

CHAPTER 2

Guiding Students' Literacy Success

Focus Questions

Prior to reading, try to answer the following questions:

1. What comes to your mind when you think of "literacy"?
 2. Why and how do teachers assess students throughout a school year?
 3. Think of an exemplary teacher you have observed teaching. How did he or she know if students were on track for their grade level—and how did this teacher differentiate instruction?
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Reading Research to Know

As the era of No Child Left Behind comes to an end, the word *assessment* often invokes unpleasant thoughts of continuous testing and test-preparation instruction in schools (Allington, 2002). Since Reading First legislation, schools have been required to use standardized test results as a way for measuring **adequate yearly progress** (AYP). Schools that could not demonstrate AYP risked being restaffed and/or losing federal money to support their school programs. Many researchers question the validity of high-stakes testing since improvement on such assessments could be a result of more time spent on test preparation and students' ongoing familiarity with the test questions and procedures (Klein, Hamilton, McCaffrey, & Stecher, 2000; Koretz & Barron, 1998; Vacca & Vacca, 2008). More recently, Peter Afflerbach (2004) composed a policy brief for the National Reading Conference, which outlined research-based concerns for standardized testing—and how such testing does not give a clear picture of a child's reading capabilities. High-stakes testing also places English language learners (ELL) at a disadvantage since these tests do not take into consideration students' diverse language and cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2001; Gitlin, Buendía, Crossland, & Doumbia, 2003; Greenfield, 1997). For ELLs who have been in the country for only a few

years, tests that are administered only in English present an unfair assessment of their learning and abilities (Lenski, Ehlers-Zavala, Daniel, & Sun-Irminger, 2006). For that reason, we are focusing this chapter on ongoing, and oftentimes informal and teacher-created assessments that can inform reading instruction. Such ongoing assessment gives teachers a full picture of a child's accomplishments and areas for improvement. Typically in literacy texts, the chapter that discusses assessment is left for the end of the book. As we discussed chapter organization and what preservice and novice teachers need to know about teaching literacy, we realized the importance of including such a chapter in the beginning. Teachers assess their students throughout the school year by using checklists, **anecdotal records**, **running records**, and **informal reading inventories**. While these terms are defined and explained further in the chapter, we want to emphasize the very importance of assessment since it guides instruction within exemplary teachers' classrooms. Based on the International Reading Association's (IRA's) position on excellent reading teachers, we examine the following aspects of assessment: use of flexible groups to differentiate instruction, continuous informal assessment of students, while linking new material to prior knowledge, and providing strategic reading help to students—by “listening in” to students (IRA, 2000).

Grouping and Learning to Read

Effective literacy teachers recognize the importance of grouping students for reading instruction, and such teachers often use **flexible grouping** to divide students into groups based on assessments of their instructional reading level and school district progress reports of reading. Effective teachers know they cannot teach children how to read effectively by relying solely on **whole-class instruction**, which is teaching a whole-class reading lesson in which all students are expected to read the same piece of literature at the same pace. New teachers often do not have the expertise to know how to group students, and frequently resort to whole-class instruction, or **ability grouping**. **Ability groups** are formed when teachers group students based on students' abilities or reading levels, and do not rotate group members. Twenty years of research document the negative results of whole-class instruction. When teachers teach using only whole-class instruction, individual student needs are not met; even more staggering, students are not given access to the material and knowledge that they need to learn (Goodlad & Oakes, 1988; Oakes, 1986, 1988; Opitz, 1998; Reutzel, 2003; Worthy & Hoffman, 1996). Whole-class instruction is a “one size fits all” form of teaching in which teachers teach students how to read using teacher-selected literature—usually from a basal textbook. All students read the same story, despite varying levels of success in reading and comprehending texts. Round-robin reading often occurs in such classrooms. **Round-robin reading** is when teachers have students read aloud from a text and move from student to student in a classroom—as each student reads aloud from the text. This type of instruction is not effective because students frequently focus only on their particular assigned oral reading and ignore the paragraphs read by their peers. Likewise, this type of instruction focuses only on oral fluency, and comprehension is disregarded.

In contrast, **ability grouping** places children in groups based on standardized test scores. Such groups are usually regarded as high, medium, and low reading groups—and

teachers often give these groups names to try to conceal the different ability levels. Generations of adults remember the groups they were placed in during their early years of schooling, and such group names as Eagles, Robins, and Buzzards stick with children throughout a lifetime. No one wants to be a “buzzard.” Despite creative naming of groups, children usually uncover the meaning of such groups—and learning that one is in the “low” group can be devastating and create lifelong self-concept issues (Eder, 1983; Hiebert, 1983; Rosenbaum, 1980). Just as in whole-class instruction, teachers often use round-robin reading in ability groups, and primarily select readings from class basals for students to read. As a result, students are frequently disengaged—while their self-image and peer groups are determined (Harp, 1989; Oakes, 1988; Wuthrick, 1990).

Flexible grouping is a way to group students into temporary groups based on their level of independence (Reutzel, 2003). Reutzel distinguishes the key differences between ability and flexible grouping strategies; these differences are highlighted in Table 2.1.

TABLE 2.1 Ability and Flexible Groups

<i>Ability Groups</i>	<i>Flexible Groups</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified based on standardized test scores. • Reading material is selected by the teacher, and reading revolves around basal texts. • Teachers give students low-level tasks. • Texts are read through round-robin reading. • Assessment decisions are based on standardized test scores. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent reading in leveled books. • Reading material is chosen by the teacher and the student. • Use of leveled books and trade books. • Teachers give students a variety of high-level tasks. • Texts are read through guided reading and silent reading. • Assessment decisions are based on informal measures, such as running records, checklists.

Teachers use both leveled and trade books during **guided reading** instruction in their flexible groups. Guided reading instruction is one important component of flexible grouping. The next section describes what guided reading is and strategies for teachers to consider as they implement guided reading in flexible grouping.

