, I felt as if I were on another planet as a reader. I was a little disoriented and a bit hesitant. For a moment, I even forgot my purpose for being there, although maybe I'm being a little melodramatic in my recollection. In any case, when I found the Ray Bradbury book I had to buy, it looked and felt different than my usual choices.

You see, I'm a creature of habit as a reader... not that there's anything wrong with that. I go to the same sections of the bookstore time after time, and the majority of my reading life occurs within the comfortable confines of a few preferred genres. *Is* there anything wrong with that? After all, there are good habits and bad habits, and I would think that having almost any kind of reading habit is probably a good sort of habit to have. In this case, however, my book club assignment made me know that being a creature of habit as a reader had limited my reading life.

I quickly realized that my habits had also limited my reading abilities once I began to read *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. This book was my first venture into the genre of sci-fi/fantasy, and I had to work really hard just to understand the story. I had trouble suspending disbelief when I needed to, and I struggled unsuc-

cessfully to cozy up to the characters, which is something I typically do as a reader. Frequently, I found myself rereading, especially those parts where strange, supernatural things happened. As a reader, I was breaking a sweat.

As you might imagine, I didn't participate much at the book club meeting that followed. I nodded here and there while filling up on snacks, but I was really more content to listen to my friends' conversation. A few people in our book club are experienced readers of books like this, and they did most of the talking. They helped me see and appreciate aspects of the text, the genre, and the author's craft that I hadn't noticed much in the midst of reading the book myself. They clarified the story as well, which I found helpful.

Although I haven't returned to that genre since, it was an important experience for me to read a text outside of my typical reading territory. I became aware of some of my limitations as a reader while also stretching myself to grow. I opened a door to a new genre and took a look around, even though I was admittedly eager to return to the comfort of my usual genres and bookstore aisles. And once again, for the zillionth time, I was reminded of the enormous benefits of talking about books with others.

Although it's absolutely fine (and probably most typical) to have text genres that we tend to read most of all, I would also say that venturing outside of our comfort books is an empowering experience. It's also an experience that we are wise to provide to our youngest readers.

Before delving into the details of planning instruction for genre-based reading clubs, it's important to state that although we may plan to spotlight the genre of nonfiction in February, for example, I am not suggesting that we limit our students' interactions with nonfiction texts to only that time. Throughout the school year and throughout the day, we want our young readers to read, think, and talk about a wide variety of texts within many different genres. So it's important to select texts from a variety of genres for interactive read-aloud time and shared reading across the year. Also, it's wise to have a variety of genres represented in the portion of our library that is leveled according to text difficulty so that our students have opportunities to select just-right texts in different genres for their independent reading time all year long. After all, if we consider the most proficient, engaged readers we know, it's likely that they navigate the worlds of several different genres each day.

On a related note, if we plan to spotlight nonfiction texts in February reading clubs, for example, that wouldn't mean our students would be "done" with nonfiction for the year after that study is complete. Instead, we would encourage them to continue to select just-right nonfiction texts of interest for their independent

reading, and we would still read aloud a variety of nonfiction texts even after the nonfiction study is finished.

It makes a lot of sense for our students to explore a mix of genres while they are still developing their reading palates. Our students bring a wide variety of tastes, interests, and life experiences to our classrooms, and it's important that they realize there is a wide world of texts available that will appeal to their passions and sensibilities, and interests and tastes, not only to their reading levels.

Planning Instruction for Genre-Based Reading Clubs

After making the decision about the genres you want to study closely with your students, it's time to plan the details for how your genre-based reading clubs will go. No matter the genre, there are some typical ways that I tend to approach the work the class will do within a genre study. In this chapter, I hope to clearly describe a pathway for genre-based reading clubs using poetry as the example genre and using the planning guide for reading clubs (see Appendix F) as a framework.

What are the featured reading skills and strategies that I will teach during this reading club cycle?

When we teach children how to read texts within a genre well, we'll want to consider the skills and strategies they'll need to read the words, to understand the texts, and to have thoughts about what they've read. Often I've chosen a couple of reading or talking skills to focus on during a reading club cycle, and I try to select skills and strategies that seem to be essential for negotiating the particular genre my students are learning to read well. I like to think of these as survival skills and strategies.

In the case of poetry, I would say that predicting is a skill that a poetry reader might use occasionally, but being able to envision, to create mental images from the words in poetry, seems to me to be one of the essential survival skills for reading poetry. Because most poetry doesn't come with comprehensive illustrations, if it's even illustrated at all, it's crucial that poetry readers make their own rich pictures in their minds as they read. Also, because exquisite and precise words and imagery are characteristics of poetry and much of the craft work involved in writing poetry, I would say that poets invite us—no, they rely upon us—to richly envision as we read their poems.

In one of my favorite books about teaching poetry, *For the Good of the Earth and Sun*, Georgia Heard quotes poet Stanley Kunitz, who says, "Above all, poetry is intended for the ear. It must be felt to be understood, and before it can be felt, it must be heard" (Heard 1989, 8). If poetry is meant to be read aloud, it's easy to argue that fluency, particularly with respect to prosody, is an important skill that avid readers of poetry need to have in their reading repertoire. With this in mind, I would make sure to plan instruction that teaches young readers how to make mental pictures and read with fluency in a poetry study. If I were launching reading clubs for a poetry study in third or fourth grade, I might very well pick other strategies to focus on during whole-class instruction, such as interpretation. After determining the survival strategies I would teach students to use with particular genres, I would also make sure that I observe my students closely as they read the particular genre during our study and offer instruction on any other strategies they might need.

Although it's helpful to consider what I've called the "survival strategies" for particular genres and make instructional plans to teach them to young readers, it's worth emphasizing that we don't want our students to be "one-trick ponies" with regard to strategy use. By this I mean we want to be careful that our students don't rely heavily on a particular strategy or two at the exclusion of the other thinking work necessary to read with deepening comprehension. A proficient reader is able to orchestrate lots of strategies for figuring out words and making meaning, so even though we may highlight a particular strategy in a sequence of mini-lessons, we always would want to offer our students instruction so that they become the kinds of readers who easily use a variety of strategies to figure out words and to understand what they are reading. Our brief, whole-class mini-lessons over a few days may focus on the strategy of making mental images, but we would want to make sure that our reading conferences and small-group instruction support students to become the kinds of readers who are flexible and automatic with a variety of strategies.

Extending to Other Genres: Helping Yourself Plan Instruction for Focus Skills and Strategies

1. Read a variety of texts in the genre and pay attention to the reading skills and strategies you most often use to negotiate the text, to deal with difficulty, and to understand what you're reading.

2. Gather a sample of children's texts (across a range of difficulty levels) in the genre you're about to study together. Look through the texts and think about the skills and strategies your students are likely to need in order to read these texts with fluency, accuracy, and understanding.
3. Notice any special qualities, text structures, or other characteristics of the genre, and include those in your list of items to consider teaching during mini-lessons, conferences, and small-group instruction.
4. Appendix H offers specific ideas for skill and strategy instruction in other genres.

What are some purposes, habits, and goals that readers of the genre might have?

It's important that we move beyond planning genre studies for the purpose of "covering" genre to planning genre studies for the purpose of broadening the scope and possibilities for our children's reading, thinking, and talking. When we keep in mind the fact that we're teaching students to read for a lifetime, it makes sense to teach our students about the power of developing good habits, having a sense of purpose, and determining goals for themselves and their reading. We'll also want to find ways to tuck in examples of the joy and passion characteristic of avid readers of the particular genres we intend to study as we make our curricular plans.

If we imagine implementing a poetry study in our classroom, the following is a list of possible habits, purposes, and goals for reading poetry that we may want to include in our instruction.

Readers of poetry may:

- read poetry aloud
- read poetry to soothe and comfort themselves
- read poetry to appreciate beautiful language and unique imagery
- read poetry to help them better understand life and world events
- read poetry because it evokes emotions such as sadness, hilarity, joy, anger, surprise, confusion, and so on
- have favorite poets
- have favorite poems that they reread and keep in special places like wallets, notebooks, picture frames, refrigerator doors, and so on

- have themes they particularly like (nature, love, politics, fear, etc.) and look for poems about these themes
- think of other people when they read poetry ("My best friend would love this poem"; "This poem sounds like so-and-so"; etc.)
- buy poetry books for special occasions and give poems as gifts to others
- have favorite lines from poems
- memorize favorite poems
- read poetry to inspire writing poetry

We may decide that some of these habits or goals are worth mentioning in our instruction, and then we can teach strategies to help students acquire a particular habit or meet a personal goal. I think it's worth a few mini-lessons to teach kids that poetry is meant to be read aloud and there are things we pay attention to in order to read it aloud well. We notice white space, line breaks, and punctuation; we consider the tone and theme of the poem and try to make our voices reflect them; we can practice reading poems aloud and notice their rhythm; and so on. The beauty of this instruction is that it isn't limited to poetry studies. This teaching can help kids with reading aloud well in any genre or situation.

Other items on this list of habits, goals, and purposes could be taught on a smaller scale, such as during reading conferences or small-group work within a poetry study. We can also use our share sessions at the end of reading club time each day to teach our students about good habits, real purposes, and personal goals that avid readers of poetry, or any other genre, might have.

Extending to Other Genres: Helping Yourself Plan Instruction About Reading Habits and Goals

1. Read the genre yourself (or reflect on a time when you read the genre in the past) and think about your purposes, habits, and goals. You might also talk to others who are well-read in the genre and ask them about these things.
2. Think about the outcomes that may occur when reading in the genre. For example, a nonfiction reader might be reading about a particular topic to help her understand something better. A reader of poetry might be trying to

find the perfect poem to post on his website. A reader of Eleanor Roosevelt biographies may be trying to find inspiration and strength for her own life and actions.

3. Appendix H offers specific ideas for habits and goals instruction for other genres.

Getting Ready for Reading Clubs

In order to get our students ready for the work they'll do in reading clubs, there are a few important things to consider before you kick off your genre-based clubs. It's enormously helpful to provide time for students to develop a sense of the characteristics, the look, the sound, and the typical structures of the genre before they dive into their reading club work. We'll want to make sure to reorganize the classroom library so that it supports the genre study, and we'll want to think about how we'll get the genre-based books into our students' hands.

Surrounding Ourselves in the Genre

Right before the official start of the genre-based reading club cycle, it's worth the time to spend a week or more preparing students and whetting their appetites for the upcoming genre study by reading aloud texts in the genre and providing opportunities for students to explore the genre on their own.

During the week or so preceding genre-based reading clubs, I would take some time during our morning meeting to ask my students what they already know about the particular genre we'll soon be studying. I would take notes and put their ideas on a chart so that as we progress through the actual study, they'll be able to see how their ideas about the genre have changed and grown. Often, some of their ideas will end up being revised or dropped altogether. One year, several students argued that poetry always rhymes, and I put that on the "What We Know About Poetry" chart. Of course, soon into the study, that idea was quickly discarded.

In *Reading & Writing Informational Text in the Primary Grades* (2003), Nell Duke and V. Susan Bennett-Armistead suggest the importance of exposing children to the diversity of texts within genre categories. In the days before and throughout our

poetry reading clubs, for example, I'll likely read aloud poetry as much as possible both during our formal interactive read-aloud time and in any other moments in the day when I can tuck it in. I'll read aloud many different kinds of poems, from silly poems to serious poems; from poems that speak to current events in the world to poems that address important topics in our classroom; from information-poetic texts (Duke and Bennett-Armistead 2003) to limericks; from several poems by one particular author to several poems on the same topic by a variety of authors.

During shared reading, I'll use poems as the text we read and think about together. I'll ask my students to talk about what they notice, and I'll invite them to read the poems along with me so we can practice using our poetry-reading voices. I'll ask students to close their eyes and let the words wash over them. I'll ask them what they are picturing as I read the poem. We'll talk about any number of other things, too, that pique the children's interest in poetry.

As we surround ourselves with poetry during some of the components of balanced literacy, I also invite my students to assume the roles of poetry finders so that they bring in examples of poetry from real life. Some kids might bring in books of poetry they have at home, while others might bring in things like greeting cards and found poetry. Some might share stories of discovering poems in unexpected places, such as in the subway or on a poster in the doctor's office. Others may debate whether or not songs are really poems set to music.

I know many teachers who create a spot in the classroom for children to bring in the texts they've found and other artifacts of the genre they'll soon be studying. The items become a collection rich with possibilities. Children can sort through the collection and notice different kinds of texts that are characteristic of a single genre. With regard to poetry, children may also begin to notice and name different categories of the genre; for example, poems that rhyme, poems by kids, and so on. After discovering the rich variety of poetry, "Students begin to know what different kinds of poetry sound like, and they come to their own understanding of what makes a poem a poem" (Heard 1989, 3).

For homework, we can assign our students to have conversations about the genre with prompts such as these: "Ask someone at home if they have a favorite poem from childhood"; "Ask someone at home to tell you all they know about poetry"; "Read this poem with someone at home and ask them 'What do you think?'"

I also try to notice and make public the times when students' oral language approximates the genre in some way. For example, as we were just beginning a nonfiction reading study, Michael came into school one morning telling anyone within

earshot, "I learned some amazing things about snakes on the TV show I watched last night. First, I learned that some of them can eat whole rats, if they're hungry, that is, and second, I learned that there are some snakes that can jump!" I told Michael that the way he explained his snake facts sounded a lot like a nonfiction book. "Michael, you said those facts like you are an authority on snakes. I can imagine what you'd write in a nonfiction book about snakes." I pretended that I had a book in my hands and began acting as if I were reading it, a technique many of us have learned from Natalie Louis, the coauthor with Lucy Calkins of *Writing for Readers: Teaching Skills and Strategies* (2003). I looked over the imaginary cover and "read" it aloud, "Amazing Information About Snakes by Michael." I turned the imaginary pages and read, "Are you interested in learning about snakes? Then this book has information for you!" I turned an imaginary page and read, "First, did you know that snakes can eat whole rats at one time, if they're hungry, that is!" Then I turned another imaginary page and read, "'Second, did you know that some snakes can jump?' Gee, Michael, you're talking like a nonfiction author."

One of my favorite examples of a student's oral language matching a genre occurred when Julian took off his Yankees hat and his curls sprang to life one spring morning. Stephanie yelled, "Julian, your hair is hyper!" What an image her words created, right in the midst of our poetry study! I immediately cut a big square of butcher paper and wrote, "We Speak Like Poets!" on the top. During our morning meeting, I told my class about Stephanie's comment (after asking Julian's permission), and I wrote it on a sticky note, which I placed on the chart. When I hear students say things that seem to match the genre we are about to study (or another genre altogether), I try to acknowledge it in the moment or jot it down in my notes for use at a later time. I also invite students to be on the lookout for when their talk sounds like text.

This work of collecting artifacts and morsels of oral language is more than an exercise in accumulating examples to make a pretty classroom display of the genre. When artifacts of the genre are gathered, students can compare and contrast the examples and begin to develop their own ideas and theories about genre boundaries, characteristics, and definitions.

How might we surround ourselves in the genre before the official launch of our genre-based reading clubs?

- read aloud a variety of texts or excerpts from texts in the genre
- use texts from the genre for shared reading
- notice and make public oral language that sounds like the genre

- encourage students to be "genre detectives" and invite them to bring in their findings
- assign conversation topics about the genre for homework

Reconfiguring the Classroom Library to Support the Genre Study

It's important that the classroom library changes throughout the year to reflect the studies that you and your students are doing. With regard to a genre-based reading club cycle, you'll want to make sure texts in the genre are featured prominently. Throughout the year, I tend to have several baskets full of texts from different genres. I would label these baskets simply Books of Poetry, ABC Books, or Nonfiction, for example. Then, in addition to these general baskets, I put together a few baskets of books that are more specific, such as Poems About Food, Poetry by Eloise Greenfield, Books About the Human Body, or Bird Books. These baskets might be considered to be subsets of the genre, and eventually in reading club cycles, partners will select one of these subsets for their club. My students are also encouraged to invent subsets of the genres themselves to add to the classroom library.

So, as I get ready for a poetry study, I make a couple of general poetry baskets that are filled with a variety of poetry books, laminated poems that we've learned together throughout the year in shared reading, and some student-authored poetry. I'll also make several more specific poetry baskets. For example, I've often made a basket labeled "Poetry About Families," which contains anthologies of family poems, as well as individual published poems about families that I've either laminated or put into plastic sheet protectors. Other subset baskets I've made in advance have included Poetry About Animals, Poems by Langston Hughes, or Silly Poems. Usually students will gather some poetry texts together to create other subset baskets that may eventually become reading club baskets.

One morning Anna and Sarah approached me with a pile of six poetry books with several sticky notes peeking over the edges of the pages. They told me that each of the books had some poems about rain. "Can we make a 'Rainy Poems' basket?" they asked. I found an empty basket and gave them an index card to design the label, and—voilà—we had a rainy poems basket in our library. As you might imagine, every year these more specific baskets in the genre change for a variety of reasons. They depend heavily on the new texts in the genre that I have acquired and on my students' interests and discoveries.

Getting Books into Students' Hands

Besides reading aloud texts in the genre to the class, it's also a good idea to give reading partners two to three days to get their hands on books to informally explore the genre they will soon be studying. In my class, I framed these as discovery days. I would tell my students that soon they would become experts about reading poetry, but first I wanted to give them time to warm up to poetry books by getting to know what was available in our classroom.

During these discovery days preceding the actual launch of clubs, I gather my students in the meeting area right after independent reading time. "Readers," I begin, "we've got baskets of poetry books that are full of wonderful stuff. I put these on each table, so you and your partner can explore poetry books together, and your partnership work for the next few days will be to see what kinds of things you discover about poetry. As you and your partner flip through the books, you'll want to make sure you're doing a lot of noticing about how the books go, what's inside them, and what you're thinking about poetry itself. I bet you'll even find some jewels in the books, poems that you treasure for one reason or another. During share time, we'll talk about your discoveries."

There are great benefits when we give students a few days to get their own hands on texts in the genre. First, they can see for themselves the wide world of the genre. For poetry, students will see that there are books in which all the poems are by one poet (like *Nathaniel Talking* by Eloise Greenfield), books containing poems by many different authors (such as *Songs of Myself: An Anthology of Poems and Art* edited by Georgia Heard), and books in which all the poems are about a particular theme or topic (such as *Spectacular Science: A Book of Poems* by Lee Bennett Hopkins).

Familiarizing themselves with different ways that books within a genre are organized or structured is important work for readers. When we know different ways the texts are structured, we can make purposeful book choices. For example, if we want to read poems about baby brothers, we might go to a book of poetry by a poet who has written a poem or two about siblings. In this case, we'd want to use the table of contents or index to locate the exact poems we have in mind. On the other hand, we can choose an anthology of family poems and read in a more "beginning to end" manner. We can also talk about purposes and intentions for reading when students discover that many different types of poetry books exist.

Students will also discover some text conventions that are particular to the genre of study. In a poetry study, my students have noticed that often books of poetry have tables of contents and indexes. Some have found that there are dif-

ferent kinds of indexes, such as those alphabetized by poem title, by author, or by poems' first lines. Students have talked about how poems usually have only a little picture to go with them. While hoping they discover the text features typical to particular genres, I also want to teach my students how to use these features in ways that help them as readers.

Another benefit of letting students muck about in the genre before taking off into reading clubs is that they get ideas for what kinds of reading clubs might interest them. For example, Emma and Taylor noticed that their tabletop basket had two books of poetry about kids' lives, *Meet Danitra Brown* by Nikki Grimes and *Nathaniel Talking* by Eloise Greenfield. They asked if they could make a Kids' Lives poetry basket, and then they went around to the other tables during partner reading time asking if students had any poetry that they might borrow for their Kids' Lives basket.

One tip to consider during these several days of playing around in the genre: No matter what sort of discovery kids make, it helps to ask them to think about how this discovery will affect their reading life. For example, after a couple of days, Daniel and Alexis declared that they didn't like poetry.

"Hmmm. That's a big thing to say. Can you say why you don't like it?" I asked.

Daniel started by complaining that poetry books don't have good pictures.

"What do you mean? Can you show me?" I asked.

"Look here, the pictures are little," said Alexis.

"Yeah, and some poems don't even have pictures," added Daniel.

"Oh, I see. So you guys think this is a problem. Why?" I asked.

"I like pictures," Daniel said.

"Say more."

"Well, pictures help you figure things out when you're reading," Alexis said. "I like them."

"You know, I agree with you. They are fun to look at, and they are helpful, too. So I'm wondering about something. Are you saying that because poetry doesn't have lots of good pictures, it's harder to read the poems?" I asked.

"Yeah," Alexis said as Daniel nodded in agreement.

