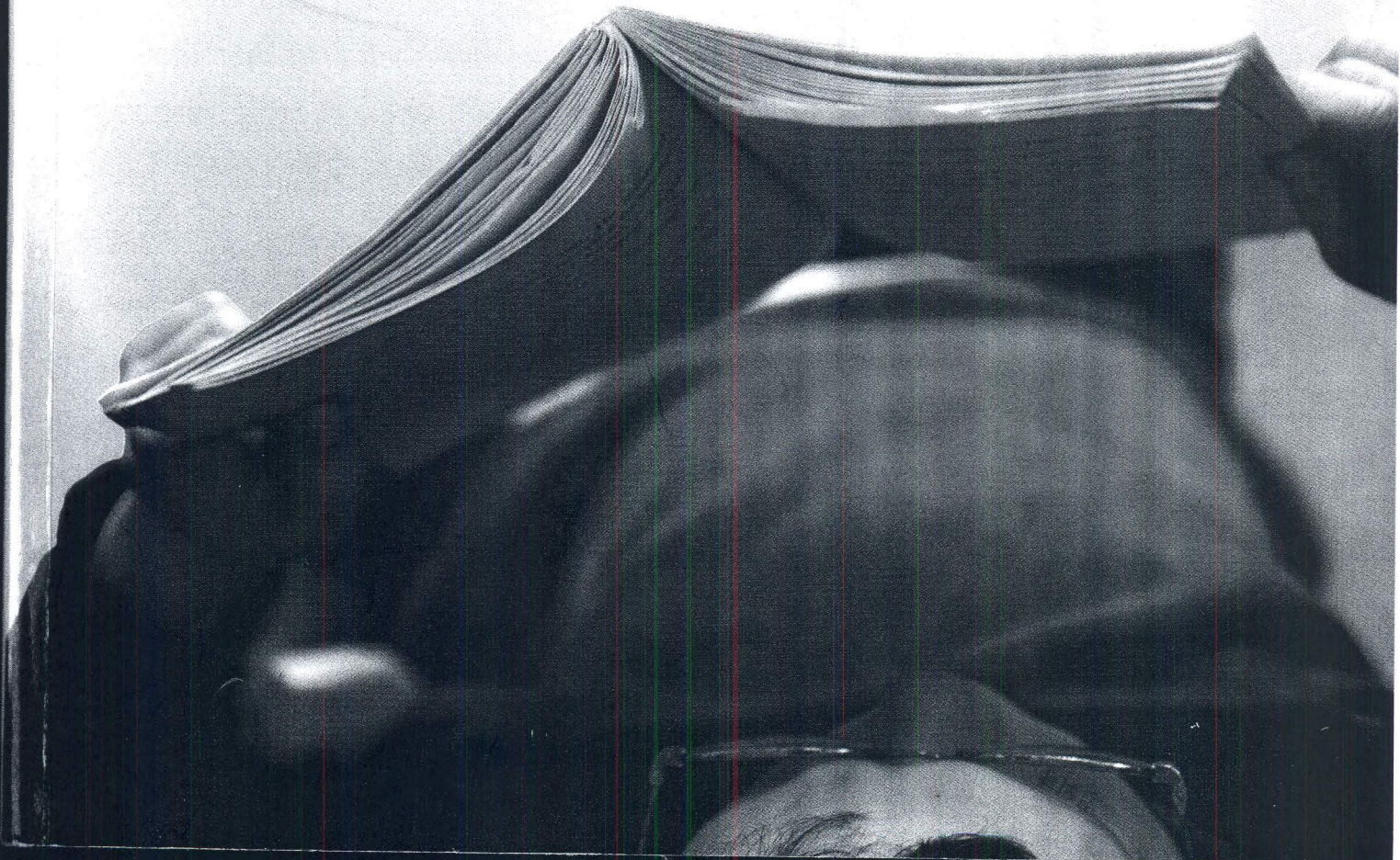


Foreword by Lucy Calkins Kathy Collins

Units of Study
in the Primary
Classroom

Growing Readers



Experiences in Literacy Throughout the Day

Chapter 2



WHEN I WAS A CHILD, MY YOUNGER BROTHER played soccer in our town league. At that time, there were no girls' teams in the area. I would watch his games from the sidelines wishing that I could run right out on the field and race for the ball. There must have been a lot of us sisters watching our brothers play because the following year a girls' soccer team was started in our town.

I played soccer every summer and each school year as I grew up. I had many teammates, a variety of coaches, and winning and losing seasons. When I think about a particularly successful team on which I played, I realize that the coaches of that team knew a lot about soccer and about working with children: our practices were well planned and organized, and the coaches spent time teaching us the skills we needed to play soccer well, such as dribbling, passing, trapping, and heading the ball. But that wasn't all. We warmed up, scrimmaged against each other, and played exhibition games. They also fostered a sense of community among the players and the families, and all of us, grown-ups included, looked forward to game nights and tournament weekends. During games the coaches were kind, supportive, and helpful from the sidelines. They took a well-rounded, balanced approach to coaching soccer as they taught us to become not just better soccer players but better athletes and sportswomen as well.

I think successful reading instruction has similarities to successful soccer coaching. They both require a well-rounded approach. A child won't learn all there is to know about reading simply by learning the print-sound code (Clay 1991). In the same way, a child won't learn how to play soccer by learning only how to dribble and pass the ball. On the other hand, children don't learn to read by putting a book in front of them and hoping for the best, just as a soccer player doesn't learn how to play by stepping onto a field and kicking the ball around when the whistle blows.

In teaching reading, we need to provide many types of functional practice and experiences that will support children's growth (Goodman 1996). In classrooms everywhere, teachers find that a balanced approach to literacy instruction offers a variety of ways for children to become well-rounded and strong independent readers and writers. Although the focus of this book is the independent reading workshop, it is worth noting that in balanced literacy classrooms teachers make time in the day for other components of literacy instruction as well. These components include shared reading, interactive read-aloud with accountable talk, story time, phonics and word study, small-group work (guided reading or strategy lessons), interactive writing, and writing workshop.

