- Thinking aloud
- Reading nonfiction and other genres (see pages 448–461)
- Understanding "story" through story maps and graphic organizers
- Writing and sharing summaries and responses to text

See additional strategies listed on page 135.

• ***Responding to and/or interpreting text*** (See Chapters 3, 5, and 11.) Students are encouraged to:

- Analyze texts—story structure (character, setting, events, problem, resolution) and literary elements.
- Compare texts by theme.
- Connect texts to life and other texts.
- Use response logs.
- Incorporate Readers Theatre.
- Generate questions on "literary" level.
- Conduct literature conversations with and without the teacher.
- Study and compare authors and illustrators.
- Recommend books (via written or oral book talks).

• ***Self-monitoring and self-evaluating*** Teacher scaffolding enables students to:

- Choose books to read independently.
- Apply skills and strategies independently.
- Have successful conferences (teacher/student and with peers).
- Maintain a reading log and/or reading record.
- Know when understanding is taking place.
- Seek help (self-help and/or outside assistance) when comprehension breaks down.

• ***Reading orally*** Many teachers ask, "How much oral reading is appropriate?" Most kids love to read orally. And reading aloud is a good way for teachers to check fluency and note if the reader self-corrects when something doesn't make sense. In general, though, I think we ask kids to read aloud too much. We always need to be asking ourselves, "What's the purpose of this oral reading?" It can be for pleasure, to determine if a text is at the appropriate level for a student, to work on fluency, or to focus on what an author has done particularly well, such as asking students to "Practice reading a passage where the author has described a character so you can picture him (or her)."

Grouping for Guided Reading

Begin

The debate about the best way to group students for guided reading continues. Teachers struggle with how many groups they can manage, how often they should be meeting with each group, and if the groups should be homogeneous, heterogeneous, or "flexible" (i.e., having frequently changing participants and purposes). There is no one best way. Look carefully at your program, as well as current research, to examine how you are grouping and dealing with students' needs, experiences, levels, and interests.

While size generally varies from three to eight members per group, most of us have found four to six members to be ideal. When working with struggling readers, any more than five in a group seems to be counterproductive. I would make sure that you meet with your low-achieving readers every day, and as often as you can for your other readers. Be sure that you use ongoing assessment (informal is fine) so that you can regroup children according to their development as readers.

Most teachers find that they can meet comfortably with three guided reading groups a day, which results in their meeting with most groups three times a week at a minimum. However, newer teachers need to give themselves permission to meet with one or two reading groups a day when getting started. With time, much practice, good pacing, and effective management techniques, meeting with three or even four groups a day becomes more realistic and commonplace.

In addition to guided reading time in small groups, one-on-one conferencing is also terrific when you can manage it. I recommend a quick, daily monitoring of independent reading for all students. Once students are reading fluently and for understanding in various genres, guided reading moves into literature conversations.

Another important point. I find, in general, that reading groups go on too long. You can do a lot of teaching in ten to fifteen minutes and then have kids "practice" what you've taught by having them read independently or with a partner. As well, shorter group time increases how many groups you can see each day and also makes management easier. With three or four guided reading groups that last approximately fifteen minutes each, students are not working independently for more than thirty to forty-five minutes.

The Importance of Heterogeneous Grouping

I believe all students should have opportunities to participate in heterogeneous groups. My beliefs about homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping in reading solidified this past year, especially in regard to struggling readers above grade two. I recently read an article in *The Elementary School Journal* that confirms what I already knew in my heart: students need and want to be in mixed-ability groups.

The article describes a study that examined student's perceptions of the makeup or composition of reading groups. More than five hundred third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade urban, mostly minority students, including some students with learning disabilities, participated. By an overwhelming majority, students preferred mixed-ability grouping to whole class, paired reading, or working alone. Students perceived that mixed-ability grouping is not only fairer but that students receive more help and make more progress. In other words, elementary students view working with a partner or small group as helpful only if a range of abilities is present. "Notably, no student expressed the view that mixed-ability groups are unfair to better readers" (Elbaum, Schumm, and Vaughn 1997, 487). The only exception was for nonreaders, who students perceived learn best in same-ability groups.

These findings are consistent with the massive amount of literature on the impact of ability grouping across the curriculum.

> On average, the achievement effect of ability grouping is quite small, equaling less than one-fifth of a standard deviation in student achievement. (Jaeger and Hattie 1995, 219)

After I read the former article, I rethought my own grouping practices. Little by little, I had been doing more and more ability grouping with struggling readers, especially in third and fourth grades. Based on the study, which clearly showed that only nonreaders needed to be in same-ability groups, I revised my practice. In the past, when upper-grade teachers would approach me for help with struggling readers, I would work with them as a homogeneous group in the classroom. Now, I do only mixed-ability grouping as long as the kids can read. (I use independent reading time or WEB [page 44] and reading conferences to teach the word-recognition strategies specific to each student.)

For example, when third-grade teacher Veronica Allen requested that I work with her struggling readers on how to figure out multisyllable words and difficult vocabulary, I worked with those readers in a mixed-ability group. I began by reading and thinking aloud using a news article on an overhead transparency, with the class following along on individual copies (see page 437). After the demonstration, when we broke up into mixed-ability groups to continue reading and problem solving independently, I said, "Anyone who wants to get good at figuring out hard words can meet with me up at the front table."

What I have found in issuing this invitation is that most of the kids who actually need the help willingly come forward. I always get a few high achievers who join the group because they want to get better at everything. And then I invite the one or two struggling readers who haven't voluntarily stepped forward. More often than not, however, such students join the group unprompted. Veronica Allen comments, "What was fascinating was seeing the kids who would never say 'I don't understand' in front of the whole class freely asking questions and volunteering a response in the small group. I was also surprised at some of the good readers who elected to be there and who also seemed to benefit from the lesson."

When I interviewed Veronica's third graders at the end of the year, I asked them what they thought about the way students were grouped. Their thoughts parallel the results of the study (Elbaum, Schumm, and Vaughn 1997). Every student says that mixed-ability grouping is better, or in their own words:

- The not-so-good readers can learn easier.
- The poor readers don't feel bad.
- If all the not-so-good readers are all together, it would be hard for them to learn because we learn from each other.
- With mixed groups, we can all help each other.

When Homogeneous Grouping Is Appropriate

While we teachers must always be sensitive to how we teach children, it's just common sense to group young, developing readers. You can't teach much in a group in which one student is working on one-to-one matching and another is reading simple chapter books. Outsiders ask, "Don't your students and parents complain about 'ability grouping?'" No, they don't, since this particular group time comprises such a small chunk of reading time. These guided reading groups in the early grades last approximately fifteen minutes, so almost the entire day is spent in flexible, dynamic groups in which students of varying abilities work collaboratively and learn from each other, sharing literary experiences. Students work with partners, small groups formed by interest, whole class as in shared reading and shared writing, independently, as well as individually with the teacher. Once students become readers, there are more and more opportunities for grouping according

to interests. For example, once a big book is introduced, the teacher might invite a group of volunteers to enjoy the small copies with her.

For the most severe readers, one-on-one may be the only option to meet their instructional needs. Anthony was a first grader who was meeting with a group of three other struggling readers. However, he was working at his frustration level, and by spring he had made no substantial reading progress. When he moved to working one-on-one with his teacher using easy readers having about two words on each page, his excitement and engagement gave him his first reading success, and for the first time he asked, "Can I read these books some more?"

While I have long been comfortable grouping developing first- and second-grade readers with similar needs for guided reading—not just for word-attack skills but for teaching multiple strategies and reading for meaning—these students are not grouped arbitrarily. First, I take the time to carefully observe them, record observational data, and evaluate their strengths and needs.