"I think you guys discovered one of the challenges in reading poetry. You have to make the pictures in your minds because there might not be a great picture that

goes along with a poem. You'll have to be the kind of readers who work really hard to read the words, make sense of the poems, and make pictures in your minds. The great thing is that we'll all learn to do that well."

When students make any kind of text or genre observation, I always try to follow up with questions and comments like the following:

- How does that affect you as you're reading this?
- How will that help you/challenge you as a reader?
- What does that make you think?
- Why do you think it's like that?
- Say more about that.

It's Reading Club Time!

Your students have had several days to explore books and texts in the genre and you've likely had several whole-class conversations about what they've noticed. Now it's their time to make decisions about what and how they'll read in the genre. Imagine now that it's time to begin our first official week of genre-based reading clubs.

Let's imagine that we're going to start the first week of reading clubs on a Monday. I tend to let my partnerships select their reading clubs on the Friday before in order to build anticipation and excitement. Also, when the clubs are settled on Friday, it lets us hit the ground running on Monday.

So, on the Friday before, I gather my students into a circle in the meeting area with the reading club baskets in the middle. I "introduce" the club baskets to the class in an attempt to generate enthusiasm for them. I show off some of the texts in the baskets, and I have students close their eyes and imagine the possibilities for what they might do in a particular club. For example, after I introduce the Silly Poems basket and show some of the texts it contains, I might say something like, "Okay, close your eyes. Think about being in this club next week. Imagine what you and your partner might do. Maybe you'll read poems aloud together. Maybe you'll discover the poem that makes you laugh the hardest. Maybe you'll figure out how poets make poems silly. Maybe you'll invent something totally different... "

If some students had created a reading club basket on their own, I would let them introduce that basket to the class. When Anna and Sarah made the Rainy Poems basket, Anna introduced it by telling their classmates something like, "Me and Sarah were noticing that there were lots of poems about rain and rainy weather, and we asked Ms. Collins if we could make a basket, and she said we could; so we put all the poems in the basket and made this label for it with an umbrella and a puddle. Sarah made the puddle. I made the umbrella. All these lines are supposed to be rain." I nudged her to say more about what was in the basket. "Oh, there's lots of poems about rain and stuff. Some of them are short, and some are long, and some are funny, and some of them are about puddles, and there's the Langston Hughes poem that we learned." I then told the students that if anyone found any kind of poem that would fit into any of our reading club baskets, please bring it into class for us to share.

After we spend less than ten minutes in a circle together having a sort of meet and greet with the reading club baskets, I put the baskets on tables around the room. The reading partners take about five minutes to walk around together and shop for the reading club they'll participate in during the following week. It's usually the case that many partnerships already know which club they want to sign up for, while other children need some guidance or nudging. I tend to pay extra close attention to the students who struggle as readers because I want to make sure they are selecting a reading club that contains texts that would be accessible for them with respect to reading level. Sometimes I've had to redirect (or strong-arm, unfortunately) students toward clubs that may not be their first choice in order to make sure they will be in a club containing texts that they can, in fact, read. I tend to stack the deck of a couple of reading clubs with easier or familiar texts so that there are always a couple of options for kids who struggle as readers.

As students shop for their reading clubs, I post a sign-up chart on the chalkboard (see Figure 7.1). Once they decide on their club and check it with me, they sign their names on the chart under the name of the reading club. In my experience, I've found that usually no more than two partnerships work successfully out of one club basket, and that only really works if there are enough texts to sustain the work of two partnerships.

It's important to note that many of my second- and third-grade colleagues have had success with foursomes working together in one reading club. Again, there needs to be enough books for four students to be engaged, and the four students need to be able to work cooperatively and collaboratively as they make plans for their work and have conversations about their discoveries and ideas.

Figure 7.1

Reading Club Sign-Up Chart

Poetry Reading Clubs		
Rainy Poems	Arnold Adoff Poetry	Kids' Life Poems
Poems About School	Silly Poems	Poems About Bedtime
Space Poems	Shape Poems	Karla Kuskin Poems

Once the partnerships all select and sign up for a reading club for the following week, we gather back in a circle at the meeting area to figure out where in the room each reading club will meet. This is a small but helpful thing to do in advance because it eliminates the time some kids might spend arguing over who gets to work in the warmth and light of the sunbeam that shines on the carpet only during reading time. Having a predetermined work place also enables all of the partners to get started quickly instead of walking around the room in search of a place to work. They know just where to take their reading club basket, so they can get started right away. Now that the students have chosen the club they want to work in for the next week or so, let's turn our attention to instruction.

One of the things I love about reading clubs is that there isn't one ideal-not-to-be-missed pathway to take in one's teaching. Some may consider this the gift of reading clubs while others may view this as the curse. Because your students' individual strengths and needs as readers, thinkers, and talkers are inevitably different from my students' strength and needs, I hesitate to lay out a precise plan because it's impossible to create something that would be appropriate for every teacher.

There is no way that the details of my daily teaching during poetry reading clubs (or any reading clubs for that matter) would be ideal in your classroom.

Even so, we can acknowledge that there are elements in our teaching that we'd likely have in common: we'll teach our students what they need as readers, in general; we'll teach our students what they need as readers of the genre, in particular; and we'll support our students as they learn how to think and talk in meaningful ways about texts. We can easily get teaching ideas for reading clubs from several dependable sources:

- from what we learn about our students' strengths and needs as readers during independent reading time with just-right books
- from what we learned by observing and listening to our students' conversations and comments when we surrounded them in the genre in the previous days or week
- from what we know about the genre itself and the skills, strategies, and habits necessary to read the genre with success and joy

Although the specific teaching points may differ from one class to another, my colleagues at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project and I have realized that there can be a predictable rhythm for how the weeks that comprise a cycle of genre-based reading clubs may go:

- Week 1: Let's learn how to read and talk about poetry (or any genre/topic) with power. (This first week is often devoted to teaching skills and strategies that will help students read and talk about the texts in the genre with success.)
- Week 2: Let's learn to read, think, and talk across our texts and grow ideas from them. (Some students may want to stay in the same club for this second week, but I tend to let my students switch to a new club.)
- Week 3: Let's read, think, and talk about poetry (or any genre/topic) to grow new ideas and to develop theories. (This week is often optional. The reading club baskets tend to be reconfigured in more sophisticated categories.)

It's important to note here that each week of reading clubs as described above may last more than five days, depending on your students' needs and interests. (I use the term *week* loosely.)

Week 1: Let's Learn How to Read and Talk About Poetry (or Any Genre/Topic) with Power

The very first week or so of a reading club cycle is often the time when we support our students by teaching (or reinforcing) the skills and strategies they'll need to read, think, and talk about the genre well. For example, if making mental pictures and reading with fluency are two of the survival skills we believe our young readers need to use in order to read poetry well, we can plan to concentrate on teaching strategies for envisioning and reading with fluency during that first week or so.

We may also want to find ways to share habits and eccentricities that readers of the genre might have. For example, one year I told my students about a friend who has a collection of poems that inspire her in much the same way that each of the New York Yankees players has his own inspiring song that blasts from the stadium's PA system when he's up to bat. As a possibility for their reading club work, I suggested that they look for poems that inspire them in some way. "As you're reading poems and thinking about them, notice if you find any poems that get you pumped up, poems that make you think, poems that give you a strong feeling, poems that make you remember something important, and so on. You could begin your own collection of inspiring poems."

We'll also consider teaching our students about the different text features and text structures they may encounter in the genre they'll be reading. In the case of poetry, there are different ways books of poetry are set up or structured, and it helps readers to be aware of the structures so they can easily find what they are looking for in a book.

When we have expectations once we know how a text is set up, we are able to read it efficiently and with purpose. For example, if a student is looking for a poem about sharks within an anthology of sea life poetry, she will know to search the table of contents or the index to look for a shark poem.

If there are text features particular to the specific genre we're studying, we'd want to show students how to use those features to help them read the texts with more power. For instance, books of poetry often have illustrations that accompany the poems. We can teach students that, like pictures in storybooks, these illustrations may tell the story of the poem, but more likely, these illustrations may reflect a small part or the big idea or theme of the poem. We can teach them strategies for how to "read" and think about these illustrations in order to gain a better understanding of the poem.

Also, during this first week of genre-based reading clubs, we might have to support the students in their work in partnerships by reminding them of strategies for

working and talking well together. This teaching may be a sort of touch-up instruction that I've found to be necessary at different points throughout the year. Your students might need some extra support for many aspects of partnerships, from working cooperatively with a partner to building book talk stamina. You might want to spend a bit of time helping partners set purposes and then make plans for their work. See Figure 7.2 for some teaching possibilities in Week 1 of a poetry reading club cycle.

Figure 7.2

Week 1 Teaching Ideas for Poetry Reading Clubs

Reading poetry with fluency
Why is fluency important for reading poetry? What can help me read a poem with fluency?
using meaning of poem, using tone of poem, listening for rhythm in poems, and reading them with rhythm; using line breaks, punctuation, white space to help fluency; rereading to deepen understanding, which will help us read it well; picking up the pace of reading; etc.

Envisioning
Why is it essential to make pictures in your mind when reading poetry?
using the words, images to make pictures; finding lines or words that evoke strong images; dealing with difficulty when envisioning; using the image the poem evokes to understand the poem better; making connections to the image

Talking about poetry
What might poetry readers talk about together?
finding parts that matter; discussing what you think the poet is trying to make you think, feel, and/or understand; making connections/comparisons between poems; naming the craft in a poem; discussing opinions about poets and poems

Word-solving and meaning-making
How do readers of poetry figure out tricky parts?
strategies for making meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases; using envisioning to figure out tricky parts; strategies for figuring out multisyllabic words; strategies for understanding unfamiliar vocabulary or syntax

Support for working in partnerships
How can we do our best work together while enjoying ourselves?
strategies for working well together; strategies for talking well with partners; strategies for making plans

Disclaimer: This is meant to offer suggestions and possibilities, not to lay out a replicable curriculum.

As the first week of genre-based reading clubs draws to a close, you may want to give your reading partners some time to reflect on how their reading club went for the week. Perhaps you will give your students a reflection sheet to complete (see Appendix E for a couple of examples), or you may decide to ask them to talk to each other in reflection.

You'll also want your students to choose their reading clubs for the upcoming week. Some of your partnerships might choose to stay in the same reading club. I would let that happen if I felt that the partners had a compelling reason, such as unfinished work or passionate interest in the reading club. Most often, I've found that students are ready to switch to another reading club after the first week of the cycle.

Extending to Other Genres: Helping Yourself Plan Instruction for Week 1 of Genre-Based Reading Clubs

It's important to develop plans for any kind of genre-based reading clubs by first considering what the readers in your class need most. If you have many readers who are still largely working on becoming resourceful word solvers, you'll want to incorporate word-solving instruction into your plans for reading clubs. On the other hand, if the majority of your students are fairly proficient at word-solving in their just-right books, you might want to plan instruction that supports them in other ways, perhaps working with them on fluency or comprehension.

It's helpful to consider whether or not there are any "survival strategies" that readers need to use to navigate the particular genre with power. For example, one might argue that for our youngest nonfiction readers, an ability to study the illustrations and photographs and state ideas about them seems essential, especially if the text's difficulty level is beyond their comfort zone. For older nonfiction readers, being able to synthesize what they've read would be an important skill to acquire.

You may decide that you want to use your reading club cycle to improve your students' abilities to talk about texts with others. If this is the case, it will be helpful to study your students' partner conversations prior to the launch of reading clubs. You'll want to identify what instruction they need to help them have conversations characterized by more depth, more stamina, or more exchanges of ideas.

Weeks 2 and 3: Let's Learn to Read with Power, Think with Depth, and Talk with Stamina Across Our Texts

By the time the first week of reading clubs comes to a close, you will have lots of data to draw upon as you plan instruction for the second, third, and occasionally fourth weeks of reading clubs. During the first week of clubs, you will have observed your students reading texts in the genre, and you may have noticed areas in which they need more instructional support. You will have listened to and participated in many partner conversations about the texts in reading clubs, so you will likely have ideas for what to teach that will lift the level of partner work and partner talk.

For the second week of the reading club cycle, you may decide that it makes sense to revisit some of the teaching points you made during the first week, especially if you aren't convinced (or have no evidence to suggest) that your students integrated that first week's instruction into their reading work.

When we decide to revisit some of the strategies for reading, thinking, and talking about texts that were covered in the first week, we often find that the repetition and extra practice with strategies help our students to read texts in the genre with strength and to talk to partners about texts with ease. The repetition also gives students more time and opportunities to digest the instruction.

Sometimes we may hesitate to revisit teaching points in the name of moving on, getting ahead, and maintaining pace, but often the repetition and extra time is necessary. It's helpful to know that our students typically choose new clubs for Week 2, so they will have a different set of texts with which to apply the strategies you're revisiting. The opportunity to use these skills and strategies across books (and across reading clubs) helps young readers "own" the skills and strategies.

On the other hand you may decide, based on your observations and data, that your students are ready to push ahead. If this is the case, it's worthwhile to plan instruction that will deepen students' reading skills as well as their abilities to think and talk about the texts in their reading clubs. During any genre study, the second and third weeks of reading clubs can take shape in many ways, depending on what makes sense for your students.

In the case of a poetry genre study, there are several different ways I've angled instruction for the second and third weeks. I tend to select an angle for the second week that will enable my students to think and talk across different texts in the

genre, and then I choose a different focus for the third week. My intention for the third week is that it has a sort of "advanced course of study" feeling. The following list is a sample of some of the ways in which I've approached the second and third weeks of a poetry study. It's important to state that this list is not exhaustive nor chronological, and the items in this list can be generalized for use in any genre study, not just poetry.

- Poems (or any other kind of topic or genre) make us think and feel.
- Readers notice similarities and differences among texts and grow ideas about what they notice.
- Readers can have great conversations about poetry (or any texts in other genres).
- Readers develop a taste for poetry (or any other genre).

Although I've included this list of potential teaching ideas, I want to be clear that I am not suggesting that these are the only ways, or even the best ways, to angle reading clubs in every classroom. By sharing several different approaches I've taken during Weeks 2 and 3, I hope to show that my planning for reading clubs is flexible from year to year and depends largely on what each class can already do and what they need to learn to do.

Poems make us think and feel.

I've chosen this focus for instruction mostly during Week 2 when I've noticed during Week 1 that my students tended to read through poems as if they were eating potato chips, one right after the other. Perhaps this is because poems tend to be short texts and books of poetry usually contain lots of poems. I suspect that students rush from poem to poem because they may feel like they have lots of poems to get through, which is likely to be very similar to the way they approach a bag of potato chips. If it seems like my students are simply stuffing themselves with poetry, trying to read as many poems as they can, rather than taking time to savor them or have thoughts about them, I would want to plan instruction that will show them how to linger more with poetry, like avid readers of poetry do, and how to slow down enough to pay attention to the thoughts and feelings they get from poems.

Besides the fact that lingering with poems is a habit of avid poetry readers, the time spent slowing down with a text offers additional benefits. If students are staying with a text longer, they're apt to have more to say about it. As a result, they're

likely to spend more time talking about the text, so their conversation stamina grows while their conversation content deepens.

If I choose this angle for Week 2, I could imagine spending instructional time on several fronts. I could revisit the idea that readers have thoughts as they read (which I've certainly covered in previous studies) and teach them strategies that will help them attend to, or catch, their thoughts. I could teach them to notice places where they have reactions to poems, and I could model a variety of kinds of reactions and responses that poetry readers might have, such as emotional reactions ("This makes me sad/mad/happy/etc."), connections ("This poem is really similar to that one." or "This poem makes me think about my dad because... "), and questions ("What does the poet mean in this part?" or "Why did Eloise Greenfield write so many poems about a boy named Nathaniel?").

The following is a list of possible teaching points for mini-lessons, conferences, small-group instruction, and share time that could lead our students to be the kind of poetry readers who linger, who think and feel, and who are affected by poems.

- Readers of poetry read in a thoughtful way, trying to really "taste" the poem and understand it well. Strategies for slowing down include: rereading it a couple of times; reading it once, thinking or talking about first impressions, and then reading it again, noticing different thoughts and impressions.
- After reading a poem once, reread it, this time making your voice match the tone and feeling of the poem.
- When we read poetry, we pay attention to the feelings it gives us. (We may think it's silly, sad, funny, thoughtful, happy, confusing, etc.) Then we reread it to find the exact parts that made the feelings strong.
- We notice when a poem reminds us of something in our own lives, and we think about how the poem is like or unlike what we know from our own lives.
- When we read poems, we want to get a clear picture in our minds, and we can find parts of the poem that make a clear picture for us.
- When there are parts in a poem that aren't so clear, we can reread them, trying to get a picture in our minds. We can share those parts with our partners and try to figure them out together.
- When we realize that a poem made us feel a certain way, we can reread it to try to figure out what the poet did as a writer to make us feel that way.

Readers notice similarities and differences among texts and grow ideas about what they notice.

Another direction I've taken my students, usually during the second week of reading clubs, is to teach them how to look across texts in the reading club basket and to think about the ways they are similar and different. When readers make these sorts of discoveries, they develop theories about both genre boundaries ("Poems have line breaks that make them look different than other kinds of things") and genre variations ("Some poets use line breaks to make a shape, but other poets use line breaks more to help us read the poem better"). When they carefully read and study several texts in a genre, they begin to deepen their understanding about the genre.

Comparing and contrasting poems can be done in a rather surface-level way, such as when Anthony told his partner, "These poems about rain are different because this one is mostly about umbrellas and this one is mostly about puddles," or when Marissa remarked to her partner, "These three poems about rain all have sound effects in them." We can teach our students to go beneath the surface in their comparisons when we teach them simply to say more about what they've noticed.

One way to do this is to teach them to add on to their noticing statement by saying, "and I think this is because... " For example, Anthony might say, "These two poems are about rain, but this one is about umbrellas and this one is about puddles. I think this is because you can write different poems about something. Maybe this poet forgot his umbrella or something so he wanted to write about it."

"Yeah, and this poet maybe liked to stomp in puddles when he was little," Anthony's partner might add.

Another way to support students as they compare and contrast texts is to teach them that they can sort and categorize the texts in their clubs. For example, in their Poems About Families Club, Jackson and Maleia decided to find the poems that are about sisters and brothers. They put sticky notes in their books to mark the sibling poems. They had marked about ten sibling poems with sticky notes, and then I suggested they go back and reread these poems more closely, looking for ways they may connect and differ. Jackson and Maleia realized that several poems were about times when siblings do not get along, and they named these "Poems About Brothers and Sisters Who Have Trouble." Another category they named was "Poems About Being a Little Brother or Sister." This rereading, sorting, and recategorizing of texts naturally lead students to think more deeply about the texts' meaning, message, and themes.

The following is a list of possible teaching points for mini-lessons, conferences, small-group instruction, and share time that could lead our students to be the kind of poetry readers who bring all they've read to any text they are reading now. This will help them make meaningful connections so they can better understand the texts, the genre, and themselves.

- Readers carry memories of poems they've read before as they read new poems, and they often say to themselves, "This poem reminds me of this other poem, because... "
- Readers can put a couple of poems side by side and read them over and over to figure out the ways they are alike or different.
- When readers notice the ways poems are alike or different, they name the similarities or differences and then tell what this makes them think.
- Readers of poetry may notice a variety of ways that poems are similar or different, such as their angle on a topic (poems about bears, for example, one about bear cubs and the other about hibernation), their tone (a silly poem about homework and an anguished poem about homework), their craft (a rhyming poem about tulips and a poem about tulips that compares them to soldiers), and so on.

Readers can have great conversations about poetry.

If I believed that my students were able and inclined to respond and react to the texts in their reading clubs without a lot of extra instruction, and if I saw evidence that they were comparing and contrasting texts, I might choose to focus my instruction on helping them talk well with others about texts in whichever genre we were studying. The beauty of this angle of instruction is that it explicitly supports our students' conversations, and it implicitly boosts our students' reading awareness. After all, in order to have a conversation about a text, it's essential to have had thoughts about the text and to have thoughts about what's being said during the conversation. It's necessary to be a wide-awake reader, thinker, and talker.

When planning instruction to help strengthen the conversation, I can work on two fronts—the content of the conversation and the format of the conversation. With regard to content, I want to teach my students to talk about things that matter to them, to pursue their ideas in the company of others, and to value input from others. With regard to format, I may want to teach my students to have con-

versations that are characterized by civility, growing stamina, and strategies for solving conversation problems, such as reviving dying conversations and avoiding conversational dead ends.

Here is a short list of possible teaching points for mini-lessons, conferences, small-group instruction, and share time that could help our readers talk about poetry (or texts in any other genre) with more depth and stamina.