My purpose in this chapter is to provide an overview of, and a vision for, the independent reading workshop and to suggest other literacy components that will complement, enhance, and strengthen the work that your students can do during their independent reading time, in school and anywhere else they find themselves lost in a book.

What Is an Independent Reading Workshop?

In many classrooms around the country, teachers have given careful consideration to ways and methods of providing their students with time to read inde-

pendently, and of course, their conceptions differ. Imagine that right now, you and I are going on a professional journey together (paid for in full by our districts, of course). Our quest is to step inside classrooms and observe what's happening in the name of independent reading so that our vision of the independent reading workshop becomes clear. Okay, grab your notebooks and let's go.

Our first stop is at my school, P.S. 321 in Brooklyn, where I'll show you the independent reading workshop in my classroom. My students are gathered in the meeting area, looking at and listening to me as I teach a mini-lesson on a comprehension strategy that proficient readers use. Each day I begin independent reading time with a mini-lesson like this one in which I offer whole-class, direct, explicit reading instruction. I wrap up the mini-lesson (which typically takes less than 10 minutes) by sending the students back to their reading spots for private reading time. It takes a minute or so for the room to settle. The children have their own plastic file holders with several books inside. They are reading a range of texts, from easy books with one line of text on a page to chapter books, because each child is reading a book at his or her independent reading level. I assess the children often so that I can guide them toward the books that match them as readers. As the children read independently, I offer individualized direct instruction during one-on-one conferences with readers. I take notes about each child during these reading conferences.

After 20 minutes I tell the children it's partner reading time. I briefly remind them of one of the ways we've learned to talk well about books. The children quickly move around to meet with their reading partners. The noise level in the classroom has risen slightly as the children begin reading together and talking about their books with their partners. During partner reading time, I confer with some partners and then I gather four children for small-group direct instruction. Today, I'm supporting a small group of readers in a guided reading session because, based on my assessments, they are ready to move to the next level of text.

After about 10 minutes of partner reading time, I stand up and again get the children's attention. "First graders, I hate to say it, but reading time is over." There is an audible group sigh, and a couple of children plead, "Just another minute, we have to finish talking about this page!" I smile and tell them to use a sticky note to save their spot so they can continue their conversation tomorrow. Then I say, "Please put the book you're going to read at home tonight in your take-home bag, and bring your bag and your body to the meeting area for share time." For the next few minutes the children gather again in the meeting area, and I share some of the great work I observed during reading time today.

During this visit to my classroom, you witnessed instruction throughout the independent reading workshop. The instruction began when I modeled and demonstrated a reading strategy in the whole-class mini-lesson. Then, as children worked independently and with partners, I coached and instructed them during reading conferences. I pulled a small group of children together to offer more assessment-based instruction. Finally, during the teaching share,

you saw that I reinforced the day's lesson by sharing some of the ways children were successful with the strategy I taught.

The next stop on our journey is my old elementary school, where independent reading is known as silent sustained reading or SSR. As we go into a classroom, we listen as the teacher instructs the children to take their SSR books out of their desks. "Remember that this is a quiet time," she reminds them. As we look around, we notice that the children are reading a huge variety of books, and the room is very quiet.

I used to look forward to SSR time when I was a student. We only had it twice a week: on Wednesdays after library time, and on Friday afternoons, and it was exciting because our teacher would let us read any book that we brought in or borrowed from the library.

Let me be honest here: what excited me most about SSR wasn't necessarily having time to read my own book. What I really looked forward to was the possibility of "getting the call." My teacher randomly picked children who would get to be her helpers during SSR time. Oh, how I hoped my name would be chosen! I loved to be a helper and do things like use the staple remover to take down the construction paper jack-o'-lanterns with accordion legs in order to make way for cornucopias and five-finger turkeys. I longed to be the one to collate and staple homework packets for the following week. Unfortunately, during those many SSR times when my name wasn't picked, I had trouble concentrating on reading my book. I was distracted as I watched my lucky classmates hand masking-tape loops up to our teacher as she stood precariously on bookshelves putting up the maps of the continents we had colored during social studies. During SSR time, the teacher may or may not be teaching reading. My teacher spent SSR time catching up on the other work she needed to do with the help of some eager children. It seems that often SSR time is less an instructional opportunity and more of a management structure that enables teachers to get some other things done while children are quietly looking at books.

Our next stop is a first-grade classroom during literacy center time. The teacher is meeting with a small group of children for guided reading at a cashew-shaped table. The rest of the children are working in small groups around the room. Some are plugged into the tape recorder at the listening center, and others have Big Books and shared reading texts spread out on the floor. A group of children are practicing spelling and making words with magnetic letters. Almost everyone seems busy and engaged. As we continue looking around, we see a group of children sitting at a table with a basket of books in the middle, all reading books from the basket and debating about who has the scariest Halloween costume. This conversation about costumes began when two of the children were looking together at the book *Rattlebone Rock*.

I ask the children what they are doing at this center. One child looks up and says, "It's the independent reading center. We're reading *Rattlebone Rock*. This is the browsing basket." Again, like SSR time in the previous classroom, the independent reading time in this classroom is a management structure that enables the teacher to do something else, in this case, to meet with

guided reading groups. The teacher is not teaching directly into the children's independent reading because she is working with one guided reading group after another. When she finishes the second of the three guided reading groups, she transitions the students into another center.

The next school we visit is in a district where independent reading is called DEAR time, or "Drop Everything And Read." During DEAR time everybody in the school, including the principal, the custodian, and the guidance counselor, stops what they are doing to read something, anything. As we walk around the school, we see adults reading catalogs, professional literature, district memos, magazines, novels, and newspapers. We see children sitting in their seats reading a variety of texts as well. The building is relatively quiet as everyone focuses for a while on his or her own reading.