A Pull-In Model in Second Grade

After working for four years as a Reading Recovery teacher, I worked for five years in classrooms (in a "pull-in" or "push-in" model) teaching reading every day to low-achieving readers. Believing from experience that "pull-out" models did not work well except for the most severe nonreaders, I applied what I had learned as a Reading Recovery teacher to small-group, guided reading sessions. (See *Invitations*, pages 144–146.) Working in the classroom had the added benefit of allowing for natural collaboration, observing another teacher teach, and daily planning together "on the run."

I typically worked with students during their second reading period of the day, which took place early each afternoon while the classroom teacher was also teaching reading—either conferring individually with students as they were reading independently or meeting with a small guided reading group.

Even here, however, I tried to be sensitive to the grouping-by-needs that was taking place by serving as a resource for the whole class. I took several weeks to work with all students in reading and writing before I met with my targeted group for the first time. Then, although I had a thirty-minute time slot with these students, I usually used the first five to seven minutes to facilitate a whole-class shared reading of poetry (see page 36). As well, I extended an invitation to the entire class, asking anyone who would like to join our group to do so. So, in addition to "my students" (four to five), typically two other students would join us. Sometimes, one would be a student with learning disabilities. Often, it was one or two of the best readers in the class.

One year, the parents of a student named Stefan sought me out at an open house curriculum night. It turned out that their son talked about me and the reading group often at home, and they were puzzled about my role in the classroom. What amused and satisfied me was that Stefan, one of our brightest students, had not realized that the group he'd been joining so enthusiastically was actually the "slow achievers."

Guided Silent Reading: What Happens in a Group Lesson

The goal in guided reading is for students to gain enough strategies and confidence to read independently. Since most of the reading we do in the real world is silent, most of our reading instruction in guided reading relates to silent reading.

Once students are readers, that is, they can read some text independently with understanding, I move them into guided silent reading. Typically, such independence occurs for most students in the spring of first grade. Up to that point—in the context of reading for meaning—we have been focusing on oral reading, word-solving strategies, automatic word recognition, and fluency in our small guided reading groups.

As well, we continue to model reading strategies throughout the day in other reading and writing contexts such as reading and writing aloud and shared reading and writing. The early stages of small-group guided reading then provide assisted practice on the strategies we have already been demonstrating in small and large groups.

As a result of reading and discussing *Learning to Read in New Zealand* (Smith and Elley 1994) in one of our language arts support groups, it became clear to us that even though we had been using literature to teach reading for ten years, even the most skilled teachers still relied mostly on "round-robin" reading, in which students take turns reading aloud. As one teacher finally told me, "I always felt inadequate with round-robin reading. I think I knew I wasn't teaching anything." Several teachers began to move into guided silent reading as a direct result of our open discussion.

One of the major advantages of guided silent reading is that you can check for understanding of everyone in the group. With round-robin reading, students take turns reading orally and the teacher asks questions. Once one student has answered correctly, we have no idea if the others could have arrived at a similar answer on their own. By contrast, when I am checking for comprehension using silent reading, I usually ask students to read several pages for a purpose (such as to find out why something happened) and to then write down a very brief response. In that way, I can check for understanding for each student by reading each individual response.

Notice, in the following vignette, how guided silent reading helps move the focus to reading for meaning for a group of slow-achieving second graders.

A Guided Silent Reading Group with Struggling Second Graders

Sarah Curtis approaches me, concerned because her group of struggling readers is showing little progress. We begin working together at her request. Sarah's typical small-group reading experience involved round-robin oral reading, with Sarah supplying most of the difficult words. It was my opinion that the books she was choosing for her five low-achieving students were too difficult, and we spoke about choosing a book that would allow the children to begin to do some silent reading and problem solving, both independently and with limited teacher support. Sarah chose *The Gingerbread Man* (pictures by Karen Schmidt), a book that I agreed would work well for our purposes.

I introduce the book to the students and we look through the pages. We talk about what they already know about this familiar story, who the characters are and what the pictures on the beginning pages suggest is happening in the story. Then I ask them to read the first several pages silently and to write a phrase or sentence that answers the question, "What did the woman tell the boy?" (to which the correct response would be, "Not to open the oven"). I also direct them to write down any words that they can't figure out and to cross out those that they eventually understand. I tell them that if I see that they have no words written down, I may call on them as an "expert" to help another student. I want them to be clear that I expect them to self-monitor as they read.

As the students read, I observe their behaviors. A student who is able to read all of the words has to reread the text in order to answer the question. (I compliment him on using that strategy.) Another writes down *pan* as a word he can't read, even though he knows the words *man* and *can.* Using a small chalk board, I show this student how he can use the word *man*—the word he knows—to figure out *pan*—the word he doesn't. I tell the two students who finish the assignment early to write down as many rhyming words as they can for the words *pan* and *bake.*

When I am sure that all have comprehended the text, we go over the word *watch,* which two students have written down as troublesome. One of these students later crossed the word out. When I ask her how she figured it out, she says that she "sounded it out." This is unlikely, since sounding this word out would have led to "w-at-ch." I have found that when students don't know how to articulate a strategy, they often resort to "I sounded it out." When they use the context to word solve as this student obviously did, we need to guide them to understand and verbalize the explanation "Because it makes sense." If students are unable to demonstrate and/or articulate what they have done, then we need to model and name the strategy for them. Second-grade teacher Loretta Martin reinforces any teaching she has done by reminding students to use the new strategy during independent reading.

At the end of group time, we review the strategies we used: rereading, using the context to put in a word that makes sense, and checking the word visually and using what you know in one word to figure out another. I make a note to start the next session by reinforcing the rime "an." (See Chapter 10 for specific procedures for such word work.)

Framework for a Guided Silent Reading Lesson

Use the following steps as a suggested format for implementing guided silent reading.

• ***Plan the lesson.*** It helps to have an overall written plan based on curriculum guidelines, student needs as determined by previous response and observation, and what the text offers. However, remember that much of what will be demonstrated, scaffolded, and taught arises directly—moment to moment during the lesson—from students' needs and involvement with the text being read. Observe your kids and use common sense. One new teacher told me, "It was ingrained in me to 'stick to the lesson plan,' whether students needed it or not. It took me a long time to have the confidence to teach to the kids' needs."

• ***Form a group.*** Have three to eight students meet with the teacher for about ten to fifteen minutes. (For struggling readers, five seems to be the maximum number of group participants for effective instruction.) For developing readers, typically in grade one and beginning grade two, the group will likely be homogeneous. For more fluent readers, and for reading situations focused on students' interest, groups are flexible, that is, the members and purposes of the groups change often. (See "Grouping for Guided Reading," pages 144–147.)

• ***Select a book.*** Again, it is important that you choose a text that is at the students' interest and instructional level. Try to have a copy of the book for each member of the group. Except for early developing readers who may have some experience with the book

through shared reading or hearing it read it aloud, choose mostly books that are unfamiliar to students. Perhaps do a quick check with oral reading to be sure it's on their level by having students read the first few pages aloud. When a student reads orally, make sure you give him time to self-correct if he makes an error.

First-grade teacher Jim Henry notes that when he's chosen the "right book," that is, one with just a little bit of a challenge and at kids' interest level, all goes well. "When I don't choose the right book, I don't have confidence that they can read it successfully."

Learning to select appropriate books takes practice. If you choose a book that is too difficult (and we all occasionally do), don't hesitate to tell the children that you've made a mistake. Continuing to read a book that is above the students' reading level will only lead to frustration—for you as well as the students. Therefore, it's a good idea to have several sets of books on hand as possibilities while you're learning how to select books.