Guided Reading

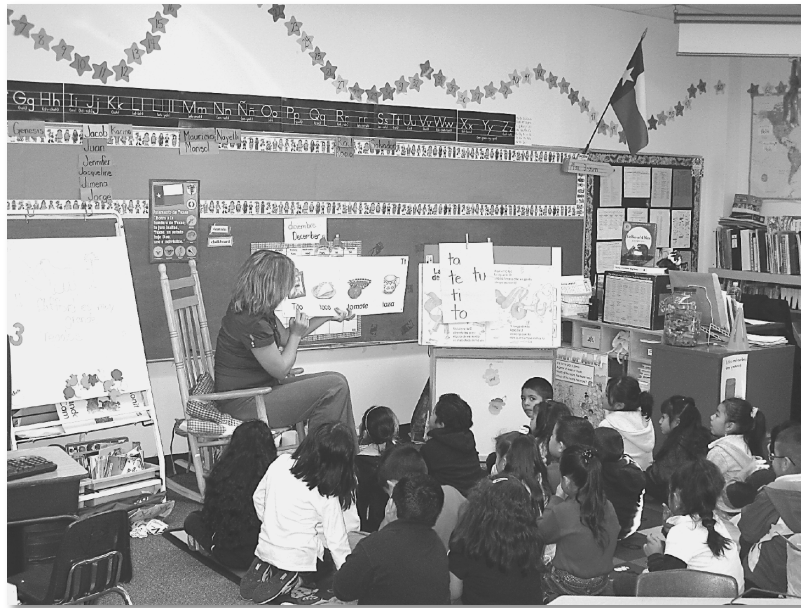
The term *guided reading* was coined by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell (1996, 2005). Guided reading is a way for teachers to support readers as they learn how to use new strategies for reading texts. In a guided reading group, the teacher works with a small group of students who are able to read similar texts at the same level. **Leveled text sets** are texts that have the same level of difficulty. A leveled text collection consists of set of books that range in difficulty from very easy books to books that have more complex plots and vocabulary.

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A guided reading lesson begins with the teacher introducing the text and briefly discussing it. The teacher serves as a guide while the students read, noting the strategies students use to solve problems while reading the text. Teachers who use guided reading groups emphasize the importance of making meaning of the text while using reading strategies. Fountas and Pinnell (1996, 2005) describe the roles both teachers and their students take during guided reading, while noting the types of instruction used **before, during, and after reading**.

Before reading a text, the teacher chooses the text based both on how supportive it would be for the group of students and that it would present a few challenges. The teacher also spends time introducing the story—and poses questions for the children to think about while they read. At the same time, children are engaged in a conversation about the story, prior to reading. They make predictions about the text—and discuss questions they may have about the text.

During reading, the teacher “listens in” as students read the text. Effective literacy teachers “listen in” to students to assess children’s reading fluency and comprehension while they read. These teachers help their students make personal connections to what they are reading—and talk in depth with the students about the story they have read. They also teach students how they can make connections to the text they are reading. One way to guide students to make such connections is to show them how to compare a story or a book to



Jessica Brown’s prekindergarten dual language class, Westcliff Elementary, Fort Worth Independent School District

their own lives, making text-to-self connections. Other types of comparisons include text-to-text and text-to-world connections. Table 2.2 illustrates how children can examine a book and think of personal examples to connect to the book. Making connections helps guide students' understanding and comprehension of a text. While reading the text, the students read softly to themselves—and when they have a question they ask the teacher for help.

For students who are learning English as a second language, making personal connections to a text helps them connect their past experiences to the text they are reading. Lenski, Ehlers-Zavala, Daniel, & Sun Irminger (2006) emphasize the importance of teachers modeling to show students how to self-assess. These authors also suggest that students use a connections chart while reading a story or book, noting the connections they can make to other books, school learning, and to themselves. This strategy encourages students to read critically, making connections to their past learning, their selves, and books they have read in the past.

TABLE 2.2 Text Connections	
<i>What it is about . . .</i>	<i>What it reminds me of . . .</i>
<p><i>Owen & Mzee</i>, by Isabella Hatcoff, Craig Hatcoff, and Paula Kahumbu</p> <p>It is about a baby hippo that everyone saves and how the baby hippo becomes friends with a turtle.</p>	<p>It reminds me of my best friend and how we do everything together. (t-s)</p> <p>It reminds me of the <i>Frog and Toad</i> stories because they are good friends too. (t-t)</p>
<p><i>What Happens to a Hamburger?</i> by Paul Showers</p> <p>It is about what happens inside your body after you eat food.</p>	<p>It reminds me of eating somewhere like McDonald's. (t-s)</p>
<p><i>Mosquito Bite</i>, by Alexandra Siy & Dennis Konkel</p> <p>It is about mosquitoes, how they grow, and what happens when they bite you.</p>	<p>It reminds me of when I am outside playing and get bit by a mosquito and my mom puts stuff on it so it won't itch. (t-s)</p>
<p><i>Actual Size</i>, by Steve Jenkins</p> <p>It is about ways we can measure up against different animals.</p>	<p>It reminds me of the time I went to the zoo. (t-s)</p> <p>It reminds me of the article I saw in the newspaper about the really big tiger. (t-w)</p>
<p><i>Danger! Volcanoes</i>, by Seymour Simon</p> <p>It shows many photos of volcanoes and lava.</p>	<p>It reminds me of when you shake a soda bottle and when you open the top, it explodes. (t-s)</p> <p>The lava reminds me of how bright the sun shines on a hot day. (t-s)</p> <p>It reminds me of the hurricane I saw on the news because they both can destroy property. (t-w)</p>

t-s = text to self

t-t = text to text

t-w = text to world

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After reading the text, the talk about the text continues. The teacher and children discuss their predictions—and they revisit the text to point out problems that need to be solved. During guided reading, teachers are continually assessing how students are reading, especially during and after the reading. As the teacher assesses student comprehension of the text and the strategies students use to solve problems when reading, the teacher makes decisions on how to instruct during guided reading.

In summary, effective literacy teachers model these important aspects of guided reading—before, during, and after reading with groups of students. Exemplary literacy teachers continually assess how students are reading, especially during and after the reading (IRA, 2000). As the teacher assesses student comprehension of the text and the strategies students use to solve problems when reading, the teacher makes decisions on how to plan future instruction.