The obvious power of DEAR time is that a school becomes a community of readers. It's exciting for children to see grown-ups around them reading, in much the same way as it can be thrilling for children when a teacher joins a game of tag at recess or the principal sits beside them in the cafeteria and eats her lunch. During DEAR time, however, if everyone is dropping everything to read, no explicit reading instruction is going on. Of course, the power of modeling reading is important, but we have to ask, "Is that enough?"

Now, as our journey nears its end, let's talk about what we observed. In each of the classrooms I've described, the children were, in fact, reading self-chosen books independently. One of the main differences, however, between the independent reading workshop in my classroom and independent reading time in the next three examples (SSR, independent reading during literacy centers, and DEAR time) is the absence or presence of direct, explicit instruction. In some classrooms the only instruction children receive during independent reading time is on management and procedures, because the teacher is engaged with other tasks (e.g., her own reading, her to-do list, or guided reading groups). By contrast, during the independent reading workshop, the teacher provides whole-class, individual, and small-group direct, explicit reading instruction to her students. In addition, when children read independently during independent reading workshop, they read just-right books, which are books that match their independent reading levels. Children can read their just-right books with fluency, comprehension, and at least 90–95 percent accuracy (Calkins 2001).

I hope our imaginary visit to my classroom gave you a vision for what an independent reading workshop looks and sounds like. In the chapters that follow, I provide specific information about the teaching and learning that goes on during this time.

Guiding Principles of the Independent Reading Workshop

During independent reading workshop, the teacher actively works with his students to teach them the skills and strategies they need to grow stronger as

readers. Lucy Calkins often refers to the independent reading workshop as the heart of our reading work because it's the time in the day when children have the opportunity to orchestrate all they know about reading in order to read their own just-right books (Calkins 2001).

For now, to provide an overview, here are what many teachers consider to be the seven guiding principles of the independent reading workshop within a balanced literacy framework.

- Readers have time to read just-right books independently every day.
- Readers select their own appropriate books.
- Readers take care of books.
- Readers respect each other's reading time and reading lives.
- Readers have daily opportunities to talk about their books in genuine ways.
- Readers don't just read the words but also understand the story.
- Readers' work in the independent reading workshop is replicable outside the classroom.

❁ *Readers have time to read just-right books independently every day.* Common sense (and life experience) tells us that getting better at anything requires practice. I don't think anyone would disagree that in order for children to become strong independent readers, we need to allot them the time to practice reading on their own, with our guidance and instruction, of course. In primary classrooms, this might mean that in September, after a mini-lesson, children read independently for 5 to 15 minutes daily. By the end of the school year, their stamina for reading independently will increase to allow 30 or 50 minutes, including private reading time and partner reading time. Throughout the year, while children are reading independently, we teachers have reading conferences with individuals, partners, and small groups to offer individualized direct instruction.

❁ *Readers select their own appropriate books.* Every day during independent reading workshop, my first graders read just-right books, which they've selected from our classroom library. These are books at the children's independent reading levels, which means they can read them independently with 90–95 percent accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. When children choose their own just-right books, they will have more interest and investment in their reading (Short and Harste 1995; Holdaway 1979; Smith 1987). And when they choose books that are at their independent reading levels, they will grow as readers.

To support children's choosing just-right books, at least 30–40 percent of the classroom library is leveled according to a gradient of text difficulty. In many classroom libraries, teachers use a color dot system to indicate the level of the texts in the leveled portion of the library; for example, the easiest books that share the same text characteristics may have yellow dots on the cover and be located in a basket with a yellow dot on its label. We need to teach our students where they'll find their just-right books in the leveled library, and this is based on our reading assessments.

There are many leveling systems that teachers and schools use to uniformly level texts from one class to another. In my teaching, I rely upon the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project leveling guides (Calkins 2002).

In addition to the leveled portion of the library, classrooms with independent reading workshops always have libraries filled with a range of books, in terms of level, topic, and genre. It's important for our students to know that there is a world of texts beyond the leveled library in which they can pursue their interests and develop new ones.

In addition to just-right books, we also encourage children to choose interest books, which may or may not be at their independent reading levels. So, for example, a child might choose to read a couple of nonfiction books on insects if that is a particular interest. Another child might borrow a Mem Fox book because her teacher has read it aloud. During independent reading workshop, the children's reading time is spent with their just-right books, but we also provide opportunities, either added on to independent reading workshop or at another time of the day, for children to explore a wider variety of texts.

In the chapters that follow, I offer more details about the classroom library, systems for students' book choices, and managing the whole system.

❁ *Readers take care of books.* When I was a child, I was mesmerized by three of our Christmas tree ornaments. They appeared so fragile and beautiful that I wanted to look closely at them. Each year, my mother would tell my brothers and me the story of these glass orbs, how they were ornaments from when she and my uncles were children, and she'd remind us that they were very special to her. She'd let us hold them before she gently hung them on the highest branches of the tree. I remember feeling that I needed to be so careful with those ornaments, not only because I'd get into trouble if they broke but also because my mom would be so sad if anything happened to them.

I spend some time early in the school year encouraging children to feel about books the way I felt about those three ornaments. I want my students to learn and to believe that books are special, worth taking care of, and meant to be shared with other people for many years. On a practical note, this is important because classroom books cost hundreds of dollars and need to last from one year to the next.

I teach my students how to take care of books and why it's important to do so. I also teach them how to keep the classroom library organized for all readers by putting books back carefully into the correct basket. Taking care of books and the organization of the library is a community matter in workshop classrooms.

❁ *Readers respect each other's reading time and reading lives.* One of the greatest challenges for teachers who launch independent reading workshop is the management of the time, so it's of great importance for children to understand the expectations for how they need to work. Children learn how to use quiet voices during reading time as well as how to stay focused on their books and what to do when they finish a book. We spend time teaching these expect-

tations during our September unit of study, Readers Build Good Habits (see Chapter 4).