- Readers can jot notes on sticky notes as they read to help them remember what they want to talk about with a partner.
- Readers can make plans for conversations.
- Readers in conversation make sure both voices are heard and offer each other invitations by saying things like, "What do you think?" or "I'd like to hear your ideas about this."
- Readers in conversation make sure they understand each other and can ask each other to clarify, to give more details, or to restate their ideas when necessary.
- Readers of poetry talk about a wide range of things, such as what they notice, what they wonder, what they think their poems are about, etc. (This is not likely to be brand-new instruction. Students will be familiar with this idea from previous instruction about talk.)

When I reflect on the many cycles of genre-based reading clubs I launched in my classroom, I could offer a ballpark estimate and say that these cycles tended to last for a bit more than two weeks. Nonfiction reading clubs were the exception in that they tended to last about four weeks, which was longer than any other kind of reading clubs. It's important to say that the length of time reading clubs would last was dependent on several factors, such as curricular obligations, students' needs and interests, and enthusiasm for the unit of study.

Even though the genre-based reading club cycle ends and you may turn off the spotlight on a particular genre, that doesn't mean that the genre itself disappears from the classroom. As stated earlier, I would, as much as possible, continue to include texts of the genre we just studied for interactive read-aloud, shared reading, and content-area studies. I would also make it easy for students to continue to choose the genre for their independent reading time by including leveled texts from the genre in the leveled library book baskets.

It's also worth noting that I've even repeated a cycle of a whole-class genre study within one school year. One February, we studied nonfiction via reading clubs on

insects (to support our life science inquiry on insects), and then in May, we put the spotlight on nonfiction again in another cycle of reading clubs. The students' work was stronger in May than in February, and they noticed the difference themselves.

Teaching our students to feel familiar and comfortable within the boundaries of a variety of genres expands their reading and talking repertoire, and it increases their confidence in both reading and talking about a wide range of texts. As Lucy Calkins says, the reading club is the part of our literacy work that especially "embodies our commitment to a literacy of thoughtfulness" (Calkins 2001, 322).

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Reading Power Reading Clubs

About a year ago, a friend asked me for advice about air travel with young children. You see, since we've been living in Alaska, I've traveled back and forth from Anchorage to New York on many occasions with my young sons, so I've earned some mama points, and my kids have earned some frequent flier miles! There are not many areas in which I could or would offer parenting advice, but air travel with young, energetic, diapered children is one of them.

At the time of my friend's inquiry, I thought about my most recent trip with my kids in tow, when Owen was three and a half and Theo was not quite two years old. "I bring lots of books," I said. "Owen reads almost the whole time, which is great because then I can concentrate on keeping Theo out of the cockpit."

My friend, whose children are the same age as mine, had a look of panic on her face.

"Oh, I'm just kidding," I said trying to reassure her. "Theo never went for the cockpit. Not with all the air marshals they've got on board these days," I said, thinking I was sort of funny.

"No, that's not what freaked me out," my friend said. "It's just that... well, are you saying Owen can read?"

Then I realized what had happened, what had caused my friend to look so panicked. When I told her that Owen reads almost the whole time on the airplane, she immediately pictured my three-and-a-half-year-old reading conventionally. Reading the print. Decoding the text. This, I assured her, was not the case.

Sure, there are some children who are able to read conventionally at that young age, but Owen wasn't one of them. Even so, I considered him a reader, and I naturally called his interactions with books "reading" although he wasn't reading the words yet.

We early childhood teachers call lots of things that our students do with texts "reading," and rightly so. When our youngest students gather around a favorite picture book and debate the motives of the main character, they may not be reading each of the words in the text, but they are reading the pictures and supporting their ideas based on the meaning they've made of the story. When a group of children act out a scene from *Pippi Longstocking* during choice time and pretend they are Pippi, Annika, Tommy, and Mr. Nilsson, we would call that reading response. When we're on a field trip and one of our students spots a sign of a cigarette with a big red slash through it and blurts out to everyone, "Hey, no smoking here," we are likely to reply, "Oh, thank you for reading that sign to us. Good thing none of us smokes."

Our view, as early childhood teachers, of what constitutes reading and who is a reader is much more wide-angled than the views of most other people (I'm thinking nonteachers), who tend to define a reader as one who can read the words. Within young children's early approximations, their energetic engagement with texts, and their fearless capacity for sharing their thoughts about stories, we early childhood teachers see the small, yet foundational, building blocks of a reading life. We see reading as a much richer and more multilayered enterprise than simply decoding the words on the page.

So, on the long flight from Anchorage to anywhere, when Owen, and now Theo, take turns sitting in the window seat looking at book after book, asking questions, noticing details, and offering ideas about them, I call that reading. If I were to interrupt Owen or Theo in the middle of a book, they'd say something like, "Mom, just let me finish this part about the Gulper eel," even though they were not attending to the print at all. They look like they're reading, they talk about books like they've read them, and they're attracted to all kinds of texts, from the Sunday comics to auto advertisements, from picture books about insects to chapter books about a young girl growing up on the prairie. I'm not suggesting that they are precocious or that this is unique. I would say that Owen, Theo, and many, many, many children like them have reading power, even though they may not be reading the words yet. These children are, in the words of Frank Smith, members of the "literacy club" even before they are "able to read or write a single word for themselves" (Smith 1988, 2).

Unfortunately, I've noticed that often after students begin to decode proficiently and with accuracy, they may temporarily cast aside all the little extras of their reading lives. Children who once had lots to say about books become readers who don't want to look up from the page to share a thought. Children who once lingered over pictures in their books no longer have the patience or desire to study illustrations, especially once they enter the world of chapter books. Children who once were free-range readers, enjoying a wide variety of books, become locked into levels, fearful of venturing beyond the boundaries of a colored dot in the upper right-hand corner of their texts.

Simultaneously, our wide-angled view of reading power tends to narrow as children progress from grade to grade. There's a conventional wisdom within schools that reading power is quantifiable and must be characterized by high reading levels, test scores, reading rates, and a solid reading résumé, but this is a limited view of reading power. Some of the most powerful readers I've encountered are the youngest ones who don't yet have percentiles and ratings attached to their reading. These

young readers work so hard to understand the pictures and the words as we read to them, and they stop us frequently for clarification or to offer comments about the story; they have favorites they want to read over and over again, and to them, books and other texts are often associated with warmly connected moments with loved ones and characterized by joyful engagement. I'd like to suggest that we acknowledge and celebrate our broad ideas of what constitutes reading power and teach with them in mind.

In this chapter, I'll describe a few different kinds of reading clubs that serve to refuel and replenish young readers' power and reignite the spark for reading that in some cases goes dormant once reading becomes solely about getting the words right. The clubs in this chapter provide a wonderful balance between getting the words right and digging into the story, between thinking hard about texts and having fun all the while.

Character Study Reading Clubs: Getting to Know Our Characters Well to Better Understand Our Books and Ourselves

We are born studying characters. Research suggests that the faces and voices of primary caregivers are the first sights and sounds that attract and hold babies' attention. Research also tells us that infants can detect their caregivers' moods by watching their facial expressions and gestures and listening to the tone of their voices. Getting to know the main characters in their lives is an important way that babies make sense of their surroundings and develop expectations about their world.

Likewise, when our young students study the characters in their books, they are learning a powerful tool for understanding the world of the text. Over and over my colleagues and I have seen that when our youngest readers' attend to the characters in their books, their level of comprehension and engagement increases. Their conversations become richer. Perhaps this is true because the characters in a story offer concrete and often visual footholds that students can step on to steady themselves as they climb their way through the twists and turns of a story. When we teach our children strategies for getting to know their characters, purposes for understanding characters, and ways to use what they know about their characters to better

understand their stories, they become the kind of readers who pay close attention as they read and have thoughts that lead to substantive conversations.

Like any cycle of reading clubs, a character study can follow many different pathways, depending on one's students and the kinds of books they read. In the following section, I will follow the planning guide format to outline some ways that colleagues and I have approached character study reading clubs.

Featured Skills and Strategies to Teach in a Character Study

During a reading club cycle in which students are learning how to get to know the characters in their books, there are several different skills and strategies that will help them do this work well. Typically, during a character study, I've tended to shine a spotlight on the reading skill of inferring, while also teaching students to sharpen the habit of mind of moving from simply noticing and naming to growing ideas about what they've noticed. During many character studies, I've also spent time teaching my students about the importance of using evidence from the text to support their ideas, because this helps to keep the conversations tethered to the books. Although these are the survival skills I've tended to highlight during a character study, it's important to note that I would make adjustments as necessary to meet the needs of particular classes and individual students.

It's worth noting again that even though I may select a couple of survival skills to highlight during mini-lessons in a cycle of reading clubs, I continue to use my reading conference time and small-group work sessions to support students with their particular word-solving and meaning-making needs as well as teaching them to use the survival strategies with a growing ease and automaticity.

Inferring: What's Really Going On?

When readers attend to their characters' facial expressions, tone, words, and actions in both the illustrations and the words of the text, they need to infer in order to understand the characters' thoughts, feelings, and motivations. In addition to attending to what the text offers via illustrations and words, we also want to teach readers to use prior knowledge, purposeful rereading, and conversations to help them infer and interpret texts (Miller 2002).

The ability to infer well and in ways that help a reader understand the story better can be a difficult skill to teach, because the inferences readers make are usually based on "off the page" information that requires readers to align their prior knowledge with what's going on in the text. "Inferring involves using personal knowledge and experience to construct meanings that are not explicitly stated in the text" (Owocki 2003, 45). Many people refer to inferring as "reading between the lines" or "having thoughts about parts of the story that the author doesn't tell us directly." Both of those ways of describing inferring seem easier for adults and older students to understand, and in my experience, these sorts of abstract images and words to describe inferring have been lost on my young students. For many reasons, a character study is a perfect time to put a spotlight on the skill of inferring because it brings the lofty, abstract aspect of inferring back down to earth and into the able hands of Mrs. Wishy-Washy, Poppleton, Horrible Harry, and many other beloved book friends.

In character studies, I've joined some colleagues in making the skill of inferring a bit more concrete by framing students' work as that of "character detectives." I'll say something like, "Readers, when you're trying to learn as much about a character as you can, you need to be like a character detective. You'll want to be resourceful and look for clues that will help you figure out more details about the characters' thoughts and feelings." We can teach students to attend to the character's external qualities, such how the character looks and dresses, where and how the character lives, and so on. We can remind them to pay attention to the character's facial expressions to figure out what the character might be thinking or how the character might be feeling. We can teach students to keep track of the character's actions, words, and tone to figure out the character's mood, personality, and motivation. We can teach them to watch the character across pages in order to notice any changes that occur in the character's behavior, attitudes, and relationships.

From Noticing and Naming to Growing Ideas About Characters

One fall when my class was riding the bus on our way to the Staten Island Children's Museum, a few students noticed that the sky ahead was very ominous looking. "Look, the sky is so dark," Michael said. "Yeah, it looks like night over there," added his seat partner, Sam. They were silent as they both looked out the window. I turned around and said, "You noticed something about the sky. What does it make you think?"

"There might be a storm over there," Michael said. Sam said that it was probably raining hard. "Good thing that we'll be inside the museum," Sam added. We all

agreed that we were glad our field trip would be an indoors adventure. This simple interaction is illustrative of the move from simply noticing something toward having a relevant thought or idea about what's been noticed.

In *Choice Words*, Peter Johnston suggests that when students notice, "instruction can begin with a joint focus of attention because the children are already attending" (Johnston 2004, 18). When our students say things and share observations about their characters, we want to nudge them toward having ideas about the things they've noticed. We can teach them to move beyond noticing and naming toward having an idea by asking them to extend their thoughts through questions like, "And what does that make you think?" or "What are your ideas about that?"

Angelica and Michael were studying the character of Biscuit in their club. Angelica said, "Biscuit likes to play." Michael and I looked at each other, and I whispered into his ear, "Ask Angelica this: What does that make you think?" Michael looked at Angelica and said, "What does that make you think?"

Angelica said, "Well, I think Biscuit likes to play because he's a puppy, and puppies like to play, so I think he's a regular puppy." Angelica and I then looked at Michael when he said, "We got a puppy once, and my mom said that playing is how puppies learn about stuff." Again, I whispered into the partnership, this time to Angelica, and said, "Ask Michael this: What does that make you think?" She did, and Michael replied, "Maybe Biscuit is learning about stuff, like mud and balls and stuff. Even though he's playing, he's also learning new stuff. Maybe that's why the girl didn't get mad at him for getting muddy."

At first, when we ask our students, "What does that make you think?" after they make noticing types of comments, they may simply repeat their original statement because they are not used to being nudged for more. It helps enormously to make this interaction a classroom habit, holding our students accountable for having ideas about what they notice throughout the day and across content areas. After all, posing the simple question, "What does that make you think?" can push anyone to move past the act of noticing and naming and into the territory below surface-level thoughts about the story, where we have deeper ideas about the text.

Using Text Evidence to Support Ideas

Any reading club cycle is ideal for teaching or reminding our students to state or show evidence from the text that supports their ideas. For children who are reading early-level books, this might mean they learn to turn the page to show their partners the details in pictures that support their ideas. Dito and Jennifer were talk-

ing about the character in the book *I Am*. On each page there's an illustration of the little girl engaged in an activity with a line of text that reads something like, "I am jumping./I am running./I am climbing." and so on. Dito told Jennifer that he thought this girl was lonely. With my prompt, Jennifer said, "Show me the parts that make you think that." Dito went on to turn the pages and say, "See, here she's jumping by her own self. Here she's climbing by her own self." Dito was about to turn the page in his effort to prove his point beyond a reasonable doubt when Jennifer told him to stop. "I notice something,'" she said. "Go back to the jumping page." Dito thumbed back to that page.

"I don't think the girl is lonely," Jennifer said. "She's got a dog, and the dog is playing with her on each page. See? The dog is jumping right here." Then Jennifer turned the pages to prove her point that the girl did have some companionship and that she wasn't lonely at all. I left Dito and Jennifer in the midst of a discussion about whether the dog counted as a friend or not. If Dito hadn't used text evidence to support his idea, Jennifer would have never grown her idea, and this conversation likely would not have occurred.

Likewise, for readers of chapter books and other higher-level text, we can teach them to use text evidence to support their ideas, although it's not quite as easy as turning the pages and pointing to illustrations. When partners study a character in a chapter book, they'll need to figure out a plan for keeping track of their ideas about their characters. In some cases, we might teach students to jot ideas on sticky notes and leave them on pages that offer evidence. In other cases, we might show students how to use a T-chart to compile evidence, with the left-side column containing the theory about the character (i.e., Junie B. Jones is a nice kid) and the right side listing parts or pages of the story to support that point.

It feels important to say that although I've shared three ideas for skill/strategy instruction during a reading club character study, I want to be clear that any actual instructional decisions I make from year to year depend largely and mostly on the strengths and needs of the students in that particular class.

Real-Life Purposes, Habits, and Goals Readers Might Have in a Character Study

If we think about our own relationships to memorable characters in the books we've read, we would probably have a range of responses and connections to these characters. We might be attracted to and repelled by characters in those books, and

it's often the case that our relationships to characters are one of the most important aspects of reading that keep us returning to a book once we've started it. We just have to find out what happens!

Sometimes our relationships with characters have a life beyond the book pages. There are certain characters that stay with us, for a wide variety of reasons, even when we put the book down. These characters may become a sort of guardian angel on our shoulder who shows up in our life at trying times, reminding us to avoid certain situations, substances, and people, perhaps. On the other hand, other compelling characters may be the rebel on our shoulder nudging us to go for it, to take a chance, to have some fun.

Other characters who stick with us may offer us a model of how to live our lives. I've learned that Atticus Finch is one of those characters for many people, myself included. In less lofty terms, when I was about ten years old, Harriet the Spy inspired me to carry around a notebook and hide in depths of a nearby furniture store warehouse recording observations and transcribing conversations (yes, even curse words!) between the warehouse workers.

Here is a list of ideas about different habits, purposes, and goals we might consider teaching our students during a cycle of character study reading clubs:

- Readers can have feelings for a character in their books.

  "I really like Biscuit because... " or "I don't like the rat because he's... " "I admire Charlotte because she's... "

- Readers may develop a personal connection to their character.

  "I'm like Poppleton because... " or "I would do the same thing as Opal because... "

- Readers may feel personal distance from their character.

  "I would never do what Pippi did in school because... " or "I don't like Anna Maria because sometimes she's mean to the others."

- Readers think about their character even when they aren't reading their books.

  "This reminds me of when Jim felt bad about not being able to read." or "I can't stop thinking about Elmer. I'm so worried he'll get caught."

- Readers make plans to get back to their reading because they can't wait to see what happens to their characters.

  "I can't wait to finish my book to see if she finds her special necklace." or "I can't get Shiloh out of my mind... "

- Readers choose books sometimes because of the characters.

  "I like reading about girl characters." "I like characters who have amazing adventures." "I like characters who are animals."

- Readers learn lessons from their characters.

  "The most important thing I've learned from Charlotte is..." "Mrs. Frizzle shows us how important it is to have fun when you're working hard."

- Characters can change how readers think about things, people, and so on.

  "I used to not like spiders at all, but now I see Charlotte in every spider web." or "Ruby, the Copy Cat, showed me that people who copy aren't always annoying. Sometimes they just want to be like someone else."

- Readers can be inspired by their characters.

  "I want to keep a notebook just like Amelia did." or "If I hear someone getting teased, I want to be just like Pippi and tell them to stop it."

- Readers recommend characters to others.

  "Oh, if you like to read Junie B. Jones books, I bet you'll like Judy Moody."

Getting Ready for Character Study Reading Clubs

For a couple of weeks leading up to the launch of character study reading clubs, it makes a lot of sense to facilitate discussions during read-aloud time that are focused on the characters of the texts. We can begin to familiarize our students with the idea of main character, secondary characters, and even terms like *protagonist* and *antagonist*, if we choose to do so. If we're reading a chapter book, we can follow the main character across chapters, noticing with students if the character's life or feelings change in any way. We can ask students to consider the reasons they think the change occurred.

One year in Hannah Schneewind's first-grade class at PS 321, she and her students collected a list, a long vertical list, of characters they knew well from all they had read until that point of the year. The list, if I remember correctly, ran about eight feet long. Some of the characters were minor figures in their books, whereas others they listed were the books' stars. I made one of these lists in my class one year, and my students and I sorted and categorized the characters on the list. For example, we put a black box around the names of characters who were the main characters in their books, and we put a star by the names of the characters who were in more than one book. Some kids went through the list and put check marks by

characters they wish were actually in our class, and others went through the list to find characters they thought could be their friends. When we read *The Biggest House in the World* by Leo Lionni, Harshel and Sela debated whether the snail's shell itself was a character.

Before launching character study reading clubs, you might consider taking a week or so to get ready by using the power of read-aloud time to focus on characters, by setting up students to have conversations about characters for homework, and by changing the classroom library in ways that will support your character study and character reading clubs. Here are some ideas:

- Focus read-aloud conversations on the characters in the text for a week or two before the character study reading club cycle begins. This will help in a couple of ways: it will expose students to some of the upcoming content of the character study, and it will offer a model of substantive conversations about characters.
- For homework, assign conversations about characters. Ask students to talk to grown-ups in their families about characters they loved when they were little. Sometimes it helps if you open it up to characters in any setting, not just in children's literature. Some parents might name Bobby and Cindy from the Brady Bunch, while others might name Betsy and Tacy from the Betsy-Tacy books. Some parents may have been Encyclopedia Brown fans while others might have loved Clifford. One year, I had a parent who told his child that his favorite characters were the Heat Miser and the Freeze Miser from *The Year Without a Santa Claus*.
- As always, it helps to change the classroom library to support the study and the work the students will be doing. For a cycle of character reading clubs, it helps to gather some texts that feature characters into specific character baskets. It's important to gather character baskets that take into consideration the range of reading levels in the class. It is also wise to make a basket or two that has a mix of characters in them, such as a Characters Who Have Pets basket or Girl Characters baskets, and so on.

It's Reading Club Time!

Typically, I would devote time for students to study two characters during a character club cycle, which means that a character study reading club cycle tends to last for almost three weeks. Occasionally, I've added an extra week to character

clubs either because my students were highly engaged in the work of getting to know their characters well or because I felt that another week would help them internalize and control the skills and strategies they were learning to use. The chart in Figure 8.1 shows some of the approaches I took in my character reading clubs:

Figure 8.1

Big Idea for Readers During Character Study Reading Clubs	Specific Strategies for Readers
Readers are character detectives, looking for clues in their books to help them get to know their characters.	· Readers pay close attention to the way a character looks by examining the illustrations or making mental pictures when the author offers descriptions. · Readers notice the character's facial expressions and body language in illustrations and as explained in the text because that can tell us how a character might be feeling. · Readers think about the character's words and actions to figure out what the character is like, what his or her motivations and feelings are, and so on. · Readers use text evidence to support their ideas about the characters.
Readers make connections with characters, and this helps them understand the character better.	· Characters may remind us of ourselves or people we know, and we can use that connection to think: What does this tell me about the character? (*For example, "This character is bossy like my big sister, always bossing everyone around. My mom says my big sister is bossy because she takes after my dad, so maybe that's why this character is so bossy too. I'm going to reread to see if that's the reason."*) · Characters may get into situations that remind us of our own lives or experiences, and we can use this knowledge from our own lives to imagine what the character might be feeling or thinking. · Characters from one book might remind us of other characters we know. We can compare and contrast two characters in order to get to know a character better.
Readers notice if the character changes in some way.	· Readers get to know their character, so it's easier to notice times when the character does something that's "out of character." · Readers pay attention to the problems a character has and watches how the character deals with problems. This can tell a reader a lot about his character. · Readers pay attention to the part of the book where a character changes because it's usually an important part of the story.