Within a balanced literacy program, teachers teach reading and writing using a variety of reading methods and strategies. Teachers assess students continuously throughout the reading and writing process. Table 2.3 explains typical elements found in literacy classrooms throughout the nation. In such classrooms, teachers provide varying levels of support to their students. With kindergarten students there is a high level of teacher support, but as students progress and become more independent readers and writers, such support is withdrawn. The goal of such reading and writing elements is for all children to develop and become independent readers and writers. Researchers often refer to this event as a **gradual release of responsibility**. Table 2.3 shows the gradual release of the teacher's responsibility during literacy instruction—as students become increasingly independent readers and writers.

TABLE 2.3 Types of Reading/Writing and Levels of Teacher Support

<i>Reading/Writing Element</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Level of Support</i>
Reading aloud	The teacher reads a text out loud to children.	The teacher provides a high level of support while encouraging children to respond to the story and to pictures in the text.
Shared reading	Children read a text with the teacher. Typically, each child has his or her own copy of the text. Children often read the text chorally during rereadings.	There is a high level of teacher support; however, the students support one another as they find ways to read and make meaning of a text together.
Guided reading	Students are grouped in small, flexible groups—typically on the same reading level. The teacher selects and introduces a text, and the children read the text.	There is some teacher support, but less support is needed than with reading aloud and shared reading. Children problem solve as they read a new text—and they are mostly independent during guided reading.

<i>Reading/Writing Element</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Level of Support</i>
Independent reading or silent sustained reading (SSR)	The children read silently to themselves or out loud to a partner.	Very little teacher support is needed—students are independent.
Interactive writing	Children “share the pen” with the teacher as they write. All children and the teacher participate in composing. Then, they read the text chorally—or together through a shared reading. Teachers often post the completed interactive writing in the classroom for further re-readings.	There is a high level of teacher support. The students decide on the message—and then each word (word by word) is composed by the entire group.
Guided writing	The teacher works one on one with a small group or the whole class by providing mini lessons on how to develop their writing. Such mini lessons could include: ways to develop crafting techniques (a lead, an ending, etc.), or ideas for developing content or refining mechanics.	There is some teacher support, but not as much as for interactive writing. The teacher acts more as a guide than as the instructional leader.
Independent writing	Students write on their own, independently.	There is little teacher support.

Teacher-Created Assessment

This section of the chapter will discuss how teachers can assess students' reading. We will not discuss fluency in detail in this chapter; however, we will examine informal reading inventories (IRIs) and ways that teachers can create classroom-based assessments. Additionally, we will discuss both why and how teachers keep running records, which allow teachers to keep track of students' reading progress throughout the year.

Informal reading inventories (IRIs) provide teachers with information about a student's reading level. IRIs do not provide a diagnosis; instead they inform classroom teachers which students can and cannot read well. IRIs have been used by teachers for at least 20 years, both those that are commercially published and ones that teachers have created themselves (Afflerbach, 2008; Paris & Carpenter, 2003; Pikulski & Shanahan, 1982; Walpole & McKenna, 2006). Commercially designed IRIs tend to have the following components: graded word lists, reading passages, and comprehension questions (Afflerbach, 2008). Many of these commercially prepared IRIs focus on **graded word lists**, which typically have between 10 and 30 words. The words on the lists are considered to be high-frequency words that need to be known for the grade level assessed. Key aspects of reading, based on No Child

Left Behind legislation, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, are also often assessed with commercially prepared IRIs. Graded word lists are usually the first section of a commercially prepared IRI. The words range in difficulty, and the purpose of the word list is to provide information on a student's decoding ability and sight word ability (Afflerbach, 2008). Based on a student's success or difficulty in completing the word list, teachers determine which reading passage the child will then read. This determination is often made based on a formula—and the specific formula seems to vary somewhat among the various reading inventories.

Next, teachers calculate the words that are correctly pronounced to determine the student's performance on the word list. The next section of the IRI is the reading passage, which focuses on students' ability to retell the story and to answer comprehension questions about the passage. Lastly, the silent reading and listening comprehension sections end the IRI assessment. This section of the IRI requires students to read and think independently from the teacher. Besides IRIs, there are a variety of other methods for keeping a record of student progress.

Anecdotal records are a way for teachers to keep track of student progress over a long period of time. They are also a way for teachers to note particular areas in which students need additional help or instruction. Typically, anecdotal records are brief and very focused. Comments are usually kept in chronological order—and over time a teacher can examine the comments to note areas of student strength and weaknesses. Table 2.4 shows a sample anecdotal record.

Anecdotal records are also an effective way for teachers to document “listening in” to students. “Listening in” is a way to monitor children's daily progress during guided reading.

Day	Kaitlin	Cate	Aiden	Jacob
Monday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared how she has developed a lead in her writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prefers to work alone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having difficulty with memoir Conference Wed. 	
Tuesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having difficulty generating ideas for writer's notebook 			
Wednesday		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not want to share her writing with her table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working on sorting ideas Prioritizing, outlining 	
Thursday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Found interesting ideas to write about in her writer's notebook; shared with her table 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed writing portfolio and evaluated his writing using the checklist for narratives

For example, during a guided reading lesson, a teacher may take anecdotal notes—noting whether students are able to identify chunks when they are decoding a word. The teacher may ask students to look at the word *har vest er*, to identify any *chunks*. **Chunks** are pronounceable parts of a word that can be recognized without an analysis of the word. When emergent readers examine chunks while reading a book, they are better able to pronounce polysyllabic words. When working with a guided reading group, teachers take notes on the strategies children use, and do not use, not only to decode words but also to comprehend text. Anecdotal records are an effective way to keep records of student progress.

Effective literacy teachers specifically monitor students' daily progress by "listening in" to oral reading and by taking running records to monitor students' word-solving strategies. **Running records** give teachers a way to analyze, record, and score a child's reading behaviors. Many teachers and researchers refer to Marie Clay's book, *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (2006), since Clay is credited with creating the idea and form of running records. Learning to take running records takes both time and practice, but such effort is worthwhile for both the teacher and the student.