Also, we teach children to respect the differences among readers in the classroom. In independent reading workshop, all the children are reading books that are just right for them, so there is often quite a range of texts being read in any one class. In our inclusion class, Jessica, my co-teacher, and I had children reading books with one line of patterned text per page alongside children who were reading chapter books, so it was extremely important for us to talk to students about how we all have different reading needs and tastes, just as we all have different heights, hair colors, or numbers of loose and missing teeth.

- ❁ *Readers have daily opportunities to talk about their books in genuine ways.* During independent reading workshop, after private time when children have read by themselves, we provide time for them to meet with their reading partners to read together and talk about their books. In order to have a conversation about a book, one needs to have had some thoughts as one reads, and this is what we want children to do whenever they read—have thoughts and talk about them with other readers. This time to talk and think about books with other readers helps children make meaning and supports deeper comprehension.

In our classrooms we do a lot of work outside of the independent reading workshop to support children as they learn to talk well about books. During shared reading and interactive read-aloud as well as during reading workshop mini-lessons, we teach our students the kinds of things readers can think and talk about, we show them how to use text evidence to support their thinking, and we model how to have good conversations that stick with one idea at a time and that include each partner's ideas.

The authentic conversations we make time for during partner reading time grow out of children's own thoughts and ideas as they read. From early in the school year, our students learn that thinking about and understanding what they have just read is a big job for readers and that it's fun to talk about one's ideas with others. In other words, the conversations between reading partners are not prompted by the teacher.

Instead of expecting very young children to regularly write reports or synopses or to answer comprehension questions about their books, we teach them how readers make sure they understand texts by thinking as they read and talking about the stories with others.

- ❁ *Readers don't just read the words but also understand the story.* Typically, once children crack the code and read the words in their books with relative ease, they begin to race through books and just keep moving from one to the next. For many children, reading seems to become nothing more than word digestion; there's little time for savoring the text, for thinking about the story, and for connecting it to what they know about their lives, the world, and other texts (Keene and Zimmermann 1997). We make it clear that reading is much more than decoding the words in books, that the big job for any reader is to understand and to follow the story.

We spend a good portion of the independent reading workshop teaching children how readers hold themselves accountable for understanding their stories, and we teach them ways they can help themselves if they don't understand.

❁ *Readers' work in independent reading is replicable outside the classroom.* The independent reading workshop is meant to closely resemble the reading work children can do when they are not in our sphere of influence. We want to provide time for them in school to practice the things they can do whenever or wherever they are reading. For this reason, independent reading workshop is packed with reading, thinking, and talking, which are the authentic, functional, and purposeful things that proficient readers do throughout their lives.

We don't make time during independent reading workshop, especially in the primary grades, for children to do lots of writing about their reading. For one thing, our youngest readers are also our youngest writers, and expecting them to write often about their reading can be too demanding. In lieu of regular writing assignments, we provide time for children to talk about their reading. It's easier for them at this stage to convey their thinking orally than in written form, and talking about books is much more common in real life than writing about them.

That said, I do acknowledge that there are district mandates about having children write about their books, so I understand that teachers may need to provide time to do that. I would just keep it separate from independent reading workshop.

Structure of an Independent Reading Workshop

The independent reading workshop has a predictable structure:

Structure of an Independent Reading Workshop

- Mini-lesson (10 minutes or less)
- Independent work time with instruction
 - Children are engaged in private reading time.
 - Teacher provides instruction during reading conferences and small-group work.
- Mid-workshop teaching
 - Children are engaged in partner reading time.
 - Teacher provides instruction during reading conferences and small-group work.
- Teaching share time (about 5 minutes)

The children in my classroom know that independent reading workshop starts when the class gathers in the meeting area for a mini-lesson. After the mini-lesson the children go to their reading spots for independent work time. This work time begins with children's reading their own just-right books, first by themselves during private reading time and then with their reading part-

ners during partner reading time. Reading partners read books and talk about their books. Sometimes, between private reading and partner reading, the teacher may do some very brief mid-workshop teaching to remind or teach children about something that will help them with their work with partners. After partner reading, the children know that they will meet again in the meeting area for a teaching share time.

Mini-lesson

Imagine now that it's late September. In my classroom it's time for independent reading workshop. I gather the children in the meeting area, which is a 9' x 12' rug bordered on two sides by the classroom library bookshelves and on one side by the chalkboard. I sit in a chair with the chalkboard behind me, an easel to my left, and a basket of books to my right. The children sit in front of me, next to their reading partners. My class knows what to do and what to expect during this mini-lesson because the expectations are the same for any mini-lesson, whether it's for writing, math, art, science, or social studies. They know that a mini-lesson is a time for them to learn something new that will help them with their work. They know that a mini-lesson is not a time for big discussions, getting a drink of water, or checking the Velcro on their sneakers. Of course, in early September I had to teach them about the expectations I have for behavior and participation during mini-lessons.

The mini-lesson by that name was first conceived in the context of the writing workshop (Calkins 1983). During this time a teacher directly instructs the whole class on a skill, strategy, or habit that they need to learn and use during independent work. Mini-lessons are brief, explicit teaching opportunities that follow a certain "architecture" (Calkins 2001):

Architecture of a Mini-lesson

- Connection
 - Connect today's lesson with yesterday's lesson
 - Connect today's lesson with ongoing unit of study
 - Connect today's lesson with students' work
 - Connect today's lesson with an experience outside of school
- Teaching point
 - Present verbally
 - Demonstrate or model
- Active engagement
 - Children try out a skill or strategy with a text
 - Children act like researchers as they watch a demonstration
 - Children plan work out loud
 - Children imagine trying a skill or strategy
- Link to ongoing work

The idea of a mini-lesson's having an "architecture" arose when Lucy Calkins and her colleagues were studying the characteristics of the most successful

mini-lessons. They realized that there seemed to be a kind of rhythm or predictability that characterized the best ones.