Figure 8.1 *(continued)*

Big Idea for Readers During Character Study Reading Clubs	Specific Strategies for Readers
Readers pay attention to the relationships the character has because they can tell us more about the character.	· Readers notice how the character relates to others in the story because this tells the reader more about the character. · Readers sometimes think about whether they would want this character as a friend/relative by watching how the character relates to others in the book.
Readers can pay close attention to the secondary characters and notice how they affect the main character and the story action.	· Sometimes readers find the secondary characters interesting, and they follow one of them through a story, attending to how the secondary character affects the story and the main character.
Readers can grow ideas about the character in their books.	· Whenever readers notice something about a character, they can say, "I notice that ABC, and it makes me think XYZ." (*For example, "I notice that Poppleton sometimes explodes at his friends, like when he squirted Cherry Sue and when he yelled at Fillmore about the pills in the cake. This makes me think that he's got a temper, sort of."*) · Readers notice when things happen over and over to a character, and they think about the reasons why because it might tell a lot about that character. (*For example, "I notice that Laura Ingalls gets mad at Mary a lot, and it makes me wonder if she's sort of jealous. I'm going to reread the parts where Laura gets mad to see what causes it."*)
Readers can learn from their characters.	· Readers can learn how to deal with challenges by paying close attention to the ways their characters handle problems. · If readers admire the character in their book, they can think about ways they can emulate the character in their real lives. · When a character has difficulty, a reader can think of advice to offer or think of ways she could help the character. · Readers notice the kinds of characters that grab their attention and can look for other books with those types of characters. (*For example, "I like mischievous kids like Junie B. Jones, so next I'm going to read Pippi or Horrible Harry."*)

As always, there are so many other possibilities and directions that one could take in any reading club. Your decisions will be based, of course, on your students' strengths, needs, and interests. I've included a sample planning guide for author study reading clubs in Appendix G.

Series Books Reading Clubs

Do you remember the debate several years ago about the Goosebumps books? On one side, parents and educators were celebrating the fact that kids, boys especially, were voraciously reading the Goosebumps books with interest and enthusiasm. On the other side, there were parents and educators who were worried that the books weren't high-quality children's literature. They were concerned that Goosebumps offered the same benefits to young readers as Twinkies offer to young eaters.

Then, right down the middle, there were those who agreed that while the books weren't exactly highbrow children's literature, they did in fact have some value and were unlikely to ruin a young reader's reading life. No matter where you fell on that issue that divided a teaching nation (surely a bit melodramatic), I think we can all agree that there are several benefits when young readers find a series of books that they love.

Reading texts in a series is comforting and empowering for young readers. As they move from book to book within a series, their confidence grows because they're familiar with the lay of the land in the texts. As the reader begins each successive book in a series, she brings more and more schema to her reading. She is familiar with the world of the text because she's gotten to know the characters, the settings, and the way the stories tend to go.

When young readers fall for a series of books, we can breathe a sigh of relief, especially if those books are at the child's just-right reading level. We can trust that while the reader is engaged in the series, she is reading books that will help her grow stronger as a reader. Usually most of the texts within a book series tend to be close to the same reading level, but occasionally a series may contain some titles that are harder than others. Because many of the characters and conventions within a series are consistent from one book to the next, the slight increase in text difficulty in one of the titles may be more easily handled by readers than if they were dealing with the same sort of difficulty in a book that was not part of a familiar series.

Many teachers find that a series book study is a perfect way to give readers a boost into the next reading level, if they are ready. Let's say that Clarissa and DeMane are reading texts at their current just-right level with fluency, accuracy, and comprehension. You determine they're ready for a boost into a higher level. You plan to conduct a couple of guided reading lessons featuring a Nate the Great book, which is a series in the next higher level. You introduce the book well and offer support

for some of the challenges they may encounter in *Nate the Great* during the guided reading book introduction and as you coach them while they are reading during the guided reading session (Fountas and Pinnell 1996).

When you follow up with DeMane and Clarissa, you suggest they select the Nate the Great series for the upcoming series books reading club cycle, which will begin in a couple of days. All of this seems to offer a very safe and well-supported entry into a higher level. Clarissa and DeMane have had the benefit of a guided reading lesson to get them started in the series. They have the support of each other during the reading club cycle. They'll be able to talk about the books, which will serve to support their comprehension.

It's worth noting an interesting thing about a series book study: it has elements of both an author study and a character study. After all, Frog and Toad are wonderful characters to study, Frog and Toad books work well as a series book study, and those books could easily be part of an Arnold Lobel basket during an author study. Many teachers have rightly asked, "What's the difference between these reading clubs, then, if they are all based on the same texts?" The difference is in our teaching focus and the reading work that students will do within each of these kinds of reading clubs.

Before I offer ideas for instruction within a series books reading club cycle, I want to share these observations:

- A series book study may not be a great choice for most kindergarten students, unless many of them in a classroom are able to read texts at levels found in a series. On the other hand, I know some kindergarten teachers who have launched series books reading clubs in which students selected from options like PM Starters Series, Sunshine Books Series, and so on.
- Series book studies seem to make sense at times when many students are ready to move up to the next level or need to strengthen their control of skills and strategies by reading within their current level for a bit more time.
- Many teachers launch a couple of cycles of series books reading clubs at different points in the year. I know second- and third-grade teachers who launch a series book study in the early fall, once they've determined their students' reading levels, and then they conduct another series book study later in the spring. Often the instruction is very similar in the two different series book studies, but in the springtime, students are likely to be reading higher-level series than they did in the fall.

Featured Skills and Strategies I Might Teach in a Series Book Study

As always, the skills and strategies I would teach in series books reading clubs are largely dependent on what my students can do and what they need to do to read with more fluency, accuracy, and comprehension. Even so, when the whole class is gathered around series books for a short period of time, there are skills and strategies we can teach to help them effectively negotiate series book reading. The skills and strategies I might teach within a series book study are things like accumulating the story across pages and chapters, summarizing text, making and using connections across books, determining importance, and reading with stamina and focus. Depending on my students' needs, some of these strategies, like reading with stamina and focus, would be taught during whole-class mini-lessons because they would be useful to most all of the readers. Other strategies might be taught in small-group settings, especially if there are only a handful of partners who need the particular support.

Real-Life Purposes, Habits, and Goals Readers Might Have in a Series Book Study

Last winter, some friends loaned my husband and me a DVD box set of the first season of a particular television show, which shall remain nameless. Ian and I had never watched this show when it aired in prime time, although we had heard lots of favorable buzz about it. We were curious, but skeptical. I hadn't been hooked on a TV show since a former roommate and I would look forward to *Melrose Place* every week. (I can't believe I'm revealing that to you.) Anyway, one long, dark winter night, we put in the DVD of this weekly television show just to watch an episode or two, but in spite of myself, I got hooked. Ian and I stayed up until 2:30 in the morning watching one episode after another, not to mention all of the deleted scenes. The next night, same thing. It was the weekend, we rationalized. We'd go cold turkey on school nights. Even though we weren't watching during the week, I couldn't get the show out of my mind. I looked forward to the next opportunity we'd have to pop in the DVD. The following weekend, when we got through every episode from that first season, I felt a huge letdown. It was 1:00 in the morning, and I wanted more.

I'm sure we can all imagine a series we've gotten hooked on, whether it is a series of books, a television series, or a movie that has several sequels. Whatever the

medium, people who are hooked on a series share many similar purposes, habits, and goals, and these are things we can share with our students during a series books reading club cycle.

- Readers get hooked on a series because the characters are compelling to them for some reason, which they can state. *("I really, really like Tooter Pepperday books because she reminds me of my best friend." "I love to read Pippi Longstocking books because she does such crazy things. I want to see what she'll do next.")*
- Readers get hooked on a series because the stories are appealing to them for some reason, which they can state. *("I love to read Magic School Bus books because they have a silly story, but they also give lots of information about stuff.")*
- Readers get hooked on a series because they love to talk about it with other people. *("Me and my friend are reading Harry Potter books right now. Even though we saw the movies, we like to talk about the parts of the books that are different than the movies.")*
- Readers look forward to reading more books in the series because they want to see what happens next. *("I want to read the next Little House book because I want to know how the move turns out for Laura's family.")*
- Readers use what they know from one book in the series to help them understand what's going on in another book in the series. *("I think that the setting of Magic Tree House books can make them tricky. I know that sometimes I might need to ask somebody about the hard words and the stuff that I don't know about.")*
- Readers look forward to the next book in the series and are eager to read it. *("Guess what my brother told me? J. K. Rowling is writing another Harry Potter book! I thought she was done. I can't wait!" or "We've read Henry and Mudge Books 1 to 4. I wonder if anyone has Book 5 that we could borrow. We want to stay in order.")*
- Readers have favorite titles within the series and compare and contrast the story lines among the books. *("My favorite Poppleton book is the first one because each of the stories introduced us to his friends. One of the Poppleton stories I didn't really like was the one when Poppleton went to buy a coat from Zacko. I didn't like how mean Zacko was to Poppleton.")*
- Readers recommend series books to other people they think will be interested. *("I know you love Junie B. Jones books. I think you'll like Tooter Pepperday, too, 'cause she's sort of like Junie." Or "You might like Clifford books if you like Curious George. They are both animals who have lots of adventures," or "Captain Underpants books are so funny. I bet you'd love them.")*

Getting Ready for Series Books Reading Clubs

Just like for any cycle of reading clubs, I would want to spend a week or so before the official launch of the clubs to scaffold my students to get them ready for the work they'll soon be doing independently. I'd find ways to expose my students to the kinds of texts they'll soon encounter, and I'd model proficient reading and strong conversations using these same kinds of texts during read-aloud time.

During read-aloud time for a week or so prior to a series books reading club cycle, I would select a couple of titles from a series to read to my students. I would model the habits and strategies of a proficient series book reader, and I would facilitate the kinds of quality conversations about the texts that I want my students to have in their reading club partnerships. I would select a series for the read-aloud during this time that is similar in level to the kind of series that the bulk of my students could read. I would also want to choose two or three titles from the series that I could get through in a week or two.

On the first day, I might gather my students for read-aloud and say something like, "You know, we will soon have series book clubs so we can become experts about a series or two of books, and I thought that it would be great to choose a series to read during read-aloud for the next week or so. I gathered titles from these two series. Let's think about which one we'd like to read." I would then offer a quick synopsis of the two series, and I'd pass out books for students to look through. We'd have a brief discussion about which series to read together and then make the choice, perhaps by voting if necessary.

Once we chose the series, I'd model how a series book reader figures out which book to read first. "You know, some series have an actual first book that it's important to start with because it introduces you to the characters and because the next books build upon the story. It's like Harry Potter books. I guess you could read the fourth one first, but then you might not know all the history and details of the characters as well as if you had started with the first one in the series. Then on the other hand, some series, like Frog and Toad, are the kind of series where it doesn't matter really which book you start first. Let's figure out what makes sense for our series. Sometimes there's a clue on the cover; like it might say 'Book One' or something like that."

As I read the books in the series aloud, I would model good habits, such as making connections from one of the texts to the other, using my schema from the first book to help me get quickly into the second book, and so on. I would also have my students turn and talk about the story in partnerships at various points as I

read aloud. If, for instance, I think aloud as I read to model what it sounds like to concisely summarize a part of the story, I would use the next turn-and-talk prompt to give my students practice summarizing. I could say something like, "Phew... a lot just happened in this part. Turn and talk with your partner and try to summarize together what just happened." We would have several whole-class conversations about the texts as well in which I acted less as a content contributor to the conversation and more as a host/facilitator. After the whole-class talk, I could take a few minutes to name the helpful conversation moves I noticed the students making as they talked. I could say something like, "I noticed you guys really were talking a lot about the idea of whether Horrible Harry is really bad or not. I love when that happens in a conversation, when we find something that we stick with for a while. Lots of voices were heard, and we checked back with the book several times to make sure we were being accurate about what happened. That was a strong part of our conversation, I think. I'm looking forward to thinking about this more in the next Horrible Harry book." (At some point in the year, after students have had lots of experience with whole-class conversations, I give them the responsibility to reflect on what they think went well in a conversation.)

Besides using read-aloud time to expose my students to series book reading before the official launch of our study, I also would want to get some books in their hands for independent reading. This means that we'd have to reconfigure some classroom library baskets into series book baskets. For example, I'd go through our Level J baskets and pull out the Frog and Toad books and put them into a designated Frog and Toad basket. We'd make series baskets for the range of readers in the classroom. For our students who read books at the earliest levels, this means that we might have to gather books like Mrs. Wishy-Washy books and put them into a basket called Mrs. Wishy-Washy Series.

Once we made series book baskets at a variety of levels, I'd strongly suggest that everyone shop for one or two titles from a series that they can read well during independent reading workshop. This means that during the week before we officially launch series book clubs, the students have a chance to explore a series first.

We can also use homework to open up dialogue about reading between our students and their families. In anticipation of a series book study, we could assign homework like the following: "Ask someone at home if they ever had a series of books they loved to read when they were little. If the person did have a series he or she loved, ask, 'Can you tell me what that was like?'"

There is another consideration in preparation for launching this cycle of reading clubs that I want to share. Before a cycle of series book clubs begins, I try to have

a very specific plan in mind for each of the partnerships. I figure out which partnerships I will nudge forward into a series of books that are at a higher level than what they are reading now. I realize that I will have to do some preparatory work with them, such as guided reading or strategy lessons (Calkins 2001) to support them in the higher-level texts, so I'll make plans for doing so. For other partnerships, I may decide to have them choose a series that's composed of texts in their current just-right reading level. I'll make this decision for partnerships who need to spend more time strengthening their reading in a particular level.

It's Reading Club Time!

The series book club baskets are set, and my students have chosen the series they will be reading for the next week or two. For children in series with books higher than Level L or M, it makes sense if they stay in the same series for about two weeks so they have time to read at least a couple of the texts in the series and have substantial conversations about them. The readers who are reading books at levels lower than L will most likely choose a series for one week and then choose another series for the next week. Figure 8.2 shows some possible approaches to use during series books reading clubs. Appendix G provides a sample planning guide for series books reading clubs.

Figure 8.2

Big Idea for Readers During Series Books Reading Clubs	Specific Strategies for Readers
Readers figure out how to approach their series.	· Readers use all the information available on series book covers to see if that helps them decide which book to read first and next and next. · Readers can skim the books in a series to figure out which one they want to start with, especially if the author hasn't written them to be read in a specific order. · Partners decide if they want to read the same title at the same time or if they want to each read a different title and then talk about the books. · When partners decide to read different titles, they can trade the books with each other after they're finished. This is helpful for the conversation because then both partners know the same books well. · Readers try to figure out if their books are "to be continued" from one book to the next, or if each book is its own separate story.

Figure 8.2 *(continued)*

Big Idea for Readers During Series Books Reading Clubs	Specific Strategies for Readers
Readers figure out what's important in a book and keep that in mind as they read (*determining importance and accumulating the text across pages and chapters*).	· Readers can retell what happened in a part of the book or within a chapter and then say, "The important part of this is... " · Readers can review the events in the chapter and think about what are the important parts to keep in mind. · Readers can jot the ideas and events they think are important on sticky notes. · As readers meet new characters in their texts, they try to name the relationship the new character has to the main characters, and they determine whether this is a character to hold in their minds or whether he or she is a fleeting character, one who just passes through the story.
Readers use what they know from the first book in the series to help them understand the next book. Readers make connections between books in a series.	· Readers keep in mind what they learned about the characters in the first book when they encounter the same characters again in the next books. · Readers notice similarities between books in a series and say things like, "This is similar to what happened in that other book. In both books, she got into an argument with a classmate." · Readers use what they know from the previous books they've read in order to make good predictions about the characters and the events in the book they are currently reading. · Readers notice when characters change across books in a series because they've gotten to know the characters really well.
Readers read with increasing stamina and focus.	· When readers realize they don't know what's going on in the story, they may have lost focus or concentration. It helps to go back and reread. · When readers have pictures in their minds of the story and characters, they can stay focused more easily. · When a reader puts down a book on one day and picks it up on the next day, it helps to retell to oneself what happened in the last section read. · Readers can flip back through the book and skim some parts to refresh their memory about what has happened so far. · Readers have ways to deal with noise distractions. They can politely ask someone to be quieter, or they can read with their hands over their ears.

Author Study

One summer, years before we had children or iPods, my husband and I drove across the country listening to the CDs from the big, black simulated leather CD case we lugged along. We made a car trip rule that whoever was driving was also the DJ because it was in our best interest to keep the driver awake and happy. So it was on a desolate stretch of highway in the middle of some big state when Ian slept and I drove, awake and happy, as I binged on all of my Wilco and U2 CDs, one after another, for hours.

I had never before listened to the music of U2 in such a concentrated way. After a while, I began to notice recurring images and metaphors in the lyrics. I soon stopped singing along and got lost in thought. In several songs, I noticed that love is equated to a temple and there is the image of crawling toward something. I realized that love is never easy and breezy in U2 songs. I began to wonder about the songs' meanings. I wondered why they used the image of crawling and the word *temple* so often. It's not exactly a rhyme generator—temple, bemple, simple, pimple, dimple. I wondered why love was so hard for U2. After all, wasn't Bono happily married to his high school sweetheart? I wondered where they got the ideas for their songs. I noticed themes within and across albums. I wondered and wondered about these things as I drove and listened. I think I may have woken Ian up to tell him my U2 epiphanies. How fun for him. In retrospect, we could say I was deeply engaged in a kind of audio author study.

My U2 study has much in common with an author study that would take place in a classroom. In our classes, we gather several texts by an author, we read and reread them in a concentrated period of time, we make connections among the texts, we wonder about and question things we notice, and we talk about our thinking.

Author studies are important because the realization that one can have a favorite author is a significant milestone for a reader. Having favorite authors is a characteristic that's typical of avid, passionate readers. Having favorite authors or authors whose work one knows well is empowering because it allows a reader to be more selective. When readers have a sense of their preferences, they also have a reading identity they can cultivate. I want my students to have tastes as readers, especially in knowing what they love and what they like. This self-knowledge will help them become independent and discerning readers who can easily maintain a reading life, mostly because they can find things they like to read. With regard to favorite authors, I hope my students know they can pursue and think about the work of

authors they love. I want to teach them the real-life ways that avid readers read, think, and talk across texts by their favorite authors. In Appendix G, I've included a planning guide with suggestions for author study reading clubs.

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Building Healthy Reading Habits

Although I'm wary of the trend to impose business models and corporate mindsets on the very human and interpersonal work between students and teachers, I have to admit there is one big lesson we educators can learn from big business. That lesson is to "hook 'em while they're young!"

A marketing objective for companies is to create lifelong, loyal consumers. Research shows that from a young age, we develop brand loyalty. In many cases, the brands we grew up using tend to be the brands we seek out as adults. Companies capitalize on this by directly marketing to children. If we read the business section of any newspaper over the course of a week, there's likely to be an article or two about how companies are spending billions of advertising and marketing dollars in their attempts to capture younger and younger consumers.

We teachers are not likely to have billions of dollars on hand (sigh) or a product to sell, but with respect to literacy, we, too, want to hook 'em while they're young. Frank Smith writes that "our strongest affiliations are to the clubs we join first" and that's why it's critical that our students are immediate and enthusiastic members of the Literacy Club (Smith 1988, 6). We want our students to develop the habit of making reading a big part of their lives as soon as possible. We want them to value the experience and reap the benefits of reading so that they're more likely to live text-filled lives outside of the classroom. It is our hope of hopes that the students we teach will walk out of our classrooms at the end of the year with visions of summer reading plans and the understanding that reading can be an integral and pleasurable part of their lives outside of school.