How do you take a running record? First, you must find a quiet place to sit down one-on-one with a child. Typically, both the child and teacher have a copy of the text. While the child orally reads from a book that has already been read once or twice, the teacher records with a check mark those words that the child accurately reads. In some instances, the teacher will select a text that the child has not read before—especially in the context of a Reading Recovery program, which is a program that serves children who are struggling to learn to read and who need additional support from the teacher to achieve independent reading. In a mainstream classroom, keeping running records, the teacher records and codes the child's behavior while reading—and does not offer support or intervention while the child reads. The teacher serves as an observer in order to record the child's reading behaviors accurately. Teachers often find that keeping running records of students' ability to decode gives them a fuller picture of the strategies children know and the ones they need to know. For an in-depth examination of how to complete a running record, please refer to the reference section of this chapter. We provide a comprehensive list of Web sites, books, and articles that describe how to complete and score a running record.

Inside the Classroom: Hawthorne Elementary School, Madison, Wisconsin

Cynthia M. Schmidt and Catherine McMillan

Like many urban schools, Hawthorne Elementary School is made up of children from diverse backgrounds: 30% Caucasian, 17% Asian, 14% Hispanic, 36% African American, 2% Native American, and 2% other ethnicities. Sixty-three percent of Hawthorne students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Administrators and staff are keenly aware that some of the linguistic and cultural differences among their students are often associated with lower standardized reading scores. However, the principal and teachers view the diversity in children's languages and cultures as strengths of their school community. They are concerned about students' reading scores, but assessment means much more

than making adequate yearly progress (AYP) on standardized tests. Teachers at Hawthorne School use assessment as a tool to guide their literacy instruction.

The following vignette describes how one teacher uses her guided reading groups to connect meaningful assessment and instruction. Throughout this chapter, pseudonyms are used for all children to protect their privacy. Sarah Daines is a fourth-year teacher who is teaching a split second- and third-grade class with 17 students: 7 second graders and 10 third graders. Five of these children have individual educational plans (IEPs), one second grader receives additional reading instruction from a Title I teacher, and one child is in a talented and gifted program. Sarah team teaches with another second-/third-grade teacher, and they use flexible grouping to divide children from both classrooms into reading groups based on quarterly assessments of each student's instructional reading level and progress reports on the school district's Essential Outcomes in Reading (Opitz & Ford, 2001).

This quarter Sarah has three reading groups, all reading nonfiction books. Sarah has different instructional goals for each group of readers, and she selects books from Hawthorne's extensive collection of leveled text sets to match curriculum goals and grade level outcomes, and to meet the needs and interests of children in each small group (Fountas & Pinnell, 2005).

During the 90-minute reading block, Sarah meets for 30 minutes with each of her three reading groups. At the beginning of the school year, Sarah worked hard to help her children learn classroom routines and develop the stamina to read and write independently while she works with one reading group at a time (Calkins, 2001). Some children are reading books in the library corner; some are reading and writing responses to books at small tables; others are reading along with books on tape to improve their fluency.

The general structure of a reading group involves an introductory teaching point or discussion of the story, time for Sarah to "listen in" to individual readers, a final discussion to share thoughts about the text, and the introduction of the next text segment and a related comprehension strategy response sheet (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). To an observer, the group time appears to have the natural rhythm of a conversation about the book; but Sarah uses the time efficiently and purposefully to teach and assess her readers. She uses three types of assessment tools to monitor children's daily progress during guided reading groups:

1. "Listening in" to oral reading and taking running records to monitor word-solving strategies
2. Taking notes related to students' comprehension and strategies used during discussions
3. Evaluating students' written products for evidence of strategies and understanding

After meeting with her groups, Sarah reflects on this information and writes anecdotal records related to the Essential Outcomes in Reading for each grade level. She keeps a checklist to help her organize and keep track of the anecdotal records related to these outcomes each week. Table 2.5 shows a sample list of Essential Outcomes in Reading.

TABLE 2.5 Essential Outcomes in Reading

Hawthorne 3rd Grade: Essential Outcomes in Reading**Uses reading strategies (rereads, reads on, self-corrects)**

- Use multiple strategies
- Prior knowledge and context
- Apply all cues and text features to read for meaning
 - Apply punctuation cues
 - Self-correction strategies
 - Pictures, graphs, and diagrams
 - Information in the story
 - Titles and headings
 - Language structure
 - Apply phonetic principles
 - Use knowledge of less common vowel patterns
 - Use knowledge of letter-sound relationships
- Knowledge of different genres (e.g., less focus on absence of punctuation in poetry)

Applies comprehension strategies to independent reading

- Comprehend a variety of printed material
 - Make connections between previous experiences and prior knowledge, and reading selections
 - Make, confirm, or revise predictions
 - Ask and answer questions
 - Identify important ideas and provide support
- Compare and contrast settings, characters, and events
 - Recognize that characters can be stereotyped in a text
 - Organize information or events logically
 - Paraphrase information found in nonfiction materials
 - Use information to learn about new topics
 - Summarize important events/facts
 - Visualize
 - Infer
 - Determine importance
 - Synthesize
- Set a purpose for reading
- Preview and use text formats (e.g., headings, graphics, illustrations, indices, and table of contents)
 - Read text structures with fluency
 - Use story maps, Venn diagrams, webs, etc., to organize information
 - Select appropriate material and adjust reading strategies for different texts and purposes
- Identify author's and characters' points of view

(Continued)

TABLE 2.5 (Continued)

- Identify characteristics of different genres, including folk tales, biographies, social studies/science texts, poetry, etc.
 - Sequence plot in fiction texts
 - Compare and contrast characters in fiction stories
 - Compare and contrast lives of people in biographies and autobiographies

Reads aloud with fluency and expression

- Select appropriate material and adjust reading strategies for different texts and purposes
- Make connections between previous experiences and reading selections
- Apply prior knowledge and context clues
 - Read with expressive phrasing
 - Reread or slows to problem solve
 - Attend to punctuation
 - Attend to meaning
 - Apply knowledge of text features to interpret language structures
- Organize information or events logically
- Read text structures with fluency
- Identify the characteristics of different genres
 - Compare and contrast different genres

Reads books for enjoyment and information at an independent level

- Have stamina to read for at least 30–40 minutes
- Read from different genres, authors and topics
- Use information to learn about new topics
- Identify important ideas and provides support
- Set a purpose for reading
- Select appropriate material and adjust reading strategies for different texts and purposes

Reading Groups

Sarah convenes each reading group at the round table in the reading nook. Anchor charts describing the reading strategies they are working on this quarter are posted on the walls.