- ***Preview the book.*** Give students time to peruse the story or book before you provide an introduction. Ask questions about
  - What they notice (drawing attention to important features—cover, illustrations, author information)
  - How the book is organized (pointing out format and visuals)
  - What they think the book may be about (making predictions, incorporating prior knowledge)

- ***Provide a thorough introduction.*** Focus on story meaning and understanding, not just getting the words right. If appropriate, link to similar stories or content. Give just enough of an introduction and background so that children can problem solve on their own, but don't tell so much that there is no work for the child to do. More independent readers will need a short introduction or, perhaps, no introduction. Developing readers may need a detailed introduction, "walking through the text" with them, sometimes page by page, with the teacher pointing out particular words, concepts, and illustrations and putting the difficult words "in their ear." According to Marie Clay (1998), "The teacher anticipates what might trip the children as they read the story; yet *the overview of the story is like a conversational exchange, and the attention to detail should not dismember the flow of the story*" (175; italics in original).

  For detailed procedures on a story introduction, see Clay's "Introducing Storybooks to Young Readers" (see page 23b for annotation).

- ***Set the framework for silent reading.*** Choose a natural breaking point in the text, and set purposes for reading. I say something like, "Read pages (usually, one to three pages) to find out what the problem is." Or, "Read pages . . . to find out what's happening." Or, "Read pages . . . to see what new information you can learn." And, "Reread if you need to or don't understand." Usually, I also ask students to jot down their response to what's happening (phrases are fine) so I can quickly check for understanding.

- ***Ask students to read silently.*** (For developing readers, some may still be reading softly and quietly saying the words.) As they read, have students note difficult words by writing them down. (We often use small spiral notebooks. [See Figure 4-11B.] Some students also like to jot down words they are proud to have been able to figure out on their own.) In that way, if you are helping one student problem solve a "tough spot," the other group members can continue their reading knowing that they are in line to receive help.

Give another task to students who finish early, such as, "Find the sentence that tells . . . ," or send students who are reading with understanding back to their seats to continue reading while you work with students who are having difficulty.

• ***Observe whether and how students are monitoring themselves as they read.*** As students read one or several pages silently from the text, observe their behaviors to glean what strategies they are using or not using so you know how to support them further. Watch for such behaviors as subvocalizing, finger pointing, rereading, reading rate, hesitations, examining pictures, smiles or laughter in response to humorous material, and crossing out words that were initially troublesome.

On some days, teachers may use this time to take a running record of a child's oral reading (see page 116) or make anecdotal notes about one or more readers' behaviors.

• ***Support and scaffold as students are reading.*** Continually provide guidance to move students forward in their reading. For example, for a student who is subvocalizing, I might say, "I see that you're moving your lips and saying all the words as you're reading. Put your lips together and try reading in your mind. You'll be able to read faster that way."

Or with a student who has reread for meaning, I might say, "I saw you looking at that word carefully, checking it with the picture, and going back to another page where you had seen the same word. Good for you. That's what good readers do."

When a student gives a response that shows he has not understood, I will say, "Where does it say that? Go back and reread and find the place where it says that." If the student does not realize he has not understood, I will have him read orally in an attempt to find out where and why the breakdown is occurring. I look for the following:

- Is the text too difficult?
- Is the print size or page format distracting?
- Are there problems with decoding words?
- Is the concept load too heavy?
- Is the student skipping over "hard" words without trying to figure them out?
- Does the student lack the background or interest to understand the story?
- Is the student decoding the words without thinking about the story?
- Is the student reading too fast?

For example, when working with a group of third graders reading a book about Martin Luther King, I can tell by looking at the one-sentence summaries that I asked them to write after reading several pages silently that three have understood the material. I work closely with the two whose summaries reveal a lack of understanding to clear up confusion. To determine where their comprehension has broken down, we read orally, discuss as we go along, and I teach the strategies they need to read for understanding. If the text is still too difficult, we drop back to an easier level. (See "Teaching for Strategies," pages 130–140 for strategy instruction. See additional examples of support and scaffolding at the word level on pages 423–425.)

• ***Check for meaning first.*** When we check for meaning first (as opposed to going straight to word work), we give the message that reading for meaning is the purpose of all reading. I ask questions such as:

- Were our predictions right?
- What was the story about?
- Tell me what you just read.
- What did you learn about the character?
- Let's talk about the setup in the story.
- What was the most important thing you learned?
- What do you think is going to happen next. Why do you think so?

Often I begin a guided reading group by checking for understanding on the previous day's assigned reading (independent classroom work). This checking can be a group oral retelling or reviewing individual written summaries or comments in the reading log. Checking for understanding takes place before we analyze the text critically. If students have not understood, we go back to the text to find out where and why the breakdown occurred.

• ***Do needed word work.*** After we have focused on overall meaning, I will ask students what words they had difficulty with, and we will work through these together. Our word work may be extensive—perhaps involving individual chalk boards, writing, making word cards (see pages 417–432 in Chapter 10, "Spelling and Word Study in the Reading-Writing Classroom")—or brief, aimed at clearing up confusions about decoding a word or understanding a word's meaning.

• ***Enjoy talking about the story.*** Once I am confident students have understood the gist of the story, I invite personal response and viewpoints, comparison to other stories, revisiting favorite parts, and any comments students feel are relevant and important. (See Chapter 5, "Literature Conversations," for information about posing and discussing high-level questions.)

Sometimes students will suggest we do an activity such as Readers Theatre, dramatization, or sequel writing, either as something they want to do in group or independently, as a follow-up activity.

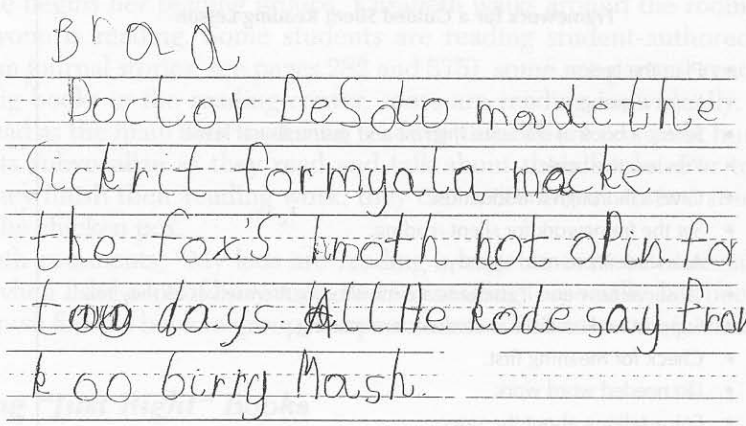
• ***Use oral reading judiciously.*** Most kids enjoy reading aloud. But, except for developing readers, it's not necessary for students to read the entire text aloud. As stated previously, sometimes I will have students read a favorite page aloud to check for fluency. Or, if a student finishes his silent reading quickly and I have checked him for understanding, I may ask him to find a specific paragraph and practice reading that to himself so he can later read it to the group.

• ***Assign further reading.*** Set purposes for continued reading for after group. Make sure most of students' time is spent reading and not in activities related to reading. Students can read on in the text with a partner or individually. For example, students may be assigned to read several pages or several chapters, depending on their skill level and your purposes. Or, students may be asked to reread familiar text to increase fluency or to create and perform a Readers Theatre.

I ask students to keep track of words or concepts they don't understand so that I can monitor their understanding when I meet with them next (see page 125). To avoid having students get distracted by jotting down long lists of words (with the corresponding page numbers), second-grade teacher Loretta Martin emphasizes that they write down only those words that make them stop reading or prevent them from understanding the story.

For students who have been assigned chapters to read—or to finish reading a picture book—I usually ask them to come prepared with written thoughts. Sometimes their teacher or I direct them to write down "how the story ended" as a comprehension check (see Figure 4-8 for a first grader's response to *Dr. DeSoto* by William Steig). Sometimes,

Figure 4–8 A first grader's understanding of how* Dr. DeSoto *ends after reading the last part of the book independently



Dr. DeSoto made the secret formula. It made the fox's mouth not open for two days. All he could say, "Frank Koo burry mush."