In this chapter I'll describe a couple of reading club cycles meant to give students the tools necessary (or, at the very least, an experience with the tools necessary) to build their own self-sustaining reading lives. These reading clubs, Setting Goals to Become Stronger Readers and Inventing Our Own Reading Projects, give students the pleasure of setting their own goals and imagining their own projects in ways that ingrain habits of mind about reading as well as provide a sense of agency as readers (Johnston 2004). The combination of developing good habits, growing a sense of agency, and experiencing pleasure as readers is more likely to enable us to hook 'em while they're young.

The two kinds of healthy habits reading clubs I will discuss in this chapter have a lot in common with each other, and in some cases, teachers have merged them into one cycle of reading clubs called Readers Set Goals and Invent Their Own Projects. I'll weave details about both kinds of clubs throughout the various sections of this chapter, so you can decide for yourself if it makes sense to separate them into

two distinct cycles of clubs or if you'd prefer to combine them into one longer reading club cycle.

When is the Right Time for Healthy Habits Clubs?

I've found that the Setting Reading Goals Clubs and Inventing Reading Projects Clubs are wonderful as back-to-back, year-end units of study, each taking about two weeks or so. They seem to fit best at the end of the year because by then our students have increased stamina for reading and can work more independently during reading workshop than they could have earlier in the year. Also, by June our students are equipped with a vast repertoire of strategies to figure out words and the meaning of their texts, and they know a variety of ways to work and talk with partners. Through the course of the year in reading workshop, it's likely that most of the students have developed a sense of purpose for their work during reading time, which is very important for successful healthy habits reading clubs.

Another benefit of ending the year with these reading clubs is that they provide a perfect segue into our students' summer reading lives. The work our students do in these reading clubs offers a dress rehearsal of sorts for how they might lead their reading lives over the summer, when they are typically left to their own devices. In these reading clubs, our students either set their own goals or imagine meaningful projects around reading, and they learn how to make and revise plans for their work. These clubs call upon young readers to develop a sense of responsibility and ownership for their reading, and they teach students that they have the power to determine their own purposes, intentions, projects, and goals as readers.

Although there are many reasons to implement these reading clubs during the final month or so of the school year, I have known teachers who have launched them at other times of the year, as well. For example, a third-grade teacher might decide that the last couple of weeks of school in December, right before the holiday break, is an opportune time to give his students the experience of planning their own reading projects to help them get ready for reading during the school vacation. Some second- and third-grade teachers choose to launch Setting Reading Goals Clubs in early January, right after the break. This cycle of reading clubs coincides nicely with the spirit of the New Year, resolutions and fresh starts, setting goals, making plans, and then doing the work to reach them.

What Are the Featured Reading Skills, Strategies, and Habits I Will Teach During These Reading Clubs?

One of the challenges of these kinds of reading clubs is determining what exactly to teach. Because there is no unifying whole-class study going on that connects all the clubs, it can be difficult to figure out an instructional thread that will make sense for everybody. During poetry reading clubs, everyone is reading and talking about poetry, so teaching students to envision as they read is a very sensible thing to teach. All of the readers will need to use this strategy. During author study reading clubs, everyone has chosen an author whose work they want to get to know well, so teaching students how to make connections between books in order to understand the stories better is one possible idea for whole-class instruction. In most reading club cycles, when the partnerships are doing the same sort of work with similar texts (albeit with different levels of texts), it's not as difficult to figure out a string of mini-lessons that will be pertinent to most all of the readers.

In healthy habits reading clubs, however, everyone has chosen a reading goal to meet or a reading project to work on, but the projects or goals may be quite different from one partnership to another. There might be a wide variety of clubs that reflect the different goals and projects of the readers in the room. Here is a sample of the clubs students created in one cycle of Setting Reading Goals clubs in my classroom:

Reading Like a Storyteller Club

The underlying work in this club was improving reading fluency. Two children invented this club to achieve their goal of becoming stronger at reading aloud because they would soon have baby siblings in their lives. I also gently encouraged two other children to participate in this club because they needed to work on reading with more fluency.

My First Chapter Book Club

The two children who invented this reading club were newcomers to the world of chapter books having very little picture support. One partner chose a Horrible Harry book, and the other chose a Junie B. Jones book. They wanted to work on making their own pictures in their minds as they read these books. Over the course of the week, they offered each other support by talking about their books

together, summarizing the parts, or sketching parts where they got strong images in their minds.

Funny Books Club

In this club, two kids pulled together a basket of several books that they said were really funny. With my nudges, they reread the books to figure out what made them so funny. Over the course of the week, they read and reread several books to find others that met their funny criteria and made them laugh out loud. They ended up making a version of a top ten list of funny books that they wanted to duplicate for everyone in the class.

Author Club

Two sets of partners wanted to work in this reading club. One partnership chose to focus on Kevin Henkes books because they loved the characters in them. They decided to pick some scenes to act out, using the little bits of speech text that Henkes included as part of the illustrations. The other partnership chose to study different authors and then report their discoveries to each other. One partner decided to study Tomie dePaola books, while his partner read Ezra Jack Keats.

What is the teaching, then, that we might focus on in mini-lessons during the healthy reading habits clubs if all the partnerships have different purposes? If we're trying to plan instruction that will be immediately useful to as many students as possible, it seems to make sense to use this time to support good work habits and strong reading habits. I've spent time in both the reading projects clubs and reading goals clubs teaching my students strategies for making plans and sticking to them; staying focused on a project or goal; note taking to record thoughts, plans, new ideas, and progress; talking with partners to offer support and to check in; and so on.

The teaching points and strategy instruction in these mini-lessons serve to keep the students afloat as they work on meeting their goals or finishing their projects for reading, but really the teaching and learning during these reading club cycles can easily cross content-area boundaries. For example, during a Reading Projects cycle of clubs, we could teach our students that people get ready for their projects by making a list of what they need and then gathering the materials. This advice and instruction makes sense for anyone working on any project: for the child whose reading project is to read everything he can about snakes because he wants to be

able to have a strong argument for getting one as a pet and for the child who is planning to paint a self-portrait for her dad's birthday. This advice makes sense for the newlyweds about to host their first Thanksgiving dinner and the friends who are going to trek through Nepal in six months. What we teach our students about planning, maintaining, and completing projects and goals can be transferred to any kind of work, in or out of school, from art projects, to writing for an audience, to planning a dinner party for six, to researching the human genome.

It's important to remember that we can use reading conferences and small-group instruction to offer more precise support for readers in these healthy habits clubs. One day, I approached Joelle and Henry, who were the founding (and only) members of the Teeth Research Club. They decided they wanted to study human teeth because they each lost one and both now had a wiggler on deck. They'd gathered several nonfiction texts about the human body as well as *Arthur's Loose Tooth* in their basket. I stopped short of their work space for a moment to observe them. Joelle and Henry were sitting quietly and looking at different books. They seemed to be racing through the texts, flipping pages quickly, in what looked to be an effort to just get through them. Every once in a while, Henry blurted out a fact about the human body to Joelle, who didn't seem very interested.

"How's it going?" I asked (Anderson 2000). This kind of open-ended question doesn't pass judgment on the work they're doing, nor does it lock them into a yes or no response like if I asked them, "Are you guys reading about the human body?" Also, questions like "How's it going?" or "What are you thinking about as you look through that?" or "What are you thinking about so far?" presume that the child is engaged and purposeful. I tend to begin conferences with an open-ended question or comment because I know that sometimes children have intentions that I just didn't realize during my quick observation.

"We're reading our books," Joelle responded without looking up.

"Hmm, I can see that. It seems like you're looking for something in particular the way you're both flipping through the pages so fast. Either that or you're trying to get through the books so fast."

"Ms. Collins, did you know that blood in your body isn't red? Did you know that? It's bluish-purplish," Henry said.

"Oooh, that's gross," Joelle blurted out.

"Guys, I want to check in with you for a second. Your project is to study teeth, and your planning card says you want to find out more information about teeth. How's that going?"

"Well, we're doing that," Joelle said.

"How so?" I asked.

"We're looking through the pages for teeth information," replied Henry.

"You know, I want to remind you of something that will help you find the information you're looking for more quickly. You can check the index and the table of contents in your books to see exactly where the teeth pages are. Watch me. Hmmm, I want to find out stuff about teeth. Let's see, where is T in this index? Oh, here it is. I'm looking for teeth. [I slid my finger down the T entries in the index.] Oh, here it is, "teeth." Wow, it looks like there are a few pages on teeth. Let's check out page 43. 43. 43. [I said this as I flipped for the page.] Look, this whole page is about teeth. Let me put a sticky note on this page to save it. Did you guys see what I did? I looked for teeth information by using the index to find the information quickly. You guys can do that, too. Look in your books to see if there's an index or table of contents, and then use it to find the information you're looking for. Go ahead."

I watched as Joelle and Henry did this. "Hey, look, Henry. There are some teeth pages in my book. Give me a sticky note!" Joelle said.

In this conference, I made a choice to remind Joelle and Henry about using the index to find information more quickly and efficiently. There were other things I could have taught. For example, I could have helped them make a focused plan for their work if they didn't have one. I could have taught them to begin by thinking together about what they wanted to know about teeth or what they wondered about teeth so that they could begin to create a framework for their research together. If they had made a plan already, I could have given them a strategy to stick with it. I could have taught them to make a to-do list that they could check off when they got things done. If I had several other partnerships whose projects involved studying a topic of interest like Joelle and Henry and their teeth research, I could gather them together for small-group instruction in the form of a five-minute strategy lesson to teach them what I just taught Joelle and Henry.

Getting Ready for Healthy Habits Reading Clubs

Getting ready for healthy habits reading clubs is a little different from preparing for other kinds of clubs. For one thing, we don't have to change our class-

room library very much to support these clubs. In healthy habits reading clubs, each partnership is likely to be working on unique projects or goals, so it's virtually impossible to change the library around to support everyone's work. This stands in contrast to nonfiction reading clubs, for example, when we feature the nonfiction texts by putting them in the limelight to increase their visibility and accessibility. In healthy habits reading clubs, each partnership might very well be doing work that is different from anyone else's. There's no way that we can switch around the library and spotlight certain texts in a way that will reflect each partnership's intentions and meet each of their needs equally well.

So instead of reconfiguring the library to support these clubs, we might spend a little time making sure our students are aware of what the classroom library offers so that they'll be able to find what they need. It's helpful to offer a mini-tour during a morning meeting or two, to show them the kinds of texts that are available.

It also helps to add more tools to the library, such as different size sticky notes; bookmarks and page clips; various note-taking sheets such as planning sheets, blank webs, and T-charts; or to-do lists with check-off boxes. For these reading clubs, I've also always provided open-ended note-taking sheets for students to write self-reflections.

Many of our students may not yet be familiar with the act of setting their own goals and working to reach them, nor have many of our students had the experience of working on a project they invented themselves. Most of the work they do in school tends to be assigned and paced by an adult, especially in the younger grades.

Helping our students make good choices for goals and projects can be one of the most challenging aspects of these reading clubs. For this reason, it's worth the time to have a few good, substantive conversations with our students about setting goals and planning projects in general, and then about reading goals and reading projects specifically.

When I think about the kinds of goals or projects that I would like to see my students choose, my hope is that they meet these criteria:

- The project or goal is helpful and beneficial to the reader.
- The project or goal is meaningful for the reader.
- The project or goal is realistic and possible to finish or achieve.

In an ideal world, our students would choose goals or projects that meet these criteria. Our classrooms, however, are in the reality-based world, so it's more realistic that we'll have several students like Charles, who says his reading goal is to count how many times he sees the word *underpants* in his chapter book, or readers like Brittany, who tells you her project is to read all of the Harry Potter books, even though it will likely be years before she can read those with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. For many children, we'll need to have conferences during which we nudge them toward another goal or project based on what we know about their reading strengths and needs and their life interests and passions. We want to support them in choosing a goal or project that will have more of a positive long-term (or even shorter-term) effect on their reading lives than counting how many times they find a particular word or struggling through high-status texts. I've found that having several whole-class conversations about goal-setting and project-planning helps children envision more fruitful intentions.

We can approach these conversations about reading projects or goal-setting by talking about projects and goals in general. One year, I shared the story of a beading project. I told my students that when I was in third grade, one of my classmates made a necklace out of love beads. I thought her necklace was so beautiful, and I wanted to make one just like it. For my birthday, I asked for and received a love bead kit. "You know what, you guys? At that moment, when I opened that present, I gave myself a project to make love bead jewelry."

"Every day after school I would set up my love bead kit at the kitchen table, and I worked on my project. I made a necklace for myself, but I didn't stop there. I made some bracelets for my mom and my grandma, and when I was running out of love beads, I made little rings for my friends. I loved making those things, and it was so fun to give them as presents. You know what I learned about projects from this? I learned that it's so important to pick a project that means a lot to you and that you'll enjoy working on for a while. Right now, think about yourself. Have you ever worked on something for several days like I worked on love bead jewelry? Do you remember ever giving yourself a project to do?"

After a bit of time, I asked the students to talk in partnerships about their projects. Many kids had something to share, and there was a wide range of projects. Students talked together about things like building snow forts after the big blizzard; making model cars with an older brother; setting up a dollhouse; cleaning out a bedroom to find a beloved Susan B. Anthony coin; and so on.

After sharing some brief details of the projects that kids had experienced, we tried to determine the characteristics of the ones they loved the most. The next day, we had a discussion about how we sometimes abandon projects or lose interest in them and talked about strategies for avoiding those problems.

Quickly, we moved from talking about goal-setting and project-planning in general to imagining reading goals and projects, specifically. We brainstormed and listed possibilities at first, and then students began to think about what kinds of goals or projects would suit them as readers. I emphasized the criteria of finding a project or setting a goal that would help them get stronger at reading, that would be meaningful to them, and that would be realistic to finish within a couple of weeks.

For these kinds of reading clubs, I tend to spend a week or so having these sorts of conversations with the whole class and with individual students who might need extra support to make wise choices. During private reading time for a week or two prior to launching the clubs, I confer with students about their reading strengths and needs, as well as their interests. In some cases, I would suggest possible projects and goals for particular students who I believed needed more guidance in making a selection that would meet the criteria listed earlier.

It's Reading Club Time!

Once your students have decided on their reading goal or project, our work for whole-class instruction is to teach lessons that help keep students engaged and focused. During conferences and small-group instruction, we can attend to the particular details of a partnership's specific projects and goals.

In any reading club cycle, it's extremely helpful to model during mini-lessons as if you and the class are partners in a reading club. During a concept book study in a kindergarten, that might mean that all of the teaching points and demonstrations are done using materials from the Counting Books club, for example, as you pretend that you and the students are working together in that club. During whole-class instruction for healthy habits clubs, it helps to do the same thing, to model and demonstrate strategies as if you and the students are working together on a goal or a project. One year, the "project" I was working on during mini-lessons was putting together a poetry anthology for our student teacher, who had just wrapped up her work with our class. She was planning to be with us again on the last day of school to say good-bye, so I told my students that I wanted to make a poetry anthol-

ogy for her so she'd always remember our class. I taught all the mini-lessons for a week or two from the point of view of a reader working on this project.

Figure 9.1 presents some of the areas I've tended to cover during mini-lessons in a cycle of healthy habits clubs.

Figure 9.1

Big Idea for Readers During Healthy Habits Reading Clubs	Specific Strategies for Readers
Readers get ready to work on their project or goal by thinking about what they need to do their work.	· Readers envision the work they'll do and make a list of things they'll need to do it. · Readers gather the materials they need and keep them in one place so they are accessible. · Readers have a vision for what they want to happen with their goal or project, and they try to think of the steps it will take to meet the goal or finish the project.
Readers make plans for their work.	· Readers can jot their plans on a to-do list or on a planning card and check them off when they finish them. · Readers sometimes get stuck at a point in their project or goal, and they can ask their partner to help them get through the hard part. · Readers can share their plans with others to help get more ideas.

The Transition to Summer and Beyond

With our support and guidance during the healthy habits reading clubs, our students have the opportunity to imagine, plan, and execute a purpose-driven reading experience for themselves. Now, it's crucial to help them transfer this process to their reading lives outside of the classroom. With summer looming ahead (presuming that it's the end of the year), we can help our students make summer reading plans using what they've learned during healthy habits reading clubs.

In my class, the homework assignments for reading at the end of the year are designed to help students make summer reading plans and to remind them to transfer what they've learned as readers in school to reading anytime, any place. So we make (nonbinding) contracts for summer plans, we create support networks for each other, and we imagine staying in touch as readers, although I may not and cannot hold students accountable for meeting the expectations set forth in the summer reading contracts they create. Perhaps the things they said they'd do in their contracts won't happen exactly as they planned, but at these young ages, it's valuable to have a vision of a rich summer reading life full of books and reading friends.

Some of the most important ideas I hope they carry from the classroom to their lives outside of school follow.

Readers Get Better at Reading by Reading — Reading a Lot

Students need to read over the summer to avoid summer reading loss (Allington 2001). For many students, teachers need to help their families make plans that will support their children's summer reading. Teachers can recommend appropriate titles and share ways that families can get books into their kids' hands. Schools can set up schoolwide expectations for reading over the summer and develop systemic ways to support families who need help. Some schools partner with the public library to make sure all students have a library card, and they collaborate on summer reading programs and book recommendations. Some schools open the school library over the summer for a few hours a few days a week so children can borrow books. In other schools, teachers organize and write grant proposals for money to buy books for their students (Allington 2001).

Readers Are Resourceful

Avid readers are scrappy about their reading. Many times when they find themselves idle, they can't help but search for something to read, whether it's flipping through a tabloid while standing in a long supermarket line, squinting to read the fine print in the ads that surround them on the subway, studying the nutritional information on the cereal box at breakfast, or making a sidelong glance at the text message the person next to us is typing away on the bus ride home.

Readers are also resourceful in the face of difficulty. Whether it's a tricky word or a confusing part of a book, readers work to make sense of what they're reading. If the text is simply too hard and the reader feels some tension and too much confusion, the resourceful reader will put the text down because she knows she'll be able to find something that is a better fit.

Reading Is Social

Avid readers talk about what they've read. They tell their friends about what they are reading, they recommend books to others, and they read with people in mind. Readers listen to book recommendations, and they often read texts they've heard about from others. Readers have reading buddies with whom they trade books and have similar reading sensibilities; they join book clubs in which they talk and learn about books with readers who may or may not be like them; they attend book talks presented by authors while sitting alongside strangers with whom they share a connection—a reading connection.

Readers Have Evolving Tastes and Identities

Readers know what they like, but they are open to new possibilities with regard to authors, themes, genres, and kinds of texts. They know that the more reading experiences they have, the more powerfully they'll be able to read. Readers know that it might just take one text or one recommendation for their reading identity to change. The reader who only reads mysteries becomes the reader who loves mysteries and poetry after her friend sends her a book of poetry for her birthday. Avid readers are responsive, open, and welcoming to new texts and to other readers.

Wait—Who Is This Avid Reader?

If I were asked to state my Ultimate Goals as a Teacher of Reading, I wouldn't think of year-end benchmarks and report card rubrics. Instead, to answer this very important question, I would do what my friend Donna Santman, author of *Shades of Meaning* (2005), suggests. I would think about my students well beyond the year

they spend in my classroom. In fact, I would project twenty years ahead and imagine my hopes for my students' ongoing relationships to books and literacy at that point in their lives.

With this in mind, I would answer the question by saying that I want to teach my students to read with passion. I want them to become active, engaged, fervent readers who live their lives as if they *need* to read. I want my students to love to read and to share their reading with others. I want my students to be avid, highly engaged readers for the rest of their lives.

When I think of avid readers, I don't have a portrait of one in mind. Instead, I picture something more like a slideshow or a collage of snapshots showing many different kinds of readers. When I think about the characteristics of avid readers, I tend not to think about what they read. I think about *how* they read. I am more interested in their habits, their level of engagement with text, and their reading quirks and idiosyncrasies. It doesn't matter whether they read highfalutin Henry James sorts of text with sentences that last for pages and words that require a dictionary, or whether they read things like the latest best-selling self-help book on curing the paralyzing fear of velvet furniture. The author, the text, and the genre being read are merely details and not the most important, nor the most revealing, characteristics of an avid reader.

When I envision an avid reader, I imagine someone who figuratively leans into the book she's reading. She has reactions to the story, like when she reads on the subway and inadvertently attracts attention as she says out loud, "Oh, no you didn't!" in response to a character's actions. An avid reader feels for the characters in his books, like when he gets an anticipatory feeling of dread in the pit of his stomach as he begins the chapter in which the protagonist finally heads home to deal with his father's wrath. He has thoughts in and around the text and sees implications for and connections with his life and the world in whatever he's reading. Avid readers read with a pulse. An avid, engaged reader is someone who can't help but have a rich, highly engaged reading life because her life, her interests, and her reading are tightly woven together.

It might be helpful to take a moment to think of a time in your life when you were carried away by your reading. How did it feel? What were the circumstances? Was anyone else involved? How did this moment or period live on to affect your life or change your thinking? Can you replicate this experience for the students in your classroom?