First Reading Group: Biographies

The first reading group consists of four girls who are reading biographies of famous women written at a fourth-grade level. We will hear more about this group of girls in the case study at the end of this chapter.

Second Reading Group: *Ant Cities*

The second group of children includes Jasmine, Stefan, and Marco, all second graders, who are reading *Ant Cities* by Arthur Dorros, written at a second- and third-grade level.



Sarah Daines, Hawthorne Elementary School, Madison, Wisconsin

Sarah explains her goals for this group:

We are working on the comprehension strategy of determining importance, but students in this group still need help in using their word-solving strategies. They get stuck on many words and have trouble coordinating their strategies, so I am working to help them monitor their understanding and use their strategies independently.

Sarah begins by asking students to summarize what they have learned about ants, but she spends most of her 30 minutes “listening in” to individual students reading. In the following scene, Sarah prompts Stefan to use his word-solving strategies:

Stefan: Their wings droop off.

Sarah: Does that make sense? Can you try that sentence again to see what word might fit?

Stefan: Their wings drop off.

Sarah: That’s right. Now how did you know that word was “drop” and not “droop”?

Sarah praises Stefan for figuring out the right word, and she is also assessing his ability to explain his word-solving strategies. When Sarah “listens in” to Jasmine, she takes a running record of one page of text without prompting Jasmine to correct her miscues.

Finally, Sarah introduces the next section of the text, which students will read for tomorrow. “We are going to read about harvester ants.” She writes *harvester ants* on the board, separated into syllables: “har vest er.” She asks, “Do you see any chunks that you know? Can you say it with me?” Students read the word aloud together. Sarah explains that she has a text-to-self connection with harvester ants that she saw carrying off a dead beetle in her garden the other day (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). Jasmine and Stefan say that they have seen ants carrying bugs on the sidewalks.

Marco asks, “I wonder if harvester ants eat other ants or just different types of bugs?” Sarah responds, “Now that’s an interesting question. Let’s see if we find the answer when we read this next part of the book.” Finally, Sarah introduces the response sheet for determining importance that students will fill out while they are reading the next section of text. (This response sheet is the same as the one listed below for group three.)

Later in the day, Sarah explains what she learned by monitoring children’s oral reading and discussion today:

Stefan corrected his miscue and was able to explain in his own words how he figured out the word was “drop” instead of “droop.” I could see that he was using both graphophonic cues and meaning cues. That is an important goal for him; to self-correct and to take more control of his own reading strategies without prompting from me. I took a running record with Jasmine today because she does not seem to be making the kind of progress I expect in her word-solving strategies. I want to compare the running record with her other, more formal, quarterly assessments, to see if I can make a plan to help her improve during the remaining months this year. I was pleased that Marco asked an authentic question about whether harvester ants would eat other ants or just different types of insects. That shows me he is really thinking about what he is reading and making connections that are personal and appropriate.

Third Reading Group: *How You Talk*

The third reading group has one second grader, Erika, and three third graders: Cesar, Tanisha, and Daniel. This group is reading another nonfiction book at a second-/third-grade level related to science, *How You Talk*, by Paul Showers (1992). The book offers good material to support understanding of abstract processes; for example, drawings and explanations that are intended to help the reader understand concepts such as air flowing through the lungs. The children are all reading with reasonable fluency, and their word-solving strategies are in place. Consequently, Sarah spends less time listening to individuals read orally, and more time talking with the group about comprehension strategies for determining important ideas. The personal interactions among children in this group are more complicated than in the other two reading groups. Tanisha keeps looking around the room; Daniel is distracted by small noises; and Sarah has to work hard to engage the group in a worthwhile discussion.

Before meeting with the group, Sarah explains her focus for this lesson based on her monitoring of comprehension strategies used in recent group discussions:

When I ask them to retell, they just respond with random facts and they don't notice relationships among facts, so I am trying to get them to focus on the most important ideas . . . Sometimes, the problem is they are just not engaging or really connecting with what they are reading, so I am trying to make it relevant and interesting for them to learn about how sounds are produced when we talk.

In the following scene, Sarah tries to help students make relevant connections with the text by using their own bodies to follow the steps of breathing illustrated in the text. Sarah begins with a connection to their previous response sheets:

Some of you wrote on your response sheets that you liked the examples of experiments and diagrams in this book, so let's talk about one of those diagrams where the author compares how the air in your lungs moves in and out like the air in a balloon. How is the balloon in this diagram like your lungs?

There is no response from students, so Sarah asks students to "act out" the diagram in the text:

OK, let's look at the picture in the book, Now, everybody take a deep breath in. *[Everyone inhales.]* Point to your lungs. Now breathe out and point to your larynx. Can you feel how the air flows? *[Students are breathing in and out and touching their throats.]* Who can make a connection with this drawing?

Tanisha: I have blown up balloons.

Sarah: No, not just any connection, I want a connection that helps you understand this book.

Sarah is not getting the types of connections she wants from this discussion, so she shows students the response sheet she has already prepared to help them make stronger and more personal connections with the text. Table 2.6 is an example of such a response sheet.

TABLE 2.6 Determining Importance Response Sheet		
<i>Determining Importance</i>		
<i>3 things I found out:</i>	<i>2 interesting things:</i>	<i>1 question I still have:</i>
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	
3.		