Connection

A mini-lesson often begins with the teacher's making a connection that grounds the work of today's mini-lesson in the ongoing work the children have been doing.

He might connect today's lesson with yesterday's lesson or with an ongoing unit of study, saying, for example, "Yesterday we learned that one of the things readers can do to figure out the words in their books is to check the picture and think about what's going on in the story; today I want to show you another way that readers can figure out words in their books," or "For the last week or so, we've been learning about lots of things readers can do when they get to tricky parts in their books; today I want to teach you another thing you can do when you get to a tricky part."

Or the teacher might connect today's lesson with his observations of student work or with an experience he has had outside of school, for example, "Yesterday, during partner reading, I noticed that Ryan and Ben were helping each other with tricky words in their books, not just jumping in and telling each other the words but figuring them out together; today I want to teach you what they did to be such great reading teachers for each other," or "Last night I was reading a book about when George Washington was president, and something happened to me that I know happens to you—I came to a really tricky word that I didn't know at all and had to do some work to figure it out; today I want to teach you what I did because I think it will help you, too."

Teaching Point

The next part of a mini-lesson is making the teaching point, in clear language and by demonstrating or modeling exactly what is meant. Telling children what we want them to do is not enough. Research suggests that demonstrating and making our teaching explicit provides children with powerful examples and a vision for what their own work should look like during independent reading workshop.

The teaching demonstration is often cued by the teacher's saying, "Today I want to teach you how to. . . ." Then, after stating the teaching point very clearly in language that children can understand, the teacher moves into the demonstration: "Let me show you what I mean." Often the teacher will alert children that they need to pay close attention to the demonstration by saying, "Notice how I. . . ." or "I want you to watch what I do."

Active Engagement

After the demonstration the teacher provides an opportunity for guided practice (Pearson and Gallagher 1983), a chance for students to try out the skill or strategy right then and there. I use the term "active engagement" for the

guided practice portion of the lesson. While the children are trying out the skill or strategy, the teacher assesses whether they have made sense of the teaching point. There are several ways to conduct the active engagement portion of the mini-lesson.

Providing a text for each child (or pair of children), the teacher might say, "I want you to try this strategy using these books." It helps if the books are easy or familiar to the children so they are not distracted by the novelty or challenge of an unfamiliar text. Or, the teacher might ask each child to bring a just-right book to the meeting area and try out the strategy using that.

Another method to accomplish active engagement is to ask children to be researchers while they watch a demonstration by the teacher: "Right now, I want you to watch me closely while I try. . . . Notice how I. . . ." Then, after the demonstration, the students talk to their partners about what they noticed the teacher doing. Or, giving a negative example of what should *not* be done, the teacher might say, "Watch me as I try to figure out one of the words on this page. If you notice a way to help me, put your thumbs up."

Children may also restate the teaching point to their partners, plan with their partners how they will use a skill or strategy in their own reading, or imagine themselves using the strategy that has been taught. Guiding their concentration, the teacher might say, "I want you to imagine that you take out your just-right book, look closely at the cover, and think about the title."

The active engagement portion of the mini-lesson needs to be quick so that the mini-lesson doesn't turn into a long, drawn-out session, and it needs to provide an opportunity for children to try out, right then and there, the skill or strategy emphasized in your teaching demonstration that day. In the chapters that follow, I've included examples of mini-lessons reflecting a variety of methods for active engagement.

Link to Ongoing Work

Finally, in the last part of the mini-lesson, the teacher makes a link to the students' ongoing work. She restates the teaching point and reminds students to use the strategy themselves during independent reading or any time they are reading, whether at home or in school: "Whenever you're reading, whether it's here in school or at home or on the subway, I want you to remember to use the pictures in the story to help you figure out the words, just as we did today."

Sample Mini-lesson

The following is a sample mini-lesson that I've done late in September, with comments interspersed to highlight the parts of the mini-lesson mentioned in the previous section.

Readers, I can tell you guys are so ready to get really strong at reading the words in your books. So many of you told me that you just can't wait! Yesterday, Joci even said, "Can we get to the words now? I'm ready for it."

I bet lots of you feel like Joci. Give me a thumbs-up if you feel ready for the words, like Joci. [I look around to see everyone giving me a thumbs-up.]

Good, because for the next few weeks, we're going to work really hard at becoming strong readers who figure out words and understand the stories in the books we read. Today, I'm going to teach you something that careful readers do first to get their minds ready to read the words in their books. I'm going to teach you that careful readers look closely at the covers of the books to get their minds ready.

I connected today's lesson to things I've heard the children say and to the unit of study I'm launching—Readers Use Strategies to Figure Out Words. I invited guided participation by having children give me a thumbs-up rather than asking, Who feels like Joci?

Today I want to teach you how readers get their minds ready to read the words in their books by using information from the cover. Careful readers look closely at the information on the cover, the title and the picture especially, and think to themselves, "What might this book be about?" [I show a book.] This helps them get their minds ready to read.

Hmm, before I just jump right in to read this book, I'm going to get my mind ready. The title says, "How to Make a Sandwich." Oh, look at the picture on the cover. What is that? It looks like peanut butter. I'll bet this book is about how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Now I feel more ready to read the words in the book because my mind is ready.

Okay, readers, did you notice how I read the title out loud and thought, What might this book be about? Did you hear how I looked at the picture on the cover for clues? And all along I kept thinking, What might this book be about?

My teaching point is that readers get their minds ready to read a book by looking at the cover and using the information on it to think about what the book might be about. I demonstrated how to do this by thinking out loud as I used the cover to get ready to read. I purposely chose a book similar to what many children in the class would be reading during independent reading time. Before beginning my demonstration, I told them clearly what to watch for. I used consistent language throughout. After the demonstration I refocused the children's attention on the strategy by saying, Did you notice . . . ?