Goodness gracious. We have a lot of good work to do.

Final Thoughts

I harbor a dark secret that I must reveal. As a teacher who has worked almost exclusively with students and teachers of kindergarten, first-, and second-grade classrooms, I admit that I've had my share of upper-grade envy. Don't get the wrong idea—it's not that I don't love the primary grades. I *do* love teaching little kids, wiggly-toothed and eager, kids like Rubin who come back from the cafeteria after lunch oblivious to the feel or smell of the food on their faces; kids like Esther who beg their moms to go to school on days when they've got a fever, a body rash, and an imminent need for a bathroom; kids like Miranda who tell you over and over that you're the best teacher they've ever had (not to mention the only teacher they've ever had). I love kids like Jordan who can probably name the date and time when he read his first chapter book. It was such a momentous occasion that if I project into the future, I can picture Jordan as a college student rolling up a sleeve to receive his first tattoo—the smiling faces of Frog and Toad inside a heart.

For our young learners, going to school and learning to read are so new and exciting, and our little ones are thrilling to watch as the puzzle pieces begin to fall into place. Yes, yes, this is all true. Even so, sometimes, just sometimes, I can't help but wonder what it would be like to teach older students. I have fantasized about having more sophisticated book talks. I have longed to venture deeply into issues and characters, characters that are a bit more developed than, say, Little Bear or Biscuit. I have wanted, just once, to read aloud a book that contained a little adolescent angst or a story about an orphan who survived in the untamed wilderness with just a bungee cord, a trusty mutt, a paper clip, and a crusty loaf of bread. Sometimes I've longed to read and talk about something a bit more juicy than Henry's dog Mudge slobbering all over that prissy cousin Annie!

I've felt green with upper-grade envy because I held a very naive perception. I thought teaching reading just *had* to be easier for upper-grade teachers than it was for primary-grade teachers. It just seemed less mysterious and daunting to teach reading to kids who could read the words already. I believed upper-grade teachers were at a distinct advantage because they have lots more in common with the kind of reading work their students are doing than we primary teachers have in common with the work our young students are doing.

Several years ago I was part of a book club that read *Corelli's Mandolin* by Louis de Bernières. Although I've forgotten much of what happened in the book, I do remember having to work hard to hold on to the story as I read it. It was set on the Greek island of Cephalonia during World War II, and it was written with a European perspective on the war. I had very little prior knowledge or schema to call

upon—the setting, culture, history, and point of view were unfamiliar to me, and the movie hadn't been released at that point.

My experience reading *Corelli's Mandolin* is likely to be quite similar to the difficulty that Nora, a fifth grader, might encounter as she reads *Catherine, Called Birdy*, a book set in medieval times. I could imagine conferring with Nora and saying something like, "Look, Nora, I know what it's like to read a book with an unfamiliar setting and time period. In fact, that's just what's happening to me now with the book I'm reading. Let me show you a strategy I use to help me understand what's going on." I could quickly forge a connection with Nora because she and I are dealing with the same challenges as readers. Using our reading connection and my own reading experience, I could teach her a helpful reading strategy.

Teachers of primary-grade students, on the other hand, usually have to dig into our memories and turn on our imaginations in order to relate to what many of our children are going through as they take those early steps as readers. Let's tell the truth now: we're either big fakers or great actors, depending on how you look at it, when we pretend we're making miscues as we read *The Hungry Giant* aloud to our students during shared reading in our attempts to demonstrate a particular decoding strategy.

In spite of my misguided belief that the grass is greener in the other grades, I'm happy to report that through the years I've gotten over my upper-grade envy. One thing that helped was implementing reading clubs into my reading workshop at various points throughout the year. I realized that reading clubs enabled me to make connections to my young readers in much the same ways that upper-grade teachers connect to their students. It is during reading clubs that my young students' reading most closely resembles real-life reading and allows them to integrate all they know about reading the words, understanding the text, and setting purposes for reading in order to develop the kinds of positive reading habits that will last a lifetime.

When my young readers participate in reading clubs at different times throughout the year, they are doing an early childhood version of the reading, thinking, and talking work characteristic of book clubs. It's during reading clubs that my students set their own purposes and have their own intentions for their reading, which are often very similar to the purposes and intentions that you or I might have for our reading. Reading clubs offer us a bridge between the teaching of skills and strategies to readers and the modeling of a highly engaged, purposeful reading life. Reading clubs also help us connect the reading our students must do in school to the reading we hope they choose to do once they are outside of our classrooms.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Ingredients for a Comprehensive K–3 Classroom Library

A Comprehensive K–3 Classroom Library Contains:

Baskets of leveled books that represent the range of learners

Some recommend that about 40–50 percent of the books in a classroom library are leveled and that the level is clearly indicated so students can easily find a variety of books that are just right for them as readers.

Baskets of books representing various genres

These baskets tend to be large and contain a variety of kinds of texts within a particular genre. Some examples: nonfiction, poetry, mysteries, biographies, wordless picture books, ABC books, graphic novels, etc.; whatever types of texts that are of interest and appropriate for the readers in the class.

Baskets of books gathered around topics

These baskets change throughout the year, depending on students' interests, class studies, the season, etc. Some examples: sharks, dinosaurs, Halloween books, books about school, books about Martin Luther King, Jr., books about families that have babies, etc.

Baskets of books featuring individual authors

The featured authors change throughout the year. Early in the school year, it's helpful to feature authors the students know well from the previous year. Some examples: Ezra Jack Keats, Mem Fox, Donald Crews, Dav Pilkey, Cynthia Rylant, Arnold Lobel, Authors We Know Well, etc.

Baskets of books arranged by series or character

Some titles within different series are found in the leveled baskets, but others might be housed in their own baskets dedicated to the particular series. Some examples: Magic Tree House, Magic School Bus, Horrible Harry, Frog and Toad, Poppleton, Judy Moody, Cam Jansen, Biscuit, Mrs. Wishy-Washy.

Baskets of books that support the work of the current unit of study

During any unit of study or cycle of reading clubs, the texts that best support the study take center stage in the classroom library. They should be easy for stu-

dents to find. An example: during a poetry study, there might be baskets such as Poetry by Arnold Adoff, Poems About Nature, Silly Poems, Shape Poems.

Baskets of texts other than books

It's important to acknowledge the wide variety of texts and kinds of reading by including them in the classroom library. Some examples are: Sunday comics, maps, greeting cards, material from the Internet, songs we've learned, laminated puzzles and word jumbles from the kids' pages found in most newspapers, etc.

Baskets of "kids' picks"

These baskets contain categories of books the students imagine and then gather and label (e.g., Books We Love from Home, Favorite Books from Kindergarten, Top 10 Funniest Stories, Rain Poetry, Characters with Pets).

Baskets of shared reading texts and emergent storybooks

Some examples: copies of Mrs. Wishy-Washy, The Hungry Giant, poems, and other texts learned during shared reading.

Basket of books the teacher has read aloud

These baskets hold the books the teacher has read aloud—picture books and chapter books—and it helps to clean them out every month or so.

Baskets containing materials and tools readers need

These baskets contain sticky notes, bookmarks, pencils, graphic organizers the students know how to use, strategy tools, index cards, etc.

Other Classroom Library Considerations

Location—Where is the library in the classroom? Are book baskets found only in the library, or are some baskets spread around the classroom (for example, art books in the art area)?

Changes—How does the library change to reflect the work, time of year, etc.?

Design—Is the library visually appealing and well organized so that readers can find books?

Access—How do students borrow and return books? When are students able to borrow books? Is there informal time when students may browse?

Appendix B: Partnership Contract

At different points in the year, with some level of fanfare and an air of "official business," I ask my students to sign partnership contracts. These are "official" classroom documents. I make a copy of the contracts for the partnerships to file in their work folders, and I keep the originals in my files. Occasionally before the partnerships get together to work in their reading clubs, I'll ask them to take out their contracts, read them together, and then talk about what they are doing well and whether there are areas in which they still need work. I usually keep the contracts open-ended in that I let the students determine for themselves what they need to work on together. Here is one version of the contract.

Our Reading Partnership Contract

Date: _____

We will try our best to work well together to help each other become stronger readers, thinkers, and talkers.

Here is a list of things we will do as partners that will help us do our best work together:

1._____

_____

2._____

_____

3._____

_____

4._____

_____

Partner signatures: _____ and _____

Appendix C: Assessment Sheet

Sample Assessment Sheet for Use During Reading Clubs

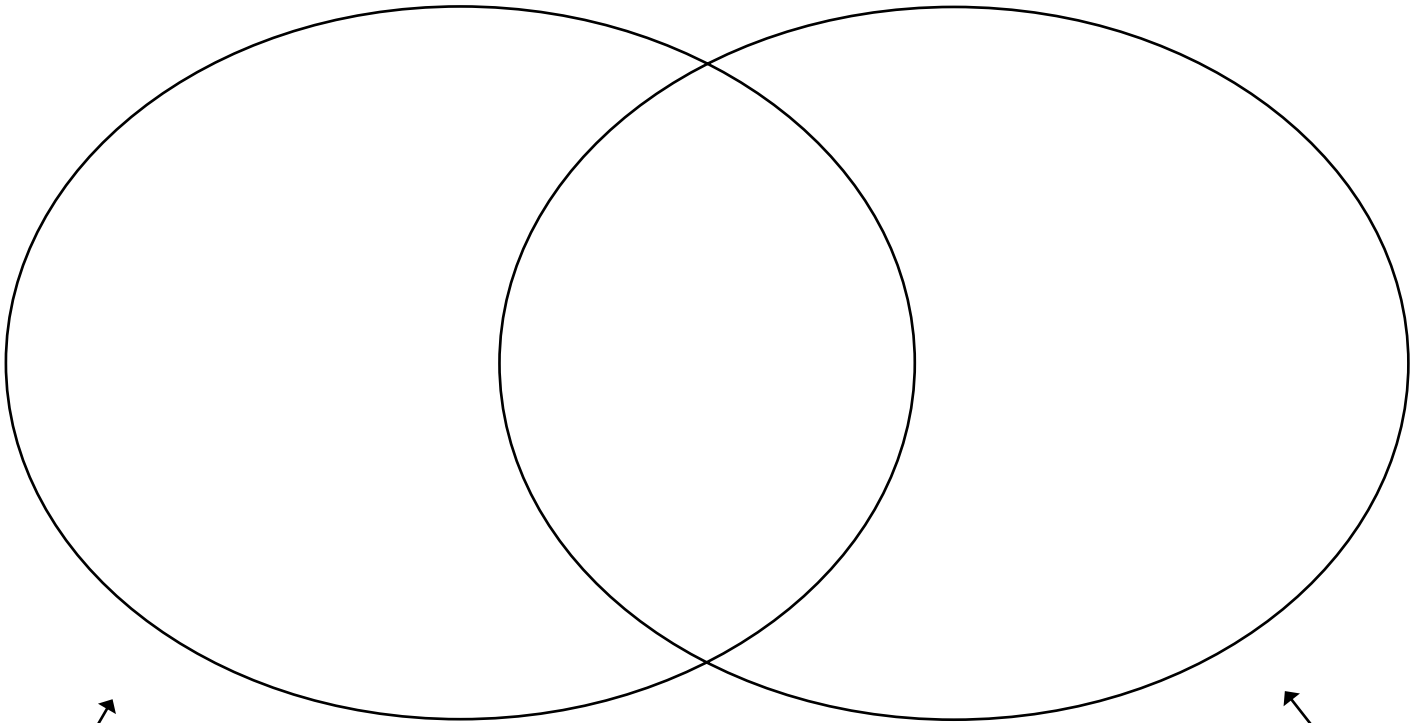
Reading Club Cycle _____ Start Date: _____

	Target Skills and Strategies *(Fill in skills and strategies taught during this reading club cycle.)*		
Students' Names			

Venn Diagram 1

Name: _____ Name: _____

Reading Club: _____



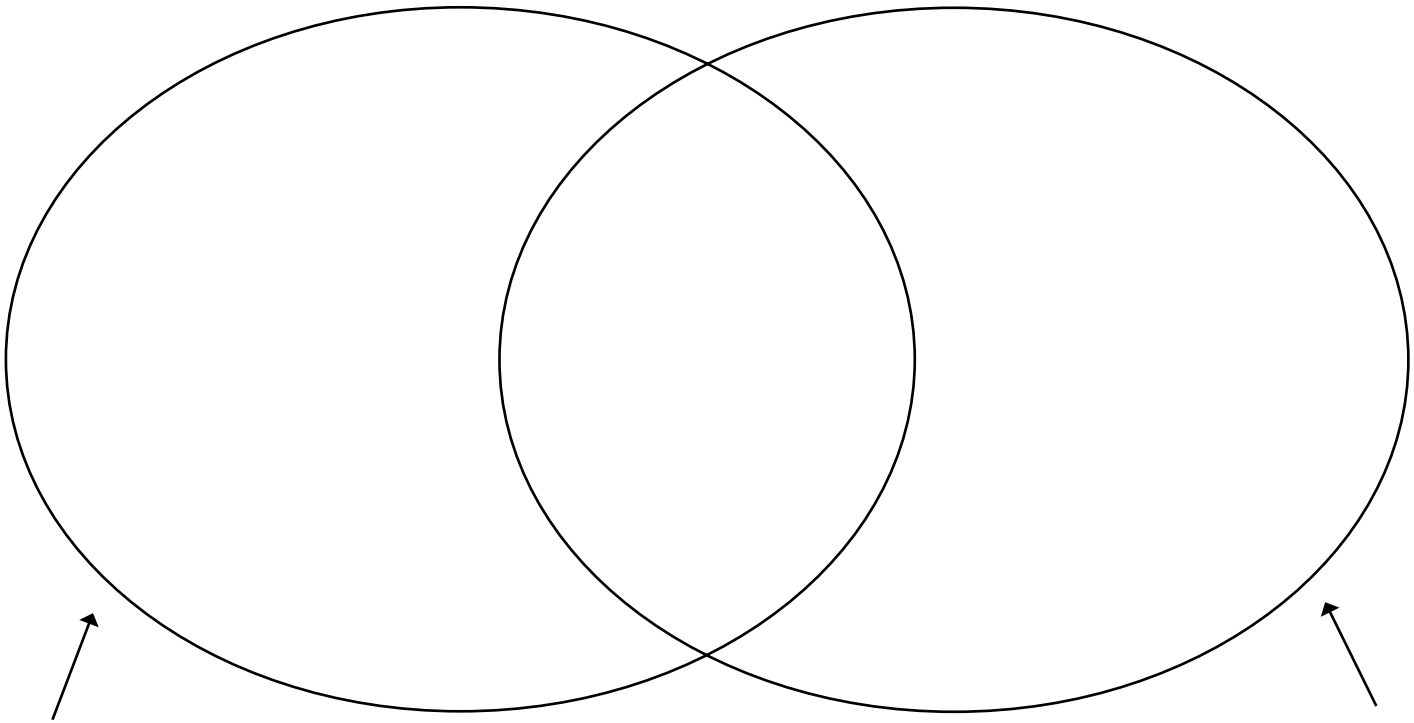
_____ _____

Venn Diagram 2

Name: _____ Name: _____

Reading Club: _____

Comparing & Contrasting Versions of a Fairy Tale/Folk Tale



_____ _____

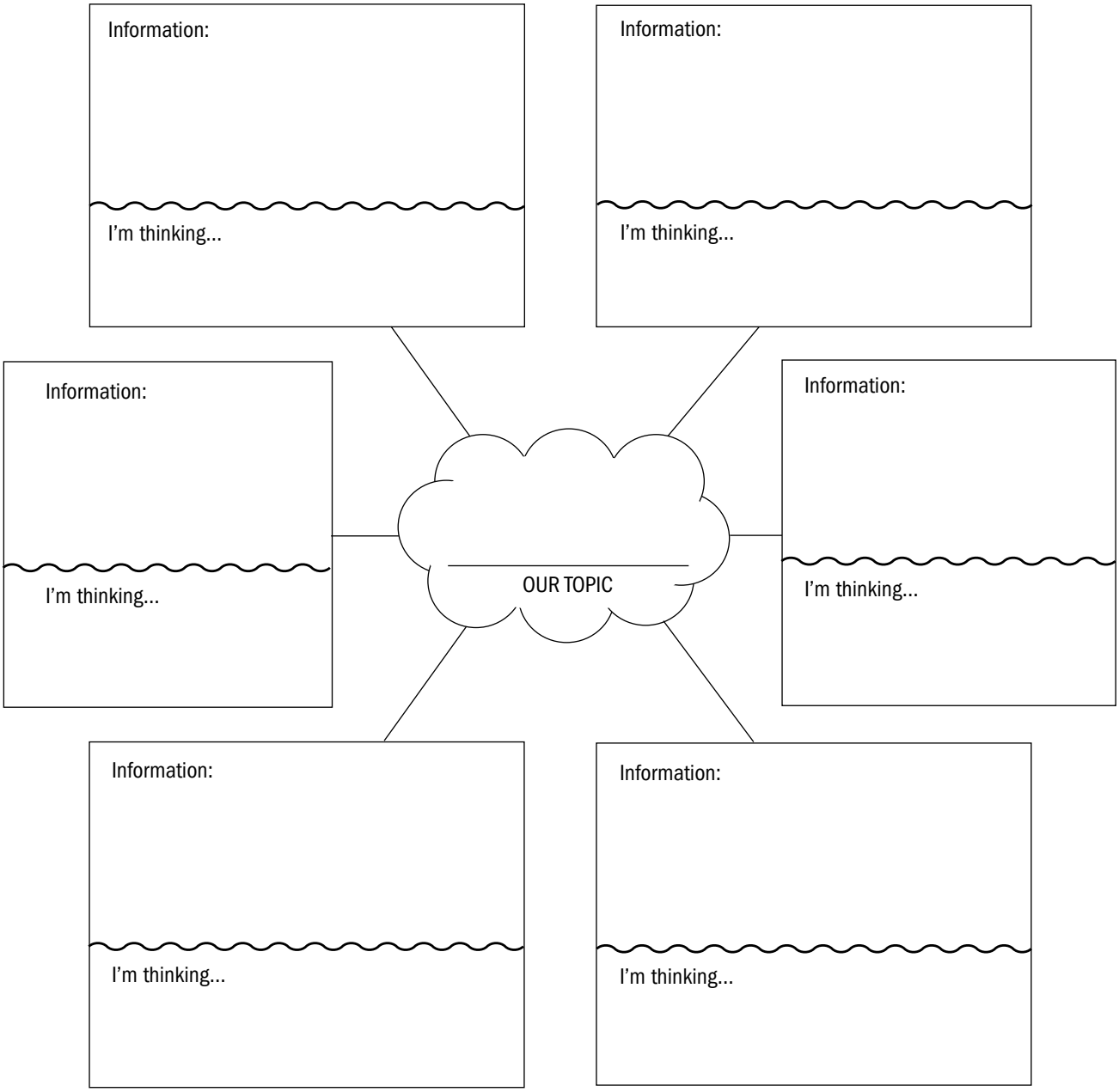
_____ _____

Name: _____ Name: _____

Our Reading Club: _____

New Information Web

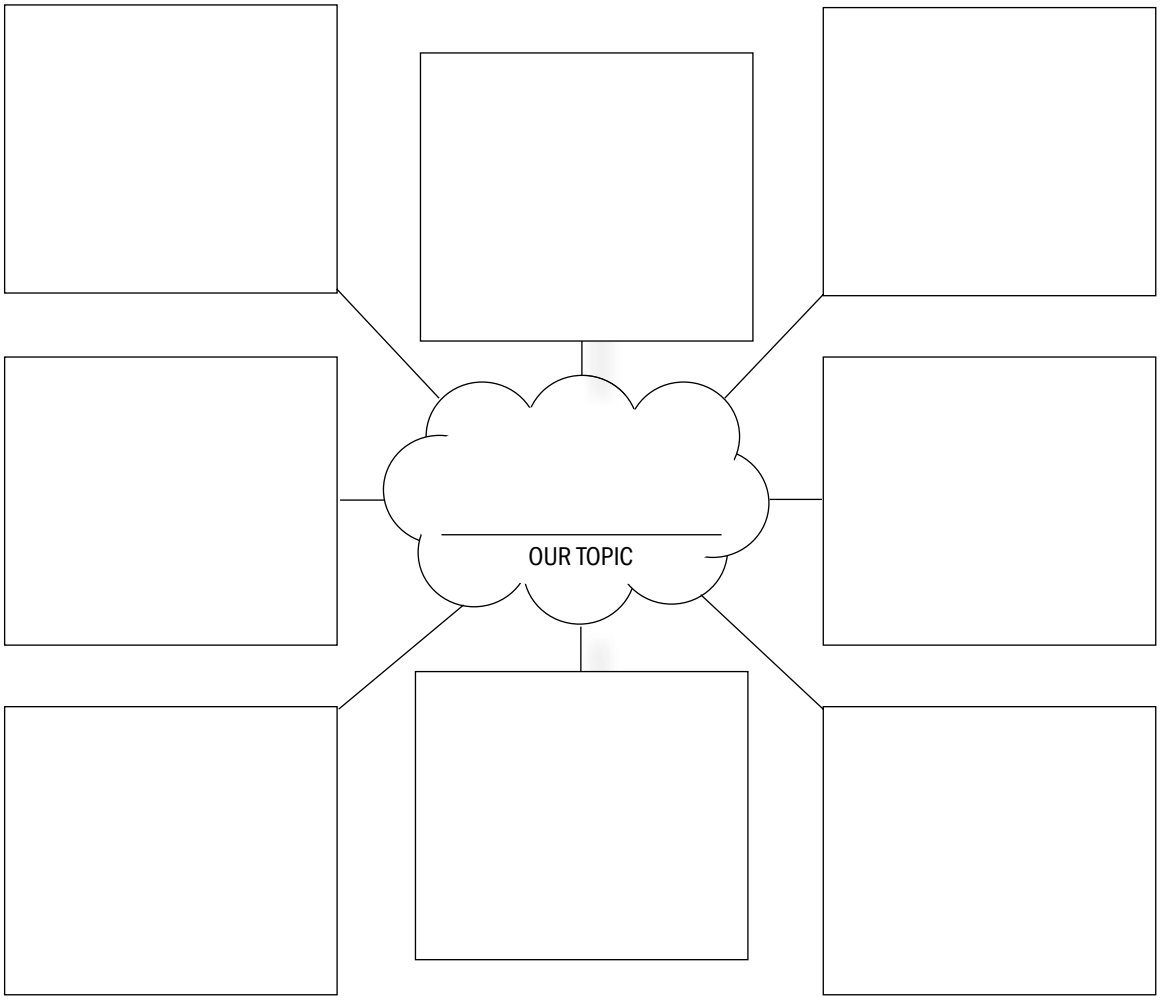
"Hey, I didn't know that!"