I pose open-ended questions; other times, they jot down what strikes them as important and interesting to talk about.

• ***Evaluate and plan.*** Often before I call the next group I jot down plans for the next day—teaching points I want to make, what needs to be reinforced or checked, students I need to check or monitor for particulars. Sometimes, the plan might be to begin the next session by rereading a familiar book (to build fluency) or to have students do a retelling of an assigned reading. This planning takes only a minute or two, supplements the predetermined weekly plan, and is based on what happened in guided reading group.

Self-evaluation questions, such as the following, can help guide your planning:

- Did the students enjoy and understand what they read?
- Is the text appropriate?
- Did students problem solve effectively?
- Did they use strategies previously taught and practiced?
- Did everyone contribute to discussion?
- What do I need to teach to increase students' independence in reading?

See Figure 4-9 on page 154 for a summary of the reading framework just presented.

Guided Reading: The Literacy Club in a First-Grade Classroom

This section describes guided reading groups in action in a first-grade class. For older students, see guided reading lessons on pages 450–458. While the text used on those pages is nonfiction, focus is on understanding, and strategies apply to fiction reading as well.

Elisabeth Tuttle has twenty-three first graders, and she meets with four guided

Figure 4–9 Framework for a guided silent reading lesson

Framework for a Guided Silent Reading Lesson

- Plan the lesson.
- Form a group.
- Select a book at students' interest and instructional level.
- Preview the book.
- Give a thorough introduction.
- Set the framework for silent reading.
- Ask students to read silently.
- Observe how and if students are monitoring themselves as they read.
- Support and scaffold as students are reading.
- Check for meaning first.
- Do needed word work.
- Enjoy talking about the story.
- Use oral reading judiciously.
- Assign further reading.
- Evaluate and plan.

Adjust the framework to suit your needs and purposes.

reading groups within a one-hour time slot every day. Everything moves like clockwork in this classroom where excitement about reading is high. Students know exactly what they are expected and required to do, and what their choices are while they are working independently. If a student interrupts her while a group is in session (which is rare), Elisabeth gently reminds the student that she cannot be disturbed. Her teaching is intentional, direct, explicit, and systematic, although it does not follow a hierarchical sequence. It follows the requirements and interests of her students and the district curriculum.

This is Elisabeth's second year teaching. There are no commercial materials on her walls, and the environment is lively, print-rich, and full of wonderful books—books garnered from garage sales, her childhood collection, libraries, book stores, and the building collection. (See room plan, page 546.)

Elisabeth feels that most of her learning about how to teach reading came not from her college instruction but from her own professional reading and self-study and her experience working with a cooperating teacher when she was a student teacher. Most important, she has learned how to teach reading by observing and talking with other first-grade teachers in her school. My coaching of Elisabeth has focused on her movement toward more guided silent reading in her classroom.

It is early May, and all of Elisabeth's students are readers. In addition to her daily guided reading groups, all kinds of reading activities go on throughout the day and across the curriculum—reading aloud, shared reading, partner reading, listening to books on tape, teacher-modeled reading, independent reading, repeated reading of familiar poems and stories, reading of big books, and sustained silent reading.

Setting the Tone for Independent Reading

Before she begins her reading groups, Elisabeth walks around the room to make sure that everyone is reading. Some students are reading student-authored books (published from journal stories, see pages 282 and 575), some are partner reading, some are reading big books in the reading center, some are reading individually. Most impressive, all read as the main activity during reading time. There is a quiet hum in the room as students subvocalize as they read and talk about their books. For today, students know if they finish their reading work, they can write letters to two students who are out with the chicken pox.

Elisabeth comments, "My kids are reading a huge amount of material compared to last year, when I did a lot of busywork. Partner reading, especially, has been so powerful. Whenever we finish a book in group, I expect them to find someone in class to read it to."

Providing "Just Right" Books

During the first week of school, Elisabeth's students choose whatever they want to read, and she observes their selections. The second week, she talks about how students become better readers and relates reading to riding a bike. "You can't get on your dad's bike and learn to ride. You need a bike that's just right for you. Well it's the same with books." A lively discussion encompasses how important practice and "just right" books are. In the beginning, until students are able to choose books they can actually read, she carefully monitors each of their book choices. (For guidelines on setting up a classroom library and helping students choose books, see pages 49–52 and 84–90.)

Meeting with the First Guided Reading Group

Elisabeth calls the first group, five students, up to the round table at a front corner of the room, and she sits where she can see the rest of the class. This group, like her others, are grouped according to strategic needs (see pages 146–147) and are reading "Bees and Mud" in *Mouse Soup* by Arnold Lobel (New York: Harper and Row, 1986). They take turns reading and discussing the first two pages orally. Because yesterday's reading indicated some confusion, for her teaching today, she begins by focusing on structure and checking to see that all understand what a sentence is. Each group member has been given a photocopy of one page from the text.

TEACHER: Find the beginning and end of the first sentence. (*Students point to the proper places in the text.*) Why do we have periods?

STUDENT: To take a breather.

T: That's right. It's important to know when to pause when you're reading. Now, circle the first sentence. (*All do this.*) Okay, you have it. I was just checking, because sometimes when you read you forget to stop at the ending punctuation.

T: What do you see here? (*Points to dialogue.*)

S: Voice marks.

S: Talking marks.

S: Quotation marks.

T: Yes, that's right. So, who's talking here? (*She points, and students respond correctly.*)

Elisabeth then assigns the group pages 14 and 15 to read silently. As they do so, she observes and assists individual students as needed.

S: I'm having trouble with a word. (*The student points to the word* whiskers.)

T: You can figure it out. What do you know? (*Student quietly rereads the sentence and runs his fingers under the word, stopping at the chunks he knows, "is" and "er."*) Good. You've got it now.

S: I can't read this (*points to the word* upset).

T: You can do it. Think about what you know. There's two little words in it you already know.

S: (*Reads.*) Up set.

T: Good. What does that mean?

S: Mad.

S: (*Obviously having difficulty with the word* muddy.)

T: (*Reaches over and covers up "-dy" with her fingers.*) Now what is it?

S: Mud. (*Student then reads "muddy" on her own but gets stuck on the next word,* swamp.)

T: Look how it starts. What would make sense?

S: Muddy swamp!

While Elizabeth guides one reader who is not quite finished, she instructs the others to make a prediction about what will happen next in the text. She gives them a minute or so to do this.

T: Okay, let's hear a few predictions.

S: He'll get stung.

S: He'll fall in.

S: He'll fall in the swamp, and the bees will sting him.

S: He'll get stuck, like in quicksand.

T: Okay, good thinking. When you go back to your seat, read to the end of the story with your partner. See if your prediction was right. Write down how the story ends.

Total group time has encompassed twelve minutes, and Elisabeth has done much teaching and reinforcing. (Notice how she has effectively used open-ended questioning, rather than asking questions that provoke a yes/no response.)

Meeting with the Second Guided Reading Group

Elisabeth introduces *Daniel's Duck* by Clyde Robert Bulla (New York: Harper and Row, 1982). Notice how interactive her introduction is and that the focus is on meaning throughout the lesson.