Sarah takes time when introducing this response sheet to emphasize the types of responses she expects through modeling and interactive dialogue with her students:

Before we read on, let's talk about the type of thinking we want to show on our response sheets. In the first column, for three things I found out, let's write new things, not something you already know. Everyone write "Didn't Know Before" above the first column. Next, in the second column, two interesting things; let's put something that really surprised us. What should we write? Let's write "Wow!" in that column. Now, let's think of a really good question. What do you want to know about the larynx?

Cesar: I want to know everything.

Sarah: Try to think of just one thing that you really are interested in knowing or something that is confusing that you don't understand.

Daniel: How big is a larynx?

Erika: Can you talk without your larynx? I know someone who had an operation, and they put in a tube, and she couldn't talk.

Sarah: Now that's a good question, Erika. It is connected to something you know and something you are wondering more about.

Later in the day, Sarah explained what she noticed from monitoring this discussion and from reading students' written response sheets:

During our group discussion, I noticed that Erika made a really good connection about someone she knew who had an operation. She was making the kind of text connection I want to see, one that is really helping her to understand the book. When I look at all the response sheets, I am still seeing some answers that are not thoughtful connections with the text. For example, all three facts that Tanisha wrote were about how babies talk. How babies talk is mentioned in this section, but it is not important, and it certainly isn't new information for her. When students write things like that I have to ask myself whether they are just not motivated to read and respond, or whether they do not see relevant connections in the text. At a basic level, the skill of "determining importance" is based on the types of connections they make while reading.

Both groups of students are working on determining importance in nonfiction texts. However, the conversations with Sarah show how she uses a more foundational comprehension strategy, making connections with texts, to teach and assess levels of quality in their comprehension of important information. Teachers at Hawthorne School have worked together to make assessment-based instruction more meaningful, and they use the rubric in Table 2.7 to guide their interpretations of students' comments and written work.

In this vignette, we see how Sarah changes the focus of her instruction for two different reading groups who are reading similar types of texts at the same instructional level. Although she follows a similar format for each group, she changes the focus of her instruction based on her continuing assessments of students in each group. Sarah keeps her instruction

TABLE 2.7 Rubric for Making Connections: Grades 2 and 3

	Makes no attempt
Level 1 Minimal	Does not make connections with the text.
Level 2 Basic	Talks about what text reminds them of, but makes a superficial connection.
Level 3 Proficient	Makes a relevant/meaningful connection, but doesn't explain how it helps to better understand the book.
Level 4 Advanced	Makes a significant connection and explains a deeper understanding of the book.

focused by selecting only one or two teaching points for each guided reading lesson. She selects the teaching points based on her interpretations of the three assessment tools she uses to monitor progress for individuals in each group: “listening in” to oral reading, notes from discussions, and examples from response sheets. In conclusion, Sarah explains how she uses assessment to monitor children’s daily progress and to guide her instruction:

I have learned how to use the Essential Outcomes as a general guide, and I have also learned how to listen and watch for important evidence that children are using their strategies to become more thoughtful readers. I write quotes and comments in my anecdotal records that show evidence of the type of growth I am looking for. Are children making important personal connections with books? Are children using their reading strategies for their own purposes? I want my children to grow as real readers.

Questions for Discussion

1. Sarah limits herself to one or two teaching points for each guided reading lesson. How does Sarah use evidence from the three types of assessment tools to determine her teaching points for the lessons in this vignette?
2. Notice the differences in the way Sarah plans and carries out instruction in two of the reading groups. Both groups are reading nonfiction books at the same reading level. What are the differences in these lessons?
3. How does Sarah use the Essential Outcomes to guide assessment and instruction?
4. How does Sarah use the Rubric for Making Connections to guide her assessment and instructional choices?

Summary of Strategies Used

Sarah Daines uses many effective strategies for monitoring students’ reading progress. Similar to the International Reading Association’s (2000) position statement describing

excellent teachers, Ms. Daines continually assesses students, while linking new material to prior knowledge. She likewise provides a variety of texts for students to read, while focusing on the importance of reading and understanding nonfiction texts. Just as important, as noted in the IRA's (2000) excellent reading teacher position statement, Ms. Daines uses flexible group structures in her classroom to differentiate instruction to meet the academic needs of each child within her class. The strategies and methods for ongoing assessment are explained in detail in the next section of this chapter.

Case for Exploration: Hawthorne Elementary School, Madison, Wisconsin

Cynthia M. Schmidt and Catherine McMillan

We have already been introduced to Sarah Daines and her classroom at Hawthorne Elementary School. This case study focuses on Sarah's first reading group, four girls whose quarterly assessments indicate that they read with good comprehension and fluency at third-/fourth-grade reading levels as they approach the end of the school year. Despite the similarities in their instructional reading range, we will examine the differences among individual students and the challenges they face as they read a book that is appropriate for their grade and instructional reading levels. All four girls are motivated readers. Rayna is a second grader; Colette, Eileen, and Kangying are third graders. Kangying is comfortable conversing with her friends in English, but Hmong, her first language, is spoken at home.

As you read this case, notice how Sarah works to develop thoughtful understanding rather than simply checking to see if students have a basic or literal comprehension of the text. Also notice how she differentiates her instruction for individuals while still maintaining a shared experience with the book.

All students are reading nonfiction books in guided reading groups this quarter, and Sarah has selected biographies of famous women for this group of girls. The girls have just finished a book about Helen Keller, and she is introducing a new book: *Georgia O'Keeffe*, by Linda Lowery (1996). This book will present challenges for the girls because there are many types of inferences to be made about the character's motivations. The author uses flashbacks, changing scenes and time periods, and there are many idioms and figures of speech describing the artist and her art. In the following scene, Sarah introduces the new biography to the girls.

Sarah: Why do you think I would choose this book for us to read next?

Rayna: It's about another famous woman.

Sarah: That's right. Have any of you heard of Georgia O'Keeffe?

Eileen: We will go to Georgia O'Keeffe Middle School for sixth grade.

Colette: I think she is an artist.