Name: _____ Name: _____

Our Reading Club: _____

Collecting Information Web



Questions & Wonderings: _____

_____

_____

Name: _____ Name: _____

Our Reading Club: _____

T-Chart for Growing Ideas	
What we noticed, learned, and found in the text:	**What it makes us think, wonder, and question:**

Name: _____ Name: _____

Our Reading Club: _____

 What we learned about our character from the book:	Page #	 What this information makes us think about our character:
Title: _____		

Name: _____ Name: _____

Our Reading Club: _____

To-Do List

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Name: _____ Name: _____

Our Reading Club: _____

First Day

Our first thoughts, expectations, beliefs, and ideas:

Reading, thinking, and talking together...

Last Day

What have we learned? How have we changed? What's new for us?

Appendix E: Reading Club Reflection Sheets

These two reflection sheets focus on how well the partners worked together. I usually give students reflection sheets at the end of a week during a cycle of reading clubs. The partners talk with each other first about the inquiries on the reflection sheet, and then they respond. A variation could be to ask students to respond to these questions orally during reflection conferences, or by drawing rather than writing their responses.

Reading Club Reflection Sheet

How did your partnership go this week?

Partners' Names: _____ and _____ Date: _____

Your reading club:

What did you and your partner do well this week in reading clubs?

What do you and your partner need to work on in order to make your partnership stronger?

What advice would you give to other partners?

Do you have any questions or wonderings about working with a partner?

(We can change the items in the checklist to reflect the specific teaching and learning that occurs within a cycle of reading clubs.)

Reading Club Reflection Sheet

How did your partnership go?

Partners' Names: _____ and _____ Date: _____

Your reading club:

Put an X in the boxes of the things that went well for you and your partner this week:

- ❑ We stayed focused on our work.
- ❑ We listened to each other.
- ❑ We peacefully and quickly solved any problems.
- ❑ We took turns talking.
- ❑ We took turns making plans and choosing books.
- ❑ _____

What is something that you and your partner want to get better at next week?

This type of reflection sheet asks students to reflect on the content of their work within the cycle of reading clubs. The one below is for a nonfiction cycle, but it can be easily adapted for any kind of reading club.

Reading Club Reflection

Nonfiction Reading Clubs

Partners' Names: _____ and _____

Reading Club: _____

Why did you select this reading club?

Share some of your new learning about your topic:

Share some of your lingering questions about your topic:

What's next?

This type of reflection sheet asks students to reflect on the reading work they did within the cycle of reading clubs. The one below is for a character club cycle, but it can be easily adapted for any kind of reading club.

Reading Club Reflection

Character Study Club

Partners' Names: _____ and _____

Reading Club: _____

What did you do as a reader to help you get to know your character?

We worked on growing ideas about our characters by paying attention to what they do, what they say, how they look, and how the other characters respond to them. Share some of the work you and your partner did to grow ideas about your character:

What did we notice about our character?	What ideas did we grow about our character from the things we noticed?
Example: *1) Shelly runs all the time to school, to her classroom, to her mom's arms. 2) Shelly likes to play tag at recess. 3) Shelly wears sneakers in every picture. 4) Shelly gets yelled at by her mom and her teacher and the crossing guard for running around all the time.*	Example: *We think Shelly has a lot of energy because she's always running around. We feel bad for her a little because she keeps getting in trouble, but she's not trying to be bad. We think she just can't help it, and maybe someday she'll be a famous athlete.*
Your turn:	Your turn:

What did you learn to do as a reader in your reading club that will be helpful for anytime you're reading?

Appendix F: Reading Club Planning Guide

Reading Club Planning Guide

Reading Club Cycle: _____ **Dates:** _____

Readers' needs:

Featured skills and strategies that I will teach:

Real-life purposes, habits, and goals readers might have:

Getting ready for reading clubs:

Teaching emphasis for reading clubs, Week 1:

Teaching emphasis for reading clubs, Week 2:

Teaching emphasis for reading clubs, Week 3 (optional):

Assessment:

Possible project/celebration/outcome of reading clubs:

Appendix G: Sample Planning Guides for Reading Clubs

Sample Character Study Planning Guide

Reading Club Planning Guide

Reading Club Cycle: *"Readers Get to Know Their Characters Well"*

Dates: _____

Readers' needs:

Baskets of character reading clubs for all readers (levels C/D to level M), work folders, sticky notes, note-taking sheets, T charts?

Rebecca, Gregory, Samantha—more support with cross-checking (esp. for meaning)

Eliza, Rohan, Sean, Gabby—likely to pick high-level text; support with multiple story lines

Sabrina, Theria, Alex, Daniel, Julia G.—help moving past retelling to other kinds of book talk

Featured skills and strategies that I will teach:

- *identifying characters (main character, secondary characters, naming characters' relationships to one another)*
- *inferring to identify character traits and character motivations: using all the information we've got: our schema; attending to characters' actions, dialogue, appearance, facial expressions, gestures, etc.*
- *growing theories about character motivation (Why would she do or say that? How would you have handled that? Given what you know about the character, were those actions/words in character or out of character?)*
- *thinking deeper about characters by moving from noticing/naming to growing an idea (You noticed… What does that make you think? Given what you noticed, what ideas do you have about that?)*
- *connecting to characters—personal connections with characters (I'm like that. My brother is such a different kind of big brother…)*
- *Vocab work: expanding the way we express ideas, thoughts, noticings about characters—moving beyond "nice"*

Real-life purposes, habits, and goals readers might have:

Readers fall for their characters.

Readers get to know their characters.

Readers think about the characters even when they aren't reading the book.

Readers can learn about life and people by getting to know the characters in their books.

Getting ready for reading clubs:

- *create a whole-class list of favorite characters on a chart*
- *Read-aloud time: read two or three books featuring the same main character over the course of the week, whole class talks about character, model inferring to get to know character, etc.*
- *Shared reading: "Aunt Lavinia" by Eloise Greenfield (or other poem with a "character")*
- *Homework: name characters they've loved from books we've read; talk to grown-ups at home about characters they loved when they were little; poem "Aunt Lavinia" on homework, ask someone at home what they learned about Aunt Lavinia*
- *create character baskets across levels, feature them prominently in library, design labels in choice time*
- *give students a couple of days to talk about the characters in their book baggies in their partnerships as practice before they select a character club*

Teaching emphasis for reading clubs Week 1:

Readers have strategies to get to know characters well.

- *identify characters (main, secondary, name character relationships, select one to really get to know)*
- *infer what a character thinks by listening to words, paying attention to actions, looking at appearance, facial expressions, gestures*
- *use text evidence to support ideas*
- *study our character across books (notice habits, consistent traits, surprises, changes, etc.)*
- *study our character's relationships to other characters*

Teaching emphasis for reading clubs Week 2: *(Students may pick different characters or stay with the same character from Week 1.)*

When we study characters, we can understand why they say things and act the way they do.

(It might be necessary to repeat some teaching from the first week, based on what students are doing as readers, thinkers, and talkers.)

- *We can connect to our character to help us understand him or her better (Am I like this character? Am I different from this character? Do I know anyone like this character? How does my connection help me think about this character?)*
- *We can grow theories about why the character does and says things (My character said/did this. I think the reason is…)*
- *We can notice if and when the character changes within a book or across books and try to figure out what or who caused the change.*
- *We can focus on the different relationships our characters have and think about what they teach us about our character.*

Teaching emphasis for reading clubs Week 3 (optional): *(What is the energy like for character clubs? Is a third week necessary, helpful, and/or requested by students? If it is called for, will the instruction revisit previously taught strategies, will it focus on talking about texts, or will there be a new direction of study altogether?)*

We can put together baskets of books with different characters and think lots about the connections between them. Some basket reconfigurations might be: characters who are bullies; characters who are detectives; characters who are quirky; characters who are girls; characters who are pigs; characters who are pets; characters who are teachers; characters who are funny; etc.

- *Different characters can have similar characteristics. How are different characters alike?*
- *We can compare different characters and think about what motivates them, how they react to things, and how they relate to the other characters in their stories.*
- *We can grow ideas about why authors make certain choices about characters. (e.g., Why are bullies often bigger than other kids? Why do detectives always have a best friend who helps them?)*
- *We can think about what our character teaches us about life, about kids, etc.*

Assessment:

- *Conference conversations about characters—ask probing questions to find out students' ability to infer, grow ideas (i.e., as students read, say, "What are you thinking about that?" or "What does that make you think about the character?")*
- *Examine work folders, look at T charts, sticky notes, etc., to determine use of skills, strategies, etc.*
- *Toward end of character study, ask students to freewrite about their character, sharing all they've learned and all they wonder about.*

Possible project/celebration/outcome of reading clubs: *(As much as possible, it's beneficial to let students develop ideas for projects instead of having a project imposed on them. The following is a list of ideas I've gathered from teachers.)*

- *Come to school as your favorite character—look and act like a character you've gotten to know.*
- *Write character riddles for the bulletin board.*
- *Design a pretend web page for your favorite character.*
- *Act out a scene that best represents your character.*
- *Write a guessing game about your character that features three facts about the character (e.g., I am a pig who loves to read, etc.)*
- *Introduce your character to someone else, either in writing, drawing, role playing, etc.)*

Sample Series Book Study Planning Guide

Reading Club Planning Guide

Reading Club Cycle: *"Readers Find a Series That They Enjoy and Read Several Books"*

Dates: _____

Readers' needs:

Baskets of series books reading clubs for all readers, work folders, sticky notes, note-taking sheets, T charts?
Iliamna, Randy, and Shelby—put together Brand-New Readers series (Levels B/C)
Quentin, Lilly, Frances, and Drake—introduce series at Level L via guided reading for a couple of days before launching series book study

Featured skills and strategies that I will teach:

- *identifying characters (main character, secondary characters, naming characters' relationships to one another)*
- *inferring to identify character traits and character motivations: using all the information we've got: our schema; attending to characters' actions, dialogue, appearance, facial expressions, gestures, etc.*
- *using schema acquired after reading first book in the series to read more books in series*
- *making connections, noticing differences between texts in a series (i.e., how characters change, plot conventions, etc.)*
- *accumulating text across chapters—determining importance; carrying info. from one chapter into the next and next*
- *summarizing story from the chapter level to the whole-book level*

Real-life purposes, habits, and goals readers might have:

Readers find a series that they enjoy and read several books in the series.
Readers get to know their characters in the series and notice when the characters grow, change, or act out of character.
Readers get familiar with a series' plot tendencies, author's craft, settings, etc., and keep this information in mind from one book to the next.
Readers try to find other series that they love.
Readers can name why they love a particular series and use what they know about themselves as readers to select another series.

Getting ready for reading clubs:

- *create a whole-class list of series books that are found in the classroom*
- *Read-aloud time: read a couple of books from a series over the course of the week, whole class talks about the series, model strategies for understanding the story, accumulating the story across a whole book*
- *Shared reading: pull dialogue exchanges from a familiar book to study dialogue (reading with fluency, reading with expression, strategies for figuring out who's talking, etc.)*
- *Homework: name series they know or love; talk to grown-ups at home about series they loved when they were little*
- *create series book baskets across levels, feature them prominently in library, design labels in choice time*

Teaching emphasis for reading clubs Week 1:

Readers have strategies that help them get into a series.

- *We can identify characters (main, secondary, name character relationships, select one to really get to know).*
- *We can infer what a character thinks by listening to words, paying attention to actions, looking at appearance, facial expressions, gestures.*
- *We use text evidence to support our ideas.*
- *We strategically choose the order in which we'll read the books (i.e., Is there a Book 1? If not, how does a reader choose which book in the series to start with?)*
- *We reread books, or parts of books, to deepen our understanding, to clear up confusion, etc.*

Teaching emphasis for reading clubs Week 2: *(Students may pick a different series or stay in the same series book club from Week 1.)*

When we read a series of books, we may see patterns in the stories, in the characters, in the way the books are written. (It might be necessary to repeat some teaching from the first week, based on what students are doing as readers, thinkers, and talkers.)

- *We can make connections between books—finding aspects that are similar and things that are different.*
- *We can notice if and when the character changes within a book or across books and try to figure out what or who caused the change.*
- *We can focus on the different relationships our characters have and think about what they teach us about our character.*
- *We can follow the stories across different books in the series to see if the author follows a similar pattern from book to book.*
- *We can find the problem and solution in the book, if there is one, and then look across texts to see if the author has particular issues he or she tends to write about in the series.*

Teaching Emphasis for Reading Clubs Week 3 (optional): *(What is the energy like for series book clubs? Is a third week necessary, helpful, and/or requested by students? If it is called for, will the instruction revisit previously taught strategies, will it focus on talking about texts, or will there be a new direction of study altogether?)*

We can put together baskets of books with books from different series and think lots about the connections between them. Some basket reconfigurations might be: series books that have mysteries; series books set in school; series that are funny; etc. The topics for many of these reconfigurations might possibly overlap with reading clubs about characters or authors (e.g., series books with strong girl characters; series books about detectives; series books by Cynthia Rylant; etc.)

- *We can compare different series and think about how they are similar and different.*
- *We can read different series to figure out our preferences and favorites.*
- *We can think about what our character teaches us about life, about kids, etc.*

Assessment:

- *Conference conversations about a series of books—ask probing questions to find out students' sense of the series, to determine how they are approaching a series (e.g., as students read, ask "What have you noticed about your series so far?" or "Why did you choose to read that book in the series first? How did reading that book help you with this book so far?")*
- *Examine work folders, look at T charts, sticky notes, etc., to determine use of skills, strategies, etc.*
- *Toward the end of series book study, ask students to freewrite about their series, describing what they know about it or how it has helped them as a reader, etc.*

Possible project/celebration/outcome of reading clubs: *(As much as possible, it's beneficial to let students develop ideas for projects instead of having a project imposed on them. The following is a list of ideas I've gathered from teachers.)*

- *Introduce your series to someone else (perhaps orally, in writing, or by drawing, for example).*
- *Rank the books in your series.*
- *Make a trail guide to your series (i.e., which book to start with, little tips that will help readers, blurbs for the books, etc.)*
- *Design a pretend web page for your series.*
- *Act out a memorable scene from a series.*
- *Write a guessing game about your series that features three facts (e.g., I am a pig who loves to read; etc.)*

Sample Author Study Planning Guide

Reading Club Planning Guide

Reading Club Cycle: *"Readers Have Favorite Authors and Read Their Texts"*

Dates: _____

Readers' needs:

Baskets of author study reading clubs for all readers (levels C/D to level M), work folders, sticky notes, note-taking sheets

Rebecca, Gregory, Samantha—more support with cross-checking (esp. for meaning)

Eliza, Rohan, Sean, Gabby—likely to pick high-level text; support with multiple story lines

Sabrina, Theria, Alex, Daniel, Julia G.—help moving past retelling to other kinds of book talk

Featured skills and strategies that I will teach:

- *making connections across books by an author (similarities, differences in characters, settings, themes, tone, writing style, etc.)*
- *comparing books by an author*
- *developing theories or ideas about an author based on his/her work*
- *using text evidence to support ideas*

Real-life purposes, habits, and goals readers might have:

Readers have authors they love and read anything they can by their favorite authors.

Readers compare books by an author and grow ideas about the author.

Readers have lots of reasons why particular authors are their favorites—genre, craft of writing, topic choice, types of characters, themes, etc.

Readers look for information about favorite authors.

Getting ready for reading clubs:

- *create a whole-class list of favorite authors*
- *Read-aloud time: read a few books by the same author across a week, lead whole-group conversations about the author, texts, etc., that will serve as models for partner talk*
- *Shared reading: compare/contrast a couple of texts by the same author within a week*
- *Homework: name authors they've loved from books we've read; talk to grown-ups at home about authors they loved when they were little*
- *create author baskets across levels, feature them prominently in library, design labels in choice time*
- *give students a couple of days to talk about what they think of the authors in their book baggies during their partner reading time as practice before they select an author study reading club*

Teaching emphasis for reading clubs Week 1:

When we read different texts by an author, we notice things the author often does as he or she writes.

- *notice similarities and differences across books*
- *learn information about author from blurb, Internet, etc.*
- *use information about author to think about choices he/she makes in her books*
- *reread books by an author to try to pick a favorite*

Teaching emphasis for reading clubs Week 2: *(Students may pick different authors or stay with the same author from Week 1.)*

When we study an author, we think about reasons why the author writes certain things in certain ways. (It might be necessary to repeat some teaching from the first week, based on what students are doing as readers, thinkers, and talkers.)

- *We can notice the copyright date of the books and think about how the author's work has changed over time.*
- *We can grow theories about where the author got his/her ideas based on all we know about an author.*
- *We can name and appreciate special qualities and talents of our favorite author.*
- *We can notice if and when the author changed across books and try to figure out what or who caused the change.*
- *We can grow ideas about what the author might want us to learn, to think about, to wonder about as we read his/her books.*

Teaching emphasis for reading clubs Week 3 (optional): *(What is the energy like for author clubs? Is a third week necessary, helpful, and/or requested by students? If it is called for, will the instruction revisit previously taught strategies, will it focus on talking about texts, or will there be a new direction of study altogether?)*

We can put together baskets of books with different authors who share something in common and think lots about the connections between them. (Some basket reconfigurations might be: authors who write about friendships; authors who write about their memories; authors who write about their childhood; authors who teach us lessons; authors who use lots of details; authors who are illustrators too; authors who write in different genres; authors who write funny books; etc.)

- *Different characters can have similar characteristics. How are different characters alike?*
- *We can compare different characters and think about what motivates them, how they react to things, and how they relate to the other characters in their stories.*
- *We can grow ideas about why authors make certain choices about characters (e.g., Why are bullies often bigger than other kids? Why do detectives always have a best friend who helps them?)*

Assessment:

- *Conference conversations about authors—ask probing questions to find out students' thoughts and ideas about the author they've chosen (e.g., What have you noticed about your author so far? What does that make you think? As you've read several books by your author, what are you thinking? Is there a special characteristic you could name about your author?)*
- *Examine work folders, look at T charts, sticky notes, etc., to determine use of skills, strategies, etc.*
- *Toward end of author study, ask students to freewrite about their author, sharing all they've learned and all they wonder about.*

Possible project/celebration/outcome of reading clubs: *(As much as possible, it's beneficial to let students develop ideas for projects instead of having a project imposed on them. The following is a list of things various students have chosen to do that I've gathered from teachers.)*

- *Top 3 or Top 5 lists: students rank and rate the books by their favorite author based on self-chosen criteria*
- *Author Promotions: students write "ads" for their author, "If you like books about mischievous kids, you'll love books by _____."*)
- *Book Reviews: students study the genre of book reviews and write one about a text or texts by their favorite author*
- *Guide to Favorite Authors: whole class puts together a guidebook about authors they've studied and perhaps present it to school library*

Appendix H: Focuses for Learning in Genre-Based Reading Clubs

Genre-Based Reading Clubs

What reading skills, strategies, habits, and goals might we highlight in genre-based reading clubs?