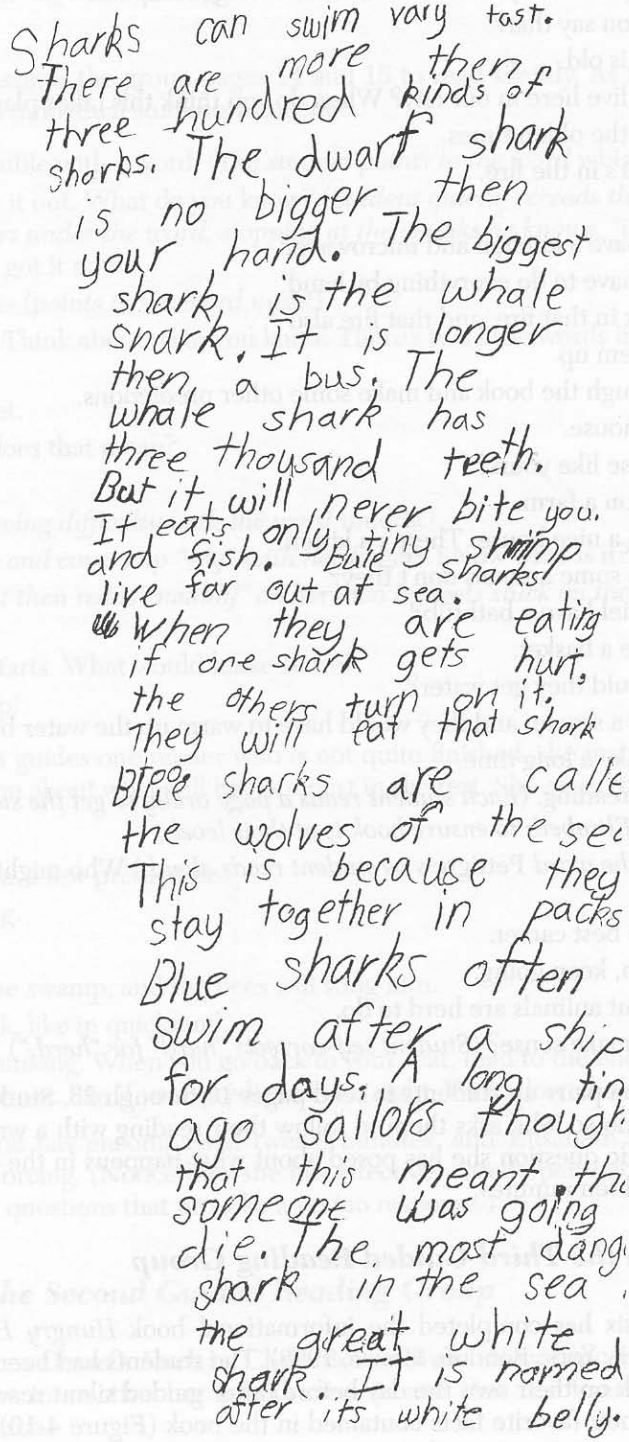
T: Look at the front cover and make a prediction. Tell me what you think the setting is.
S: It's about a little boy who's in a cabin. He might be poor.
T: Why do you say that?
S: The floor is old.
T: Could he live here in our city? When do you think this takes place?
S: I think in the olden times.
T: Look what's in the fire.
S: A kettle.
T: Do they have a kitchen and microwave?
S: No, they have to do everything by hand.
T: They cook in that fire, and that fire also . . .
S: Warms them up.
T: Look through the book and make some other predictions.
S: He has a house.
T: Is it a house like yours?
S: They live on a farm.
S: They have a nice house. There's a kitten.
T: They have some animals don't they?
T: Does Daniel have a bathtub?
S: No, it's like a basket.
T: Where would they get water?
S: They have a stream and they would have to warm up the water by the fire.
T: It might take a long time.
T: Let's start reading. (*Each student reads a page orally to get the story going and as a check for Elisabeth to ensure book is at their level.*)
T: (*Supplies the word* Pettigrew *as student reads aloud.*) Who might Henry Pettigrew be?
S: Maybe the best carver.
T: Okay, Ryan, keep going.
S: (*Reads.*) But animals are herd to do.
T: Does that make sense? (*Student self-corrects "hard" for "herd."*)

Elisabeth then pairs up students to read pages 10 through 25. Students who prefer to read alone can do so. She asks them to follow their reading with a written response answering a specific question she has posed about what happens in the story. The reading group has lasted ten minutes.

Meeting with the Third Guided Reading Group

This group of six has completed the informational book *Hungry Hungry Sharks* by Joanna Cole (New York: Random House, 1988). The students had been assigned to finish reading the book on their own the day before (after guided silent reading in group) and to write down their favorite facts contained in the book (Figure 4-10). Elisabeth begins

Figure 4–10 Response to nonfiction reading: a first grader's favorite facts


Sharks can swim very fast.
There are more then
three hundred kinds of
sharks. The dwarf shark
is no bigger then
your hand. The biggest
shark is the whale
shark. It is longer
then a bus. The
whale shark has
three thousand teeth.
But it will never bite you.
It eats only tiny shrimp
and fish. Blue sharks
live far out at sea.
When they are eating
if one shark gets hurt,
the others turn on it.
They will eat that shark
Blue sharks are calle
the wolves of the sea
This is because they
stay together in packs
Blue sharks often
swim after a ship
for days. A long tim
ago sailors though
that this meant th
someone was going
die. The most dang
shark in the sea
the great white
shark. It is named
after its white belly.

the group by having each student share their responses. Students talk interactively about what they've learned.

S: I didn't know dolphins can kill sharks.

S: Dolphins are smart and can take in air.

S: Their brains are the size of peanuts. Sharks are not so smart.

Elisabeth and I had been talking about how important it is to use guided reading time for nonfiction as well as fiction. (See Chapter 11, "Reading Nonfiction.") She decides to try the primary edition of the news magazine *Time for Kids*, even though it is geared for second grade. She had given students copies of the news magazine the day before so they'd already looked through them. Notice how she talks them through the cover story "A New Deal for Ireland" and how, once again, the focus is on meaning.

T: I knew you'd be interested in this story because of St. Patrick's Day, and because of what I told you about my own visit to Ireland. (*Begins to read orally.*) Northern Ireland has had problems for years and years. (*Continues reading orally.*) Let's stop for a moment and look at the map. (*They talk about where Ireland is located.*) They were trying to bring peace to the country. Did it work?

S: No. There were bombs. That shows it didn't work.

T: What's a bomb?

S: It's something black and has a string.

T: There's different kinds of bombs.

S: Atomic bombs, time bombs.

T: Remember at the Olympics a bomb went off. Laura, in this story, is afraid a bomb will hit her school.

S: (*Reading orally.*) Violence has divided Northern Ireland for years.

T: What does that mean?

S: Families are arguing over different beliefs.

T: People are splitting into different groups.

S: Protestant religion . . .

T: What does that mean?

S: It's a kind of religion.

T: So, who's arguing?

S: Two religions.

T: So the Protestants and the Catholics are enemies.

S: Just like when Lincoln was president and the North and the South were enemies.

T: Good thinking. Who rules Northern Ireland?

S: The British.

The interactive reading continues with Elizabeth frequently asking, "What does that mean?" and then filling in what students don't understand.

S: They want to be free.

T: Yes, they want to have their own country and be free of British rule.

S: Like when the Pilgrims came here to be free.

T: Yes. And, can you believe over three thousand people have died because of the fighting?

They finish the article with Elisabeth guiding them through it. All take a short turn reading aloud from the text, but the primary focus is on discussion and meaning.

T: If you're done with *Hungry Sharks*, put it here. If you want to look for more facts, keep it. Read *Time for Kids* on your own or with a partner. Read any articles you like.

The group has lasted twelve minutes.

Meeting with the Fourth Guided Reading Group

This group is in the middle of reading *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* by Ellen Appleby (New York: Scholastic, 1984) and, although these might be considered the "struggling" readers—relative to the rest of the class—all can proudly read.

T: What's happened so far? Who can remember?

S: The billy goats came across the bridge.

T: Yes, what did the troll always say?