Sarah: You are both right. Georgia O'Keeffe was a famous painter and she was born near us in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin; and that's one reason the school is named for her. Now let's look at the book. Notice what the author shows us about the

setting at the beginning of each chapter. The first chapter starts, “New Mexico, August 1930.” The second chapter starts, “South Carolina, October 1915.” First of all, how do those dates connect with the life of Helen Keller?

The girls comment that both are women and they lived at about the same time. Sarah encourages the students to look through the book to see how the chapters are organized. Students notice that the first and last chapters are set in the 1930s, but chapters in the middle go back to earlier times in Georgia O’Keeffe’s life.

Sarah: Have you read a book or seen a movie where the time changes like that?

Eileen: I saw a movie about a time machine.

Sarah: Well, no, this is different. Have you seen a movie where it starts at one point, and then goes back to an earlier time in someone’s life?

Sarah explains how authors use flashbacks to tell a story about someone’s life, and she and the girls talk about some movies they have seen that use flashbacks.

Colette: Like in Harry Potter?

Other students nod in agreement. Sarah asks the students to begin reading, and she “listens in” while Kangying reads.

After a few minutes, Sarah reconvenes the group for discussion. She begins, “Kangying asked a good question when she was reading. What does it mean on page 18, ‘She pulled out her black charcoal sticks.’ What are charcoal sticks?” Colette remembers that they made some charcoal drawings in art class. The girls talk to each other about those drawings and infer that charcoal sticks must be similar to the black chunks they used in those drawings. This group is comfortable talking about texts with each other; they respond to each other without much direction from their teacher.

In the next scene, Sarah introduces the girls to their first response sheet for this book. As we noticed in the earlier vignette, Sarah’s students are accustomed to using reader response sheets to practice comprehension strategies and to document their thinking during reading. Table 2.8 is a sample of a reader response sheet.

Your response sheet [*Sarah refers to the response sheet shown in Table 2.8*] asks you to write about three of the comprehension strategies we have been using, but I especially want you to focus on visualizing the scenes in this story because we are reading about an artist, and I think it will help us understand her story. There are some illustrations, but I want you to pay attention to the descriptive words that the author chooses and use your imaginations. [*Sarah directs their attention to the anchor chart on the wall that identifies different senses that might be triggered while trying to visualize a story.*]

Remember that when we use the strategy of visualizing, we are talking about imagining with all our senses, not just seeing (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). Notice how the author uses words that appeal to your sense of hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. What images does the author paint in your mind?

TABLE 2.8 Comprehension Strategies Response Sheet

<i>Comprehension Strategies</i> <i>List the page number, story quote, and a note describing the strategy you used.</i>		
<i>Connections (t-s, t-t, t-w)</i>	<i>My Questions</i>	<i>Visualizing</i>

t-s = text to self

t-t = text to text

t-w = text to world

After this introduction, the girls collect their books and response sheets and move to their tables while Sarah convenes the next reading group. Later in the day, Sarah reflects on the discussion.

My main goal with this group of girls is to help them integrate their use of comprehension strategies. That is why I used the response sheet that includes three strategies we have been practicing. I am looking for evidence of their thinking during reading. As I was introducing this story, I wanted to be sure that they were not confused about the sequence of events because the author changes the settings and time periods using flashbacks. I used Kangying's question about charcoal sticks because I knew the girls could make connections to their own art projects, and I like to take opportunities for them to practice making personal connections. Also, I think Kangying learns more when there is group discussion among her peers. Kangying can decode many words, but she isn't always willing to ask about the meanings of unknown words. It helps her and all the others when we talk together about the meanings of unusual words. This book is tricky for everyone because of figurative language; for example, when Georgia O'Keeffe is painting pictures of apples, Alfred (Stieglitz) says Georgia has "apple fever." That will confuse all the girls.

The next day, Sarah showed me their response sheets, and explained her interpretations of their responses for each of the comprehension strategies: visualizing, asking questions, and making connections (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Keene & Zimmermann, 1997).

Visualizing

Despite Sarah's review of different sensory images, all students commented only on things they could see, and none of the visual images seemed to add to their understanding of the

scene or the story. Sarah knows that the girls are able to visualize during reading in some texts, but they have not demonstrated their best abilities in this response sheet. Their responses are listed below:

- Colette:** Georgia's picchers are butufale.
- Kangying:** I can see the apples in the photographs.
- Rayna:** I can visualize Georgia painting the apples.
- Eileen:** I can see her paintings.

Asking Questions

Sarah was more satisfied with the quality of the questions the girls reported on their response sheets, because these questions gave Sarah better insights into what the girls were wondering and thinking about during reading. Some questions focus on the character's intentions, one focuses on the author, and Kangying's question indicates that she is wondering how to interpret the text. These questions give Sarah good ideas for the next lesson. Their questions are listed below.

- Colette:** Why does she think she is going mad? like crase?
- Kangying:** Are the shapes supposed to be real, like moving around?
- Rayna:** Why did it go back in time and then front in time?
- Eileen:** Why did she paint cow bones?

Making Connections

Sarah was not at all satisfied with the text connections her students wrote on their response sheets. The students identified differences among the types of connections they have studied: text-to-self (T-S), text-to-text (T-T), and text-to-world (T-W). However, their connections were not powerful, and they did not make connections that would extend their understanding of the text (see Table 2.7, "Rubric for Making Connections"). Three girls made connections to the previous story about Helen Keller, but the qualities of their text-to-self and text-to-world connections were superficial, indicating that students were not making meaningful connections when reading on their own. Notice the connections listed below.

- Colette:** T-S I feel like I go mad when my brother bugs me.
T-W Some people think they are mad (crazy).
T-T Georgia and Helen both have a problem.
- Kangying:** T-S I like painting.
T-W Her paintings are real.
T-T Georgia has courage too (like Helen Keller).

Rayna: T-S I think the flowers she painted look like firecrackers.
T-W A lot of artists paint flowers.

Eileen: T-S I like flowers.
T-W Georgia and Helen Keller lived at the same time.

When Sarah meets with the girls today, she decides to reread parts of the story with them to see if she can help them focus on Georgia O’Keeffe’s problem as an artist and how she feels as she struggles to find her own unique style. She believes that the students need scaffolding to make meaningful connections with Georgia.