Okay, now I want you guys to try it. I'm going to show you a book, and I want you to think about the title and look at the picture while thinking to yourselves, What might this book be about? [I put an unfamiliar Big Book on the easel and read the title to the class.] Look at the cover, think about the title, and look at the picture. Remember to think to yourselves, What might this book be about? [I give them half a minute to do so.]

During active engagement I gave the children a chance to try out the work I want them to do on their own. I used a new Big Book for this demonstration because I wanted to replicate what they would need to do with unfamiliar books.

Turn and talk to the person sitting next to you about your thinking. What might this book be about? [I listen in to a few partner talks.]

I gave them time to talk with their partners about what they were thinking rather than asking the whole class for volunteers to participate.

Readers, I listened in and learned that you really thought about the cover of the book. You said the title out loud, and you noticed the picture. The title and the picture on the cover helped you imagine what the book might be about, so I'll bet you would be all ready to read the words in it.

When they talked to their neighbors, I listened in to report back what I heard them say. This is more efficient than asking, What did you think? If I had asked this, only a few children would have had the chance to share their thoughts. When I asked them to turn and talk, everyone had the opportunity to share their thinking.

Readers, whenever you're about to read a book, remember that you need to think about the title and the cover picture to get your mind ready to read the book. Think to yourselves, What might this book be about? Today, I'm going to be looking for careful readers who do that, careful readers who think, What might this book be about? I'm sure everyone is going to try it because it's such an important thing for readers to do.

During the *link to ongoing work* I restated the reading work I had taught them to do in this lesson. I told them I expected them to do this whenever they read.

Other Considerations for Effective Mini-lessons

It's important to follow a consistent architecture in our mini-lessons, whether it's similar to the one I described or another method used regularly in the classroom. When we have a consistent approach to mini-lessons, planning becomes easier, teaching becomes more efficient, and the students come to know what to expect so that they can better focus on the skill or strategy that we're teaching.

Of course, the language and tone of my mini-lessons will inevitably differ from other teachers'. After all, we each have our own way with students, and we have to teach in ways that feel comfortable and natural. Throughout this book, I provide sample mini-lessons, and my intention is for readers to use these as templates rather than as scripts for their own work with children.

Although we need to account for differences in teaching style, the following suggestions can help every teacher conduct effective and inspiring mini-lessons:

- *Limit student talk.* Sometimes, in our effort to hear children's voices, we may invite too much student participation during mini-lessons. I used to

do this; then my mini-lessons would stretch too long, and the children would become fidgety and unfocused. Joanne Hindley, author of *In the Company of Children*, says that the mini-lesson is the time for the teacher to talk and to teach. She provides other times in the school day for children to talk about their work, but during mini-lessons she does most of the talking. We can allow a certain level of participation during mini-lessons, but it should be guided and controlled.

- *Keep connections brief.* The stories we use to make a connection should not be too elaborate or grand lest they distract from the teaching point. I once shared a story that involved baby aspirin, my younger brother, and ipecac. Needless to say, my students were so morbidly interested in the story that they entirely missed the teaching point I was trying to make. So, keep the connection part of the mini-lesson brief, not much more than half a minute long.

As well, don't turn the connection part of a mini-lesson into a Q&A session by asking things like, "Readers, who can tell us what we've learned about figuring out hard words in our books?" Teachers often do this in an attempt to assess children's knowledge. Unfortunately, these Q&A sessions don't really provide an accurate assessment, and they almost always turn the mini-lesson into a drawn-out, meandering event. If a teacher feels she must remind students about the things they've learned already in the unit of study, she might instead say something like, "We've been learning about how to figure out hard words in our books. One thing we've learned is. . . ." When the teacher does the work of reminding the class, the connection goes much faster and the lesson stays on track.

- *State the teaching point simply, and reiterate it.* Sometimes, in our efforts to be crystal clear, we may overexplain the teaching point. It always works better to state the teaching point concisely and repeat it throughout the lesson. It also helps to regularly cue the teaching point by saying something like, "Listen closely . . . today I'm going to teach you how to . . ." or "Today you'll learn how to. . . ." When we cue the teaching point this way, children become conditioned to focus on what they're going to learn in this mini-lesson.

I like to imagine that when my children get up from a mini-lesson and go to their independent work, the teaching point is playing over and over in their heads like a song. For this to happen, I use consistent language to describe the teaching point, both during the lesson and in reading conferences.

- *Demonstrate the teaching point.* After expressing the teaching point clearly, it helps to demonstrate it, especially from the perspective of a six- or seven-year-old child. To cue the demonstration, the teacher can say, "Let me show you what it looks like," or "Watch me as I show you how to do it."
- *Use a familiar text.* To demonstrate the teaching point, it's helpful to use a familiar text rather than a new one. An unfamiliar text might distract students because they tend to focus more on the novelty of the new text rather than on the strategy or skill they are learning.

- *Match the active engagement to the teaching point.* It's important for the active engagement to match the teaching point so that children have the chance to practice the same skill or strategy that was demonstrated.

To wind up the active engagement, a teacher could ask children to report back on what they just did, but this might draw the mini-lesson on too long. More helpful is the teacher's stating what she noticed children doing during active engagement: "Okay, readers, eyes up here. I noticed some good work. Some of you were. . . ."

Independent Work Time with Instruction

After the mini-lesson, I send the children out of the meeting area back to their reading spots for *private reading time*. In my classroom the children's regular seats are their reading spots. I know many teachers who let children sit around the room in cozy nooks and comfortable chairs for reading time. I love that idea, but typically it's been hard for me to start out the year with children reading around the room. I find it easier to manage the room, especially at the beginning of the year, when children sit at their tables. Then, later in the year, when children know exactly what's expected of them during reading time, I let them choose places other than their own seats for reading.

On the other hand, some teachers have found that having all their students at their tables or desks can create its own set of management problems because the room might get too noisy or the children might distract each other. These teachers find it more effective to let children read in spots that are spread throughout the room. Where children read during reading time is an individual decision teachers make based on the class temperament and their own comfort.