S: (*All together*) Now I'm going to gobble you up!

The students continue reading, mostly orally to firm up strategies but with an occasional page read silently to promote independent problem solving. Some use line markers to help them keep their place. Focus is on discussing the story.

S: (*Stumbles over the word* second.)

T: Think who's on the bridge. (*The student self-corrects.*)

S: (*Having trouble with the word* voice)

T: Can you read on? Remember how the first billy goat was talking in a high, squeaky . . .

S: Voice

T: Read it the way the troll would say it.

S: (*Reads with expression*) Now I'm coming to gobble you up!

T: What does "Be off with you" mean?

S: It means "go away."

Elisabeth noticed that a few children had trouble with the word *trap* in the story. She pulls out the small chalkboards and asks the children to try writing the word *tap*, which she knew most would know. She then asks them to share what they had written with the students around them and change the spelling if needed. Next, she asks them to try writing the word *trap*. Then she directs them back to the book to check their spelling. Students are encouraged to change their spelling if needed and then to check their final spelling with each other. Next, Elisabeth asks them to write the word *cap* under the other words they have written and to underline the "ap" rime in each of the words. After that, she tells them each to say and write a word that contains the rime "ap." Other words they say and write are *chap*, *lap*, *flap*, *gap*, *nap*, *map*, and *rap*.

Finally, students are asked to read the story to someone else in the room. Elisabeth asks each one who they will share the story with to make certain they pick someone who can support their reading in the event help is needed. This reading group has lasted fourteen minutes.

MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES AND ACTIVITIES

Many teachers tell me that they overrely on whole-class reading because they can't manage multiple reading groups. Translated, that means "What would the rest of the class be doing while I'm teaching a guided reading group?" To ease that anxiety, some teachers who do use reading groups in their classrooms spend hours each week creating "seat work," busywork activities and projects designed specifically for management. Sometimes the only purpose of these activities is to keep students occupied while the teacher is engaged with the small group. As one teacher told me, "I know I'm doing too much, but I'm so worried about management." My advice is to keep written response to a minimum, especially in the early grades when what kids need most is time to enjoy and practice reading.

Excellent management is essential for effective teaching. Poor management often keeps teachers and students on one book way too long. Lara was a new primary grades teacher. Because management was such a problem (she was constantly interrupted so group went on for forty minutes instead of fifteen to twenty), she was only able to meet with two groups a day. She also had a hard time figuring out what to have kids doing that would hold their attention and keep them from interrupting her.

It usually takes teachers lots of trial-and-error time to devise a management system that they are comfortable with. Several first-grade teachers I know worked out elaborate management systems involving displays—wall boards, for example, with movable cards that explained what everyone in the class was to do outside of group. Most abandoned the system after a few months as the "management" of it was so burdensome and time consuming. One lamented, "Managing the system drove me crazy." Cathy Grieshop, who pioneered such a system, found that when she had sufficient numbers of books that kids could read, she no longer needed to manage the class around special activities. Each of her students now has his own bag of "just right" books that stays in the classroom. Most of these have been previously read in the guided reading group; some have been selected by Cathy, and others by the students.

Her management system now has kids:

- Read with a buddy (two books)
- Read independently (four to five books)
- Work on chart words
- Write a book, poem, letter, or journal entry

Indeed, when I am in her classroom, just about everyone is reading, and there is a quiet hum in the room as she works with small groups. Cathy structures the above activities more in the beginning of the school year; as the year goes on and kids can handle more on their own, they are given more independence and choice.

The important thing to remember is to have kids spend most of reading time reading,

not doing activities related to reading. Again, kids become readers by reading lots of material at their interest, experience, and independent reading level.

Procedures That Promote Effective Management

During guided reading group time, students need to know exactly what is expected of them. For me that means I cannot be interrupted (both from inside and outside the guided reading group), students may not wander around the room, the noise level must be low, and all students must be engaged in reading or a reading-related activity. So how does this happen?

The following are some procedures that have been effective for me and for teachers I have worked with. Adapt and add to them based on your own and students' needs.

- ***Make expectations clear.*** Negotiate with students what behaviors are desirable and acceptable while you are working with a group. Listing expected and allowable behaviors through a class shared writing—initially posted as a draft, tried out for effectiveness, and revised until you and your students reach agreement on a final version—is a good way to begin. Typically, such guidelines for working independently include acceptable voice level, what to do if a question arises, where in the room it is acceptable to work, completing assignments, and what to do if all work is finished. Some teachers will also include procedures for such things as bathroom use and pencil sharpening, if these have not yet been firmly established.

- ***Model everything.*** Just because you've suggested a behavior or listed it as a guideline, do not expect that students will "do it." Every expected behavior needs to be modeled—often repeatedly. One teacher told me, "I never realized how nitty-gritty I would have to get in setting up rules for small-group time—modeling everything from what students need to do when they have a problem to when and how to move about the room. The behaviors I expected did not occur until I modeled them with the children over and over again."

I demonstrate such things as how students should ask another person for assistance (whisper to someone in close proximity). After I model the behavior myself, I have two students demonstrate it while the class looks on. Next, I have small groups attempt it. After each demonstration, I ask, "How did we do?" and possibly, "What do we need to do better?" I also demonstrate how students should come up to the reading table for guided reading group (push chair in quietly, bring book and any other required materials, walk quietly). Similarly, I demonstrate what it looks like and sounds like when two students are partner reading.

- ***Place responsibility for expected behaviors on the students.*** When I am working with a group and the noise level distracts us, I say something to the class like, "We're having a problem working in group. Can someone tell me what the problem is and what you can do to fix it?" Then, I expect students to suggest what needs to be done. If they cannot, I scaffold for them. This is very different from having the teacher take over and tell a particular student or group of students to be quiet. When we continue to assume responsibility for student behavior, students have little motivation to monitor their own actions.

Some teachers find that it works well to have a table monitor (when students are

seated in groups) gently remind peers of expected behaviors. Again, teachers will first have to model this role, showing students how, as group monitors, they can best offer behavioral reminders to other students.

• ***Provide choice.*** When first-grade teacher Jim Henry abandoned required "seat work" activities, in which all students worked on the same assignment, in favor of "invitational" activities, in which students chose what they wanted to participate in, his management during reading time improved dramatically. He acknowledges that initially it was difficult to give up teacher control and trust students to responsibly manage their chosen activities, but the payoff for doing so was huge: "To my surprise I found that by providing options there were fewer discipline problems. Children had a greater interest in their work. That meant I was then better able to focus on the readers I was working with."

See *Invitations,* pages 87–102 and 437–445, for possible invitational activities, literature extensions, and plans for independent work in grades one through four.

• ***Get students focused quickly.*** Second-grade teacher Neal Robinson found that when he invited students to group by quietly and individually walking up to each student—rather than calling out their names—transitions between groups were a lot smoother.

First-grade teacher Cathy Grieshop uses a great management technique at the beginning of each guided reading group. As kids join the group, they pick a book from a box on the table that houses recently completed reading-group books. As the children read these books independently, she takes notes and observes them as readers. Not only does she gain information about these students that helps focus that day's reading, she is also able to use that brief time—three to five minutes—to help focus those several students in the room who have not yet settled into their reading book or activity.

• ***Have books readily available.*** Many teachers make sure that there are baskets or tubs of books at students' interest level and independent-reading level placed on desks and tables at which students are seated. Others make sure that each student has an individual bag of at least five books that can be read without teacher help.

• ***Post the assignment.*** Many teachers will post what each group of students are to do at the beginning of group time. Neal Robinson writes what each group is to do on an overhead transparency, which he leaves up during group time. Assignments usually include reading a chunk of text individually or with a partner and responding to the reading. Usually there is a guiding question, such as, "What's the problem?" or "What do you think of the story so far?"