Strategies and Skills for Reading Nonfiction Texts

- Readers know how to use the features of nonfiction to help them understand the information.
- Readers of nonfiction often have a purpose in mind as they read, such as information they are looking for or questions they want answered.
- Readers of nonfiction have strategies to help themselves read and understand tricky words and unfamiliar vocabulary.
- Readers of nonfiction can determine importance as they read.
- Readers of nonfiction can synthesize the text they've read and put it into their own words.
- Readers of nonfiction know how to take notes as they read.
- Readers of nonfiction accumulate information on topics.
- Readers of nonfiction compare and contrast information between books.
- Readers of nonfiction can become experts about their topics by having thoughts about the information they are learning.

Habits, Purposes, and Goals

Nonfiction readers may:

- have a new topic of interest that they want to learn about
- have a topic of interest that they want to learn more about
- read nonfiction to become experts about a particular topic
- read nonfiction to better understand something important to their lives
- read many kinds of texts on a particular topic
- learn lots of new vocabulary and concepts from their reading
- do something, make something, act in some way based on their reading
- like the feeling of learning new things as they read

Strategies and Skills for Reading Mysteries

- Readers of mystery books pay close attention to details in the text as they read.
- Readers of mystery books notice setting and pay close attention to what the characters do and say.
- Readers of mystery books look for clues to solve the mystery as they read.
- Readers of mystery books determine importance as they read to help them avoid following red herring clues.
- Readers of mystery books use text evidence to support their ideas.
- Readers of mystery books envision the sights and sounds of the story as they read to help them notice clues.
- Readers of mystery books make sensible predictions and abandon predictions if new evidence suggests they were wrong.

Habits, Purposes, and Goals

Readers of mysteries:

- pay close attention to the characters, settings, and plot
- reread parts of their books to find clues
- pay attention to the big events of the story but also notice details
- can retell parts of their books
- learn how to read mysteries well as they learn how mysteries tend to go
- make and revise predictions as they read through their books
- make mental pictures as they read
- understand the conventions of mysteries (clues, red herrings, resolution, etc.)
- might like stories with suspense
- might like stories in which there is something to solve

Strategies and Skills for Reading Concept Books

(i.e., ABC Books, Number Books, Opposites Books, Shape Books, Color Books, etc.)

- Readers of concept books have expectations for how their particular type of book tends to go (sense of genre).
- Readers of concept books can use their knowledge about the concepts to help them read (activating schema).
- Readers of concept books can compare and contrast books (making connections).
- Readers of concept books can learn new things and get new ideas from their books (synthesizing text, determining importance).
- Readers of concept books can predict what might be next as they turn the pages (predicting).

Habits, Purposes, and Goals

Concept book readers may:

- read a kind of concept book to learn more about the concept (alphabet, numbers, etc.)
- make predictions as they read
- like to read concept books because they know things about the concept featured in the book
- find favorite concept books
- talk with others about what they notice in concept books
- get stronger at reading concept books after reading a few of them
- learn how concept books go
- learn new things about the concept they are studying

Strategies and Skills for Reading Fairy Tales/Folktales

- Readers of fairy tales and folktales (FT/FTs) notice similarities and differences among different fairy tales/folk tales.
- Readers of FT/FTs are familiar with the conventions of FT/FTs, and this helps them predict how the story might go.
- Readers of FT/FTs get to know the characters well.
- Readers of FT/FTs compare and contrast different versions of the same FT/FT.
- Readers of FT/FTs pay attention to the problem and how it's solved.
- Readers of FT/FTs read the dialogue exchanges with expression and fluency because they know the characters well.

Habits, Purposes, and Goals

Readers of fairy tales and folktales:

- have favorite ones
- like to explore different versions of the stories
- like to retell their stories because they know them so well
- like to act out parts of their stories sometimes
- reread their favorite ones over and over
- might like stories set in bygone days
- might like stories that are not realistic or that have some sort of magical things happening

Appendix I: Study Group Materials

The following items are included as possible professional study materials for teachers to use during or after reading this book.

A Girlfriends' Guide to Reading Clubs

(The title of this section comes with apologies to the real Girlfriends' Guides to a variety of topics, which you can find in your local independent bookstore. I also apologize to the boyfriends in the teaching profession who might be reading this, my husband included. I trust you know you're welcome here.)

When we try new things or want to learn about something, we often consult a text on the subject. In many cases, however, it's conversations about the task or topic that are immediately and perfectly helpful. For example, take panty hose. Imagine that the only authority on panty hose you have is the text on the package in which they came. You'd have washing instructions, the ubiquitous size grid, the name of the color, and information about the type of panty hose—opaque, control top, sandalfoot, sheer, and so on.

Do any packages tell you how to deal with the trauma of getting a run in your panty hose when you only have minutes left to get out the door for the big event you've been looking forward to for months? No, reading the package won't help with that. That's when you call your mom or your friend while trying to sound like you're not in a panic. Like some all-knowing character from the movies, they'll calmly tell you about the Clear Nail Polish Trick, and voilà, your problem is solved immediately and with empathy. The text on the package of panty hose didn't do that.

This does connect to reading clubs, believe it or not: Over the last couple of years, I've made dozens of presentations to teachers brand new to the idea of reading clubs and to teachers familiar with reading clubs, and I'm always interested in the questions teachers ask each other during the breaks and at the end of our sessions together as well as the responses they offer.

So, in this section, I'm going to share some of the typical questions that I've overheard and the answers I've collected from listening to teachers helping each other, hence this is the Girlfriend's Guide to Reading Clubs.

If my principal and some district administrators come into my classroom during reading clubs, and they ask me to tell them the pedagogical rationale for why my students are in reading clubs, what can I say?

Well, the first thing I want to say is that you're lucky. You're lucky because by asking you what you're doing, your principal acknowledges your professionalism and ability to figure out and talk about your instruction. Second, you're lucky because these visitors didn't just stop by your class, take a look around, and make huge assumptions about your teaching without ever talking to you about it. Instead, they bothered to ask you, dear teacher, about the events in your classroom. Here's hoping it wasn't a major interruption. Now, back to your question. There are several things you might consider telling your visitors.

- Reading clubs provide opportunities for students to orchestrate all of the reading work they've done so far. They are using the skills and strategies they've learned in authentic, self-directed ways. Reading clubs also provide opportunities to spotlight particular comprehension strategies as needed.
- Cycles of reading clubs rejuvenate the reading workshop and the reading work our students are doing. It's sort of like cross-training. The students get a different way of working together for a short amount of time and can therefore work different reading, thinking, and talking muscles. Then when a cycle of reading clubs is over, the students will bring their new power to their independent reading, thinking, and talking.
- Reading clubs reenergize partner work and book talks, because the books in reading clubs are connected in some way. This enables students to notice similarities and differences among the books, and it gives students lots of things to talk about. Almost always, this comparing/contrasting talk gives students an idea, theory, or thought they want to explore together.
- Reading clubs provide a bridge between school reading and real-life reading. What students do in reading clubs is very closely related to the work that real-life avid readers do. Reading club partners make plans for their reading, set goals, talk about what they've read and what they think about it, and accumulate knowledge about the topic.

Question to consider: What else could you say in support of reading clubs?

My student teacher is interviewing me for a paper, and she asked me to explain reading clubs. What is a concise way to define and describe reading clubs and the kinds of work students do in them?

A reading club is not a place in the room, nor is it a particular activity. A reading club is a couple of kids who meet to read and talk about books that connect in some way. Often one or two partnerships work within a reading club, and the reading club basket contains between four and eight books, depending on the club topic, the level at which readers are reading, and their plans for their work. The partners will read and reread the books in the club, talking about what they notice, what they're thinking, and what questions they have. They'll likely develop some ideas about ways to pursue their reading club topic, and they'll make plans for the kinds of work they want to do.

Question to consider: What other information would be helpful to tell the student teacher?

My friend is a teacher at another school who is interested in launching reading clubs in her classroom. She has a few really practical questions: What's in the reading club basket? How are students partnered for reading clubs?

Reading club baskets contain books or other texts that pertain to the topic of the reading club. In the old days, we used to fill the baskets up with as many books on the topic as we had (or borrowed). For example, one year, the kids who were studying Cynthia Rylant during a cycle of author study clubs had nearly twenty books in their basket, and I kept adding more. Once, during nonfiction reading clubs, I went to the public library and borrowed all the books on snails for the snails reading club. The partners were overwhelmed each time they faced their club basket filled to the top with books. Most of the work they did that week was to simply try to get through the books.

At one of our study group meetings at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, we talked about the problem presented when there are too many books in reading clubs. We realized that the students try hard just to get through all of the books, and it is overwhelming to them. They don't talk much about their reading because they just try to get it all read! After naming the problem and describing its characteristics, we decided that it makes more sense to begin with fewer books in a reading club basket. The priority is to first include texts that are just right for the partnership, and then maybe a title or two that would be considered high interest.

During cycles of reading clubs, students tend to provide each other with books. There is a real community-sharing component. During poetry clubs one year, Julia brought in a poetry anthology from home that contained several Langston Hughes poems. She put sticky notes on the pages with the Hughes poems and lent it to the students in the Langston Hughes club. It often happens that students will notice that a book they have in their independent book bin relates to another reading club in the classroom, and they generously lend the book to the club. I invite this to happen, and we celebrate when it does.

In addition to books, it's important that students have all the reading supplies they need in their reading club so they are not spending precious reading club time looking for index cards, or sticky notes, or a sharpened pencil. Here are some items that I've tended to include in each of the reading club baskets:

- A folder (either a pocket folder or a manila folder) for each of the partnerships in the club so they can "file" the work they are doing in their clubs. The folders might contain note-taking sheets, planning sheets, sticky notes they've accumulated, to-do lists, etc.
- Sticky notes, index cards, pencils, bookmarks, etc.
- A variety of blank, yet formatted, note-taking sheets, often in the form of a graphic organizer. Students decide which graphic organizer best holds their work. We had blank T-charts, a blank Venn diagram (with a decent-size inner, overlapping section), a blank web, and so on. My students learned how to use these note-taking sheets during other times of the day, such as during science time, so I didn't have to do much teaching about them during reading club time. If I were to add a sheet that was unfamiliar to them, I would demonstrate how to use it during a mini-lesson or model how to use it during read-aloud time.

There are several ways that teachers have arranged partnerships for reading clubs. In many classrooms, students work with their usual reading partners during reading club cycles. This eliminates the labor and time needed to reassign partnerships. Also, because the reading partners are at or very near the same reading level, it's easier to ensure that the reading club books will be appropriate for each of the partners.

That said, there are some reasons why teachers may switch up the partners during reading club cycles. One year, during a nonfiction reading club cycle on insects (which also supported our science unit), my students signed up for the insect topics they

were most interested in studying. From their expressions of interest, I assigned partners with similar reading levels as much as possible. If seven students wanted to study butterflies, I would assign the ability-based partners and then see if the extra student wanted to pick another topic. If his heart were set on butterflies, I might try to enlist another student at or near his level to join him in the butterfly study.

This brings us to the question of how students end up in particular reading clubs. I try to let my students feel that they've chosen the club as much as possible, but sometimes I have to guide students to particular clubs, without much kicking and screaming, I hope. This is especially and unfortunately the case mostly with struggling readers. For example, during a character study reading club cycle, Sam wanted desperately to be in the Horrible Harry club because his best friend, Michael, said that was the club he wanted to pick. Horrible Harry books were much too difficult for Sam, so I had to try to entice him into another character club. I said something like, "Sam, I know you are really excited about Horrible Harry, but I think that another character club might fit you better as a reader. I have an idea though. You can take a Horrible Harry book home to read with a grown-up, and you and the grown-up can be in a Horrible Harry club together. That way, you'll get to know the Horrible Harry books, and I bet you and Michael can have some fun talks about Harry. But for your reading club in class, you need to pick a character that lives in books that are just right for you. Let's see. Hmmm. What about Titch? He's a kid that has some fun stuff going on... Take a look at Titch. I think you'd like to get to know him." Sam agreed (albeit reluctantly) to join Nicole in the Titch club, but in the end, they enjoyed their work together while reading books that were just right for them.

So, girlfriends, boyfriends, and significant others, I hope this section answered some questions about reading clubs.

Reflecting on Our Personal Experiences in the Reading Clubs in Our Lives

One of the most helpful ways to envision reading clubs in our classrooms is to think about times in your life when you've read as if you were in your own reading club. (It's important to differentiate a reading club from a book club—participants in a book club typically read one book at a time and then meet to talk about that book.)

I've included a few actual real-life reading club scenarios that teachers have shared with me to help you think about the times in your life when you were in a reading club, whether you knew it or not.

Reading Club Scenario 1

The *New York Times Book Review* just came out with a list the top twenty-five novels of the last twenty-five years. You decide to create a little project for yourself. Over the next year (or ten), you plan to read each of the books on the list that you haven't read yet. You ask your best friend to do this with you so that you have someone with whom you can talk about the books. Another goal that arises from this project is to create your own list of top twenty-five favorite books, which requires that you reread lots of old favorites.

Reading Club Scenario 2

Your cousin is getting married, and he's asked you to select a poem to read aloud during the ceremony. You're a little excited and intimidated because you want to pick the *perfect* poem for the occasion and for the couple. You spend a few evenings at an independent bookstore reading through poetry books trying to find the perfect poem. You find three poems that seem like they'd be great, so you enlist the help of another friend to help you decide which one to read during the ceremony. You and your friend read the poems and talk about the couple, trying to decide which poem connects best with their personalities and interests, as well as with the tone of the wedding.

Reading Club Scenario 3

You're in line at the supermarket, and one of the tabloid headlines screams, "Surprising Secret Plans of Brad and Angelina." Oh my goodness! You grab a copy of the tabloid and move over to a longer checkout line so you have time to read about these secret plans. You have to know. The person ahead of you wants a price check on several things, so you have even more time to pick up another tabloid with a teaser that reads, "Brad and Angelina Struggling to Make It Work!" Well, you must read that. After all, it's important to be well-rounded, right? You compare the articles and realize that they contradict each other over and over again. You notice

that none of the quotes are attributed to either Brad or Angelina and instead come from "a close friend of the couple," or "a family member." You realize you don't care much about the secret plans anymore, and you turn to a photo essay titled, "Celebrities' Trendiest Kids." Your groceries are getting scanned by this point, and you decide to buy the magazine for a friend because her child wears the same cool shoes as Gwyneth Paltrow's son.

Reading Club Scenario 4

You're at a barbecue, and all of a sudden there's a heated discussion about gas prices, oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), and alternative energy policy. You don't say much, although you're instinctively against oil drilling in the ANWR. You hesitate to participate in the discussion because you feel like you don't have any factual information to support your opinions. You hear lots of contradictory information, so you decide to wade through the issue to solidify your stand. You Google "ANWR" and find gazillions of items to explore on both sides of the issue.

Reading Club Scenario 5

You love to read spy thrillers and are excited that a new one by your favorite author is coming out at the end of the month. In the meantime, you reread an earlier book by this author to get yourself primed to read the new one, and you set your TiVo to record her interview on *Larry King Live*. You call your best friend to tell her about the new book, and you decide that you'll both read it right away.

Reading Club Scenario 6

You read an interview with the author of a newly published historical fiction title, and you decided to buy it, even though you rarely read historical fiction. The author sounded really interesting, and the book sounded great. The book is set during World War I. When you're finished reading it, you realize that you'd like to learn more about this period of history, so you ask your friend, who is a history buff, to recommend a title of a good nonfiction book about that time period.

I suspect that most of you can make a connection with at least one of these scenarios, even if the details of your own personal reading club are considerably dif-

ferent. These real-life reading club scenarios have a few characteristics in common whether the reader is skimming tabloids or reading historical nonfiction:

- In a span of time, the reader reads at least a couple of texts that are connected in some way. They may be connected in a variety of ways, such as by topic, by genre, by author, by readers' purpose, and so on.
- In each of these scenarios, there is a social component in, around, and behind the reading work. The readers talk about their texts with others, choose their texts based on the recommendations of others, or have other people in their mind while they're reading.
- The reading in these reading club scenarios tends to result in some sort of action or project, a new understanding, or an intention to explore something new or different. The reading affects the readers' lives in some way.

I invite you to think about times in your life when you've been in a reading club. Here are some guiding questions that you might consider to help you think about your reading club and its possible implications for your teaching:

1. Why did you start this reading club in your life? How did it all begin? What were the circumstances and your intentions?
2. What were some of the things you did while you were in the reading club? How did you gather texts? What was the social aspect of this work? Who did you talk to, who did you think about, and how did they affect your reading?
3. What was the outcome of the reading club? How did it affect or change your life? What happened next?
4. What can you bring from your personal experience into your instruction?

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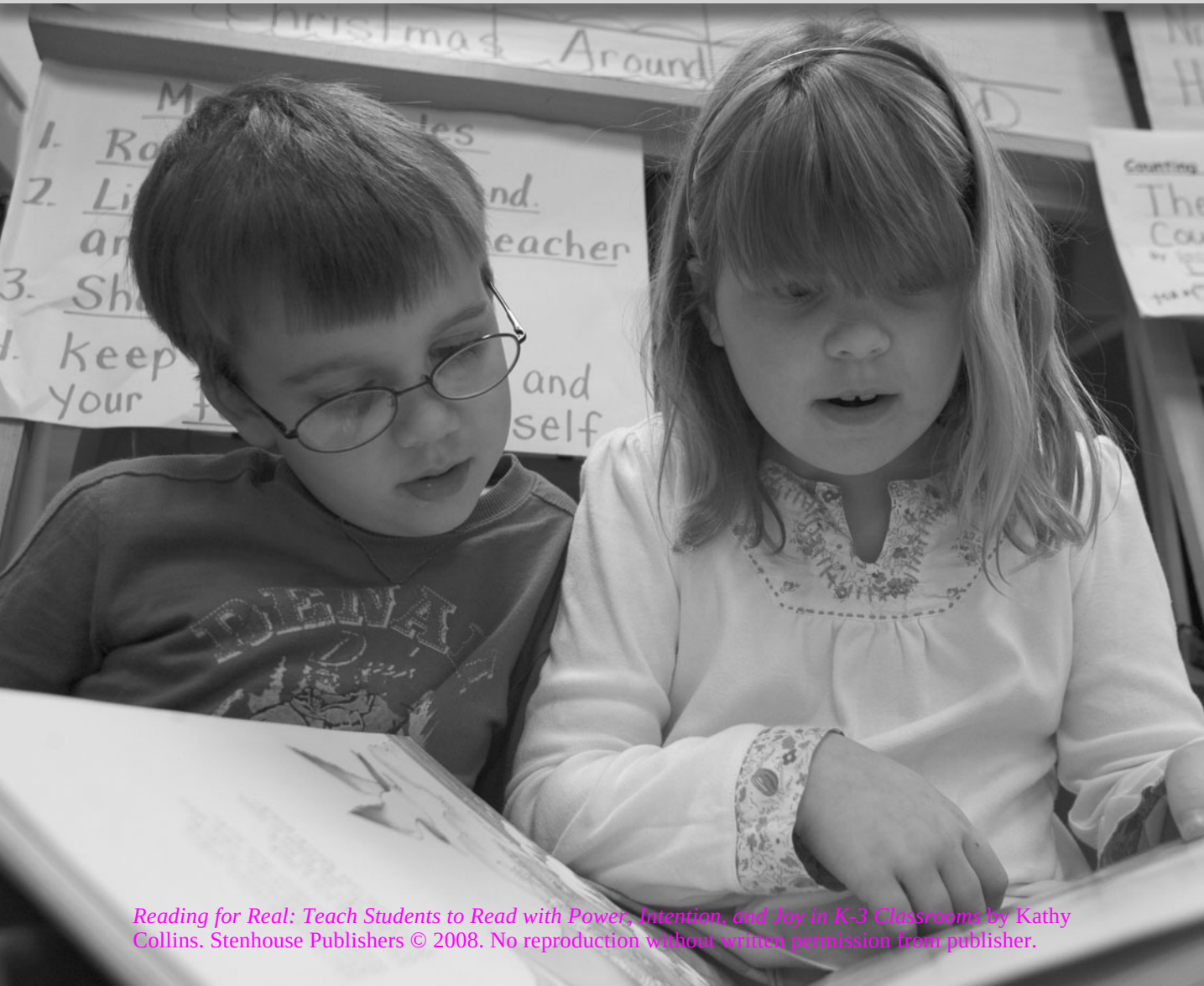

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