During private reading time, the children in my class read just-right books that they've chosen from the classroom library. Once a week, they shop for the books that they will read throughout the week, and I guide each of them toward the books that are at their independent reading level. In the chapters that follow, I explain in more detail how children choose their books.

The room is quiet during private reading time, but it's not completely silent. First, most young readers are still reading aloud to themselves, so there is a quiet buzz in the room during private reading time. Also, I let students talk quietly with the person sitting next to them if they need quick help with something. Other teachers I work with do expect private reading time to be silent, and they discourage children from talking to their neighbors during this time. This again is a decision teachers can make based on their tolerance for noise and the temperament of the class.

During private reading time I have reading conferences with individual readers. After private reading time, which increases from 5–10 minutes in September to 35–45 minutes in June, I stop the class for mid-workshop teaching. I might say something like, "Readers, I have to stop you. It's time to meet with your reading partners. Right now, take your books and your book bin, and go to your partner reading spot for partner reading time. Remember,

today you will want to show your partner the cover of your book and tell him or her how you got your mind ready to read.”

Mid-workshop Teaching

During mid-workshop teaching I remind the children how to use the particular strategy I taught, or teach them something specific to support their work in partnerships. This mid-workshop teaching is based on the needs of the class at the time.

After the brief interruption the children get up and move around the room to meet with their partners for *partner reading time*. Some teachers might begin private reading time by having partners sit near each other on chairs back-to-back, so that when it's time to transition to partner reading, they just need to turn their chairs around. In my classroom children go to their own seats for private reading time, and I tend to assign partner spots, so that each day partners know where they will meet. Again, this is an individual decision based on what works best for the teacher and the children.

During partner reading time the noise level in the room does go up a bit as children read together and talk about their books. Even so, it's important for a teacher to be consistent and clear about how much noise is acceptable. Especially early in the year, I briefly stop my class when the noise rises above a tolerable level. I want them to internalize their own volume monitors so that, as the weeks go by, it becomes less necessary for me to interrupt their work (and my reading conferences) to remind them to lower their voices.

Often during partner reading time, I pull together a small group of children for either guided reading instruction or a strategy lesson. When I don't teach a small group during partner reading time, I continue to walk around the room and conduct reading conferences, this time with partners rather than individuals. The chapters that follow explain setting up and managing reading partnerships in more detail.

Reading Conferences

During the children's independent reading workshop, teachers have very challenging work to do, too. While the children read privately or with partners, the teacher moves around the room providing direct instruction. In order to do this, we need to know our students as readers, a variety of ways to support their reading development, and how to teach the strategies they need to grow as readers.

I rely on two resources to guide me with reading conferences. Carl Anderson's book *How's It Going?* is full of valuable information about conferences in general and writing conferences in particular. Lucy Calkins's *The Art of Teaching Reading* details the kinds of conferences we might have during independent reading workshop. I also refer to other professional literature to help me imagine a repertoire of things I could teach in conferences (see appendix).

When I work with teachers new to independent reading workshop, it's always the case that reading conferences are the most challenging part of the workshop. Teachers often wonder what to say or what to emphasize when they sit alongside readers in their classrooms. As we watch children read, it can be overwhelming: there are a million things to teach them within a single conference.

I begin by providing an idea of how a typical reading conference might go. First, it's important to say that I move to the children rather than having them come to me. In other words, I meet them at their tables and their reading spots instead of asking them to join me at a conference table. When I move around the room for reading conferences, I am able to subtly manage the class because my presence in different places is effective. When I'm walking over to Atelah to confer with her, I can tap Jacob on the back as I pass him if I notice that he seems distracted or unfocused. Also, when I meet Atelah at her reading spot, the conference she and I have can inform the other readers at her table.

It's my goal to have conferences that last less than 3–5 minutes. In order to meet this goal, my conferences, like my mini-lessons, tend to follow a sort of architecture. As I sit alongside a child, I review my notes from our last conference and then observe the child as she reads. I jot some notes about what I see (and don't see). I then begin the interaction by offering some kind of compliment to the reader. This is an important yet often overlooked part of a conference. When we learn to begin a conference with a compliment, it trains us to watch our children and see their strengths. Often, as teachers of reading to new readers, we tend to focus on the skills or strategies that are missing. It's easy to sit alongside a child and feel overwhelmed by all the things the child needs to learn, but when we see only what's missing, we can't truly meet our students where they are as readers. Also, a compliment is just plainly a kindly and encouraging way to begin the interaction required in a reading conference.

So, after doing a little research and complimenting the reader, I move quickly to teach the student a skill or strategy that he needs to help his reading improve. Just as in a mini-lesson, it's most effective to decide on one teaching point for a reading conference. I make this decision by prioritizing the child's needs and picking the strategy or skill that will help most at this time in his reading life.

Having decided on the teaching point, I demonstrate just what I want the child to do, and I watch her as she tries it within the conference. At the end of the conference, I restate the teaching point and remind the reader to use the particular skill or strategy from this point forward. This summary is similar to the "link to ongoing work" portion of the mini-lesson.

As I confer, I take notes on my interaction with the reader. At first, when I was new at conferring, it was hard to observe, teach, and jot notes at the same time. But I've gotten better at it, and it helps me to remember that the purpose of my note taking is to inform my teaching.

In my conference notes, I make sure to jot down the compliment I offered the reader so that I can keep track of what's going well. I note the teaching

point of this conference and the other needs of this reader so that I can address them in the next conference or within a small-group strategy lesson with other readers who share that particular need.

Sample Reading Conference

The following is a sample reading conference, with comments interspersed to highlight the parts of the conference just described.

As I sat alongside Julian, I quickly *reviewed my notes* from our last conference to remind me of what we had worked on and what Julian might still need to learn. I *listened and observed* as he read a few pages of his text.