I like to give the reading assignment at the end of our small-group reading time. I write it on a small chalkboard in front of the students, make sure everyone copies it into their reading response log, and check to be sure students understand what is expected. Some teachers have three or four such small boards (one for each reading group) and leave them visible so that students can copy at their own pace and everyone can refer back to the assignment—on the following day and when the group meets next. Keeping the assignment posted is also helpful for students who were absent.

• ***Assign More Reading.*** Our students know that the primary and first assignment is always reading. Second-grade teacher Ed Kmitt says, "Everything the kids do when I'm with a group stems from what they're reading. Kids know what to do, and that if everything is

done, you read. We have books in every corner of the room." (See the photo on page 85 in Chapter 3 for Ed's reading corner.)

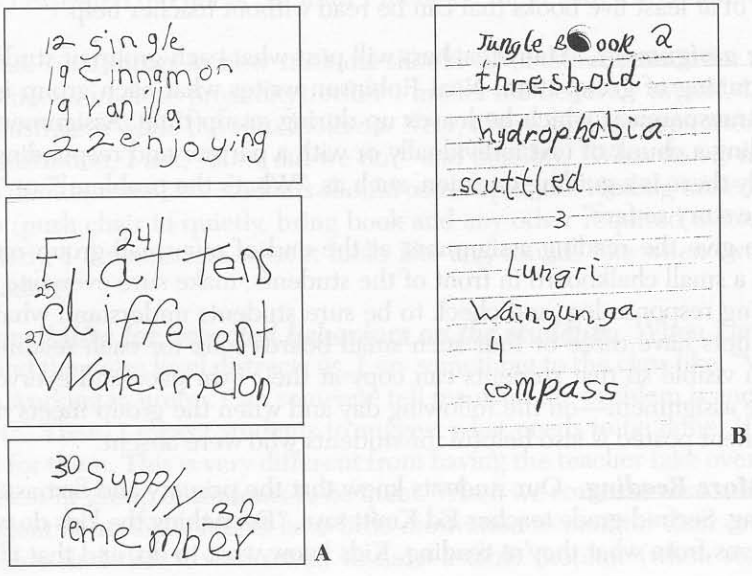
• ***Have students jot down difficult and interesting words and questions.*** Ask students to jot down words and concepts that are difficult/interesting and note page numbers so that words can be easily located. Teach students to use phonics plus context to figure out words. (Jennifer Shoda notes that until she showed kids how to figure out words using both strategies—phonics and meaning—students were writing down all words they couldn't "sound out." The number of words written decreased significantly after her demonstrations.)

Students enjoy having a small spiral notebook especially for writing these words, or they could use Post-it Notes for the same purpose. (See Figure 4–11.) Some teachers have students write words in their reading response logs.

• ***Encourage partner reading.*** Elisabeth Tuttle uses partner reading daily as a management strategy in first grade. She groups students of mixed ability and expects at least one partner-read book to be completed each week. Additionally, when students complete a book in group, they are expected to read it to someone in the classroom after group.

Second-grade teacher Loretta Martin uses partner reading as a management tool and to promote enjoyable, successful reading. She has partners choose a corner or place in the room, which becomes their permanent reading spot. Partners need not be reading the same book or be on the same reading level. However, if one gets "stuck," the other helps problem solve. That arrangement allows Loretta to confer with students individually or meet with a guided reading group without interruption. Loretta also encourages

Figure 4–11 Jotting down words, questions, and page numbers while reading: a second-grade developing reader in early fall (A), and a second-grade independent reader (B).



partners to do a book talk with each other about their respective books and first models exactly how that is done. (See pages 58 and 59 for book-talk guidelines.)

• ***Set up a listening center.*** Listening to a book on tape is a terrific management strategy. Especially for struggling readers who may be having difficulty focusing, simultaneously hearing and seeing the text seems to help them concentrate. Such listening and viewing also promotes story enjoyment and fluency. (See Photo 4-2.) Because books for older readers can be too time-consuming to tape, teachers sometimes locate a professionally prepared tape or elicit the recording services of a competent volunteer or former student.

First-grade teacher Elisabeth Tuttle sometimes puts her actual small-group guided reading lesson of a book on tape and finds it wonderfully reinforcing for developing readers, especially at the beginning of the year. She notes, "They meet with me, then go to the listening station and, in a way, meet with me again."

• ***Make the overhead projector accessible to students.*** Place an overhead projector on the floor and use a part of the wall or white paper as a backdrop. Then, a student or group of students can enjoy reading poems and picture books (which have been photocopied as transparencies for classroom use only) on the overhead projector. Developing readers can sequence pages, illustrate them with washable magic markers, find and circle rhyming words, add an original ending, and more. Some teachers also prepare word work such as word sorts (see page 428) on cut up, blank transparencies.

• ***Consider having multiple self-directed groups operating simultaneously.*** As described in Chapters 5 and 11, this arrangement works very well (especially above grade two) after it has been modeled and practiced. Students work collaboratively discussing a

Photo 4–2 Listening to a book on tape while the teacher is meeting with a small guided reading group

text in literature conversation groups, reading a news article or nonfiction piece (see pages 450–458), or doing a first reading of a chapter or section in preparation for literature conversations. The teacher then takes one group for guided reading.

Fourth-grade teacher Linda Cooper frequently has five simultaneous reading groups, often using literature related to the science or social studies curriculum. While she guides one heterogeneous group, the other groups help each other, using strategies they have learned through reciprocal teaching (pages 137–140), literature conversations (see Chapter 5), and other reading contexts throughout the day. To encourage the use of strategies—for example, what to do when meaning is lost or when a word needs to be pronounced or defined—each student has a bookmark noting important strategies that have been determined in a whole-class shared writing (Appendix D-2). Modeling their teacher, each group also uses a small white board to help decode hard words. Linda notes, "Unlike me, who jumps right in, the kids say, 'Would you like help?' Readers usually say, 'Yes,' 'Give me ten seconds,' or 'Let me have a try first.'"

Possible Activities

The more I teach with literature, the less crazed I become about "doing stuff" related to books. However, for management purposes during guided reading group time, some reading activities will need to be in place. Several effective management activities are mentioned below. See *Invitations*, pages 88–102, and pages 73–78 in this text, for more on worthwhile enterprises related to reading.

Readers Theatre

Readers Theatre is second-grade teacher Ed Kmitt's favorite management activity. For kids unfamiliar with the practice, Ed creates a script that the kids will then "perform," using dialogue and narration from familiar books. With modeling, students eventually learn how to dramatize texts themselves. Once he helps organize who will play the narrator(s) and characters, students work well independently reading and rereading their parts.