Sarah asks the girls to reread a passage from the text, as she read it aloud:

She noticed that this painting was made to please a teacher. . . . Other paintings looked just like the work of famous European artists. Not one painting was simply hers. She had no idea how to paint like Georgia O’Keeffe. (Lowery, p. 11)

Sarah asks, “Now what does the author mean by that when she says, ‘She had no idea how to paint like Georgia O’Keeffe?’” At first the girls are silent, but Sarah continues to probe: “How do you think Georgia is feeling about her paintings?”

Rayna: She doesn’t like her paintings.

Sarah: Why not? What’s wrong?

Colette: She doesn’t want to paint just like other people.

Sarah: That’s right. She is trying to find her own unique style. Let’s talk about that word *unique*. . . . What does it mean?

Sarah pulls out a dictionary and reads some synonyms for unique: “original, or different from others . . . special.”

Rayna: Oh yeah, like she is trying to discover her style.

Sarah: That’s right, Rayna. She is trying to discover her style. Now, let’s read ahead and think about how Georgia feels when she is trying to develop this style.

Night after night, Georgia worked until the charcoal crumbled in her hand. Her fingers got so sore she could hardly hold a pen to write to Anita. “Am I completely mad?” she wrote. She wondered if drawing such strange shapes meant she was insane. Maybe this was not art at all. Maybe it was just crazy scribbles. (Lowery, p. 22)

Sarah: So how does Georgia feel?

Colette: She feels mad, but not like angry, sort of like when my brother makes me go crazy.

Sarah: That's a great connection, Colette. Her problem is that she is doing something new and original and she feels so discouraged that she thinks she is going crazy. When you finish reading this book, let's see if she solves her problem of trying to paint in her own unique style.

After this discussion, Sarah explains why she focused on rereading and interpreting those two sections of the text:

I always try to return to the story itself, to reread confusing parts and work together to help students interpret and understand the text. I think that Georgia's emotional struggle to express her art is central to this story, but I have to find a way to help students make a personal connection. I knew that everyone was confused about "going mad." I had worked with Colette individually on that phrase and helped her think of a time when "something drove her crazy." She had an authentic connection with her younger brother, so I focused on that part to let Colette explain it to the others in her own words. After reading their response sheets, I could see that they were not making good personal connections with the character in this story, and that they couldn't understand or interpret her actions and motivations. This was the most important teaching point for today's lesson. Without a clear understanding of Georgia O'Keeffe, they will not be able to practice other strategies, such as visualizing or inferring themes.

Sarah knows this book presents comprehension difficulties. It provides an example of a typical dilemma that teachers face when selecting appropriate texts for their students. This book is interesting to the girls, because Georgia O'Keeffe is a famous woman who was born in their state. The book fits the curriculum requirements, a nonfiction text that is written at their instructional reading level. Students can recognize most of the words in this book, but the figurative language is confusing and the theme—Georgia O'Keeffe's struggle to express her own painting style—is elusive to these young girls. Each girl in this group brings her own personal experiences to this book, and the teacher is committed to supporting all her learners. Sarah explains her decision to use this text. "I know this book is challenging for the girls. On the other hand, I feel like we are working through some of the challenges that they will continue to face in their reading."

Questions for Discussion

1. Based on quarterly assessments, all four girls are reading third-/fourth-grade stories with reasonable fluency and comprehension. What differences do you notice among students? Are individual differences apparent in their response sheets? (Refer to Table 2.7, "Rubric for Making Connections," when you evaluate their responses.)
2. Sarah needs to make individual assessments of her readers, but she also wants to build community within the reading group. How does she balance these two competing needs in this case; for example, addressing vocabulary development with her ELL student?

3. Review the instructional decisions that Sarah makes in this case. How does her instruction respond to the evidence of assessment from discussions and written responses? Would you focus instruction differently? Why or why not?

Concluding Thoughts

Our nation and the individual states must consider giving the voice of student progress back to the classroom teacher. Teachers know which students are progressing, which are not, and what instructional decisions need to be made to help students better understand what they are reading. When teachers are given a greater role in this process, they can better impact student academic progress. Schools must allow teachers to look at the whole child when making educational decisions. Teachers can do this by keeping ongoing records of student progress, not merely basing educational progress on state-mandated assessment tests. Teachers like Sarah Daines use many effective strategies for monitoring students' reading progress throughout the school year. Her school encourages teachers to examine the progress of the whole child, and that child's progress throughout a school year. With such examination of the whole child, teachers make note of the ways the child decodes words, comprehends text, and makes connections to what he or she is reading. Based on such ongoing assessment, teachers make informed decisions about how best to plan instruction. Flexible group structures in these teachers' classrooms help them differentiate instruction to meet the academic needs of each child within a class. The strategies and methods for ongoing assessment should be a component of all elementary school classrooms—and for this to happen, states must rethink the dominant role of high-stakes testing in our nation's schools.

TERMS TO KNOW

Ability grouping	Graded word lists
Adequate yearly progress (AYP)	Gradual release of responsibility
After reading	Guided reading
Anecdotal records	Informal reading inventory
Before reading	Leveled text sets
Chunks	Round-robin reading
During reading	Running records
Flexible grouping	Whole-class instruction

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WEB SITES

- Informal Reading Inventory: <http://lrs.ed.uiuc.edu/students/srutledg/iri.html> is a Web site designed by a classroom teacher. It is an incredibly helpful site for teachers interested in creating their own IRIs. The author leads viewers through specific steps for choosing books, determining levels, creating questions, and scoring the inventory.
- Reading a–z.com: <http://www.readinga-z.com/assess/runrec.html> provides an easy-to-read description of how to keep running records. A coding system for keeping running records is shown and described in detail.
- Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL): <http://www.sedl.org/cgi-bin/mysql/rad.cgi?searchid=194> offers a comprehensive chart comparing commercial informal reading inventories. The Web site presents solid research and materials helpful to teachers interested in learning more about reading assessments.