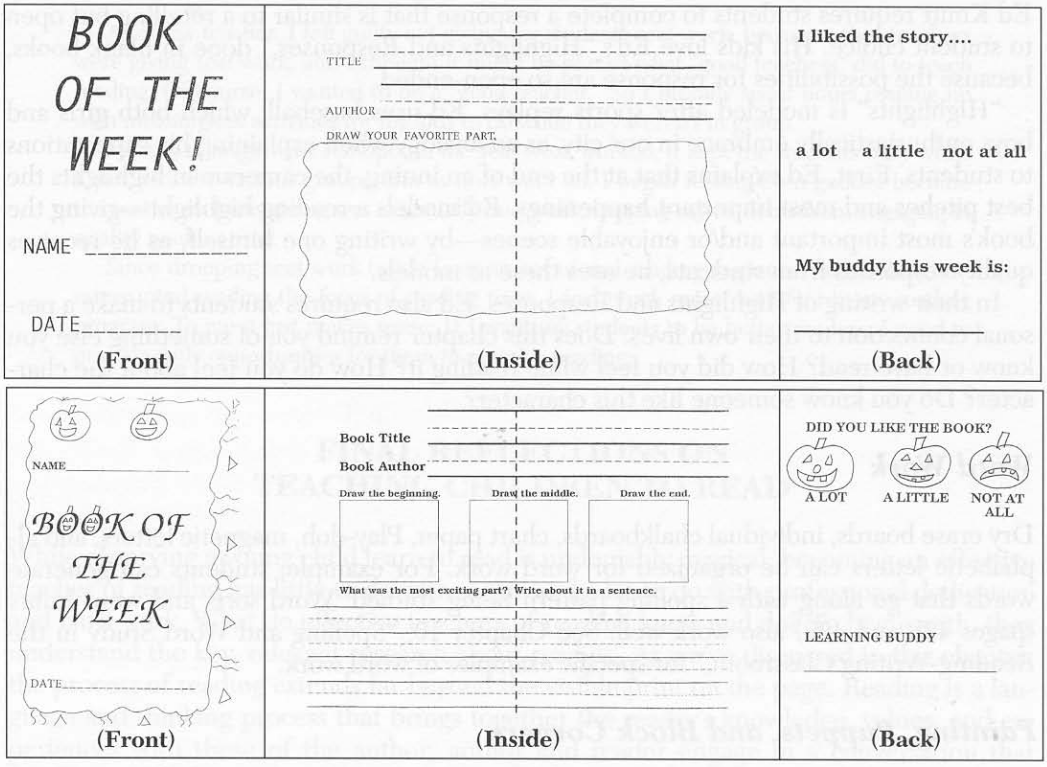
When I was in his classroom in late fall, a group was happily rehearsing *Fox in Love* by Edward Marshall. They had read through the script at least fifteen times and showed no signs of tiring of it. Because of this constant rereading, every student in the room could read the script fluently. (See pages 74 and 75 for procedures and additional information on Readers Theatre.)

Book-Related Projects

First-grade teachers Ruth Mardell and Elisabeth Tuttle create a "Book of the Week" project, with simple variations, using booklets made from folding an $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$". (See Figure 4-12 for examples of two booklets.)

I sometimes write our own reading text with students in group (as I did for Angie, page 124), photocopy it, and have students illustrate the story and practice reading it. I use $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$" copy paper (as opposed to folded paper) because it's easier to assemble pages quickly.

Figure 4–12 Two variations of a Book of the Week project (folded 8 1/2 × 11-inch sheet of paper)



Student-Designed Group or Individual Activities

Although I am careful to limit projects that take time away from reading, once in a while murals and other involved projects can be terrific. Some students shine through the visual and creative arts, and best remember salient features of text through "doing." Additionally, group planning and collaboration can expand text understanding.

I once asked a small group to suggest their own activity for *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* by Beverly Cleary. After reading a chapter in the book that features a maze, they decided to build their own maze. They devised a plan, assembled materials, and using class time and lunch recess built a complex cardboard maze that became a favorite with the class pygmy gerbil.

Reading Response Logs

While reading response logs can be a vehicle for fostering deeper understanding of literature, this is often not the case. As one principal said to me, "We're killing reading response logs." Often reading response assignments amount to nothing more than "Read

this chapter, answer these questions, and look up these vocabulary words." We must guard against the "workbook" model when using reading response logs.

For about one out of every three to five books his students read, second-grade teacher Ed Kmitt requires students to complete a response that is similar to a retelling but open to student choice. His kids love Ed's "Highlights and Responses," done in blank books, because the possibilities for response are so open-ended.

"Highlights" is modeled after sports replays. Ed uses baseball, which both girls and boys enthusiastically embrace in our city, as an analogy when explaining his expectations to students. First, Ed explains that at the end of an inning, the cameraman highlights the best pitches and most important happenings. Ed models a reading highlight—giving the book's most important and/or enjoyable scenes—by writing one himself; as he receives quality responses from students, he uses these as models.

In their writing of Highlights and Responses, Ed also requires students to make a personal connection to their own lives: Does this chapter remind you of something else you know or have read? How did you feel while reading it? How do you feel about the character? Do you know someone like this character?

Word Work

Dry erase boards, individual chalkboards, chart paper, Play-doh, magnetic letters, and alphabetic letters can be organized for word work. For example, students can generate words that go along with a spelling pattern being studied. Word sorts and word hunts (pages 428 and 429) also work well. See Chapter 10, "Spelling and Word Study in the Reading-Writing Classroom," for specific examples of word work.

Painting, Puppets, and Block Corners

I have never understood why creative response involving painting easels, block corners, felt boards, and puppets seem to vanish after kindergarten. Children continue to love opportunities to create and respond to literature through artistic expression, dramatic play, and structures they create. First-grade teacher Elisabeth Tuttle notes that "including these [materials] in my room helps to keep learning to read exciting and motivating. In fact, whenever I find a group frustrated or bored, I ask if they want to do a Readers Theatre or puppet show. It brings back all the excitement and keeps them going!"

High school English teacher Holly Burgess concurs, noting that her students love artistic and dramatic response and that such activities can "level the playing field." She says, "I have one student who is very reluctant to write, but his drawings show imagination and attention to detail that surpasses many written responses. While I've used 'art' responses for a long time, I realized that I 'value' them less than written responses in terms of credit given. Now I am careful to value artistic responses as much as written assessments."

The Well-Managed Classroom

Effective management systems are in place when books and interesting reading materials are readily available to students, lessons reflect ongoing assessment of students' needs

and interests, and busywork is not in evidence because children are "busy" reading. Second-grade teacher Neal Robinson shares his initial struggles with management and where he is now, as a third-year teacher:

> As a new teacher, I felt guilty not giving my students seat work, because other teachers were giving seat work, and I thought it might be part of what "good teachers" did to teach reading. Of course, I wanted to be a "good teacher." So I literally spent hours coming up with meaningless activities for my kids to do while they weren't in group.
>
> From a management standpoint, the seat work worked; it kept the students busy while I met with the various groups. But as time went on, I began feeling even guiltier because the seat work I was giving was essentially busywork, keeping my students from engaging in quality reading time.
>
> Since dropping seat work (aside from an occasional reading response) and making uninterrupted reading the focus of reading time, I feel much more confident in my reading program. To me it just makes sense: If I want my students to be better readers, I need to provide daily opportunities for them to practice reading.

FINAL REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING CHILDREN TO READ

While observing a young child learn to read is undeniably magical, becoming an effective teacher of reading has little to do with magic and a lot to do with professional dedication and hard work. What do effective teachers of reading know and do? To begin with, they understand the key, relevant research about reading. As we've discussed in this chapter, the process of reading extends far beyond the visible print on the page. Reading is a language and thinking process that brings together the reader's knowledge, values, and experiences with those of the author; author and reader engage in a conversation that is—first and foremost—meaningful. Successful reading entails the skillful orchestration of multiple strategies that enable the reader to construct meaning from the printed page—it's not about using an eclectic mix of skills "to get the words."

Secondly, effective teachers of reading are sensitive, careful observers of their own students. They understand how to temper their instruction to meet the unique challenges and needs of each and every student. Finally, effective teachers understand their own reading processes. As readers themselves, they understand what it means to live a rich reading life and they draw on that life for inspiration in their own teaching. Accordingly, they consider coherent texts, reader interest, students' experiences, and the physical classroom setting that invites students to browse, read, and enjoy books.

Our ultimate goal, of course, is to foster a love of reading—to help our students discover and revel in the magic of reading. In this way, we know that they will choose to read and to go on reading over the course of a lifetime.

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

• ***Read and discuss current research studies on reading.*** Form a study group. Use resources listed in The Blue Pages, pages 22b–26b, as a beginning. Be sure you know how to