My goal is to leave the child better off at the end of the reading conference than when we started. So, I need to consider the possibilities for what I might teach. Based on my notes from previous conferences and on listening to Julian read, I knew we could work on several things. But today, I decided, my *teaching point* would be that when Julian was figuring out tricky words, he should go back and reread the text smoothly. I knew from previous conferences that Julian tended to rush while reading and to stop to think about what he had read only when asked to do so. I decided to teach him to slow down and reread the tricky parts smoothly because this would support his comprehension and fluency. I also decided on what *compliment* to offer. I jotted all this down in my conference notes.

Julian, I noticed that when you were reading, you used lots of strategies to figure out the tricky words in your book. Like, when you came to the word cleaning, I saw you check the picture, make the sound of the first letters, and take a guess. You said, "clening," but then you fixed it because that didn't make sense. I liked how you didn't just give up as you were reading.

I made a specific *compliment* based on what I observed Julian doing as he read. The compliment is analogous to the connection in the mini-lesson, and it starts off the reading conference in an affirming way.

Julian, I noticed that when you were doing that hard work with some of the words in your book, you kept right on reading. It gets a little messy when readers stop to work on words, and when reading gets messy, it can be hard to understand what's going on in our books. So, today I want to show you something that careful readers do to make sure their reading is clean and understandable. Readers go back and reread the parts where they had to do lots of work. Let me show you what I mean.

I'm going to go back to one of the pages where you did some work on words, and show you how careful readers go back and reread so that their reading doesn't sound so messy. Watch me do this.

I returned to the page where Julian had worked hard on a word, and I *demonstrated* how to reread it smoothly.

Julian, did you see how when I stopped to work on a word, my reading got messy? Did you notice how I went back and reread? It helped me get back into the story again.

I *explained* briefly what I had done, noting the benefit of using the strategy.

Now, I want you to go back and reread a part where you worked hard to get the word. I want you to reread it so it sounds clean, not messy, because this will help you better understand what you're reading. Right now, I want you to go back to this page and reread it to clean it up.

I offered the student a chance to *practice the strategy*. I made sure to use *consistent language* throughout the conference, and I remembered to explain why the strategy is important.

Wow, Julian, that sounded really clean. I'll bet it was easier to understand, too. Well, rereading the parts that you work hard on is a really important thing to remember when you read. When your reading is clean, not messy, it's so much easier to understand what you're reading. I want you to do this from now on, okay?

I complimented Julian on his success and *restated the teaching point*. I also made clear my expectation that he would use *this strategy from now on* as he reads. If he had not been successful, I might have demonstrated for him again and asked him to try it once more.



Throughout the chapters that follow, I provide examples of reading conferences that correspond with particular units of study.

Teaching Share Time

After private and partner reading time, my students gather together again for the teaching share time. After partner reading time I say to the class, "Readers, guess what? It's time to meet again for share time. But first, pick out the book you're going to read at home tonight, and put it in your take-home bag. Do that now." The children select a just-right book from their own book bins. "Okay, put your book bin away and bring your bag to the basket in the meeting area, and we'll get together for share time."

The children gather in the meeting area, put their take-home book bags in the proper basket, so that they can be passed out at the end of the day with the homework folders, and take a seat for teaching share time. Many teachers have moved away from the round-robin way of conducting share time, in which each child shares something that they did during reading time. We've found that this kind of share takes a very long time, and the children tend to tune out after the third or fourth description. Instead, many teachers have come to view the share time as another teaching opportunity. I often think

about it as a mini-lesson, jr., although it doesn't follow the mini-lesson architecture as described in a previous section. Here are a few different ways that teachers might conduct the teaching share time.

Share Time as a Mini-lesson Reinforcement

Sometimes during independent reading workshop, share time may be used to reinforce the teaching done during the mini-lesson. For instance, I might say, "Today we learned how readers use the cover of a book to help them get their minds ready to read. I want to show you the great work that Selena and Michael did to get their minds ready to read their books." I would show the class what the students had done by acting it out. Then I might say, "Okay, everyone else, turn and tell your neighbor how the cover helped you get your mind ready to read your book today."

Share Time as a Mini-lesson Add-on

When we confer with readers, we may notice that they do something that can supplement the teaching we did in our mini-lesson. In such a case, I might say, "Today I taught you how readers get their minds ready to read by looking closely at the cover picture, saying the title out loud, and thinking what the book might be about. Well, today when Alex was reading, he noticed the author's name on the cover. He had a book by Joy Cowley, and I heard him say, 'Hey, Joy Cowley. I bet this book is going to be silly.' That was so smart of Alex to notice the author's name so that he could get even more ready to read his book. So I guess we can do a few things: Say the title out loud. Look at the cover picture. Notice the author. Think, What might this book be about? Hey, we should start a chart called Things to Do to Get Our Minds Ready to Read a Book, shouldn't we?"

Share Time as a Mini-lesson Preview

Often, during reading conferences, I find that I taught a child a skill or strategy that I had planned to teach the whole class in the next mini-lesson. Then I might use share time to preview the mini-lesson: "Today we learned how readers take a close look at the cover of their books to get their minds ready to read. We learned that it helps to say the title out loud and to look at the picture on the cover. But, you know what? Today Eliza discovered something else that helped her get her mind ready to read. She took a sneak peek inside the book, right, Eliza? Well, tomorrow, I'm going to teach you all how you can do just what Eliza did, how you can take a sneak peek into the book to help get your minds ready to read."

Share Time as a Problem-Solving Opportunity

Some days, the independent reading workshop doesn't turn out as planned. Usually, when this happens, it's a workshop management issue, and the chil-

dren need to be reminded of what's expected of them. The share time is a good time to have this kind of talk, for example: "Readers, today we were supposed to be working on getting our minds ready to read by looking closely at the covers of our books. But a few kids told me it was hard to concentrate because it was pretty noisy. I even had to interrupt conference time to remind you to use your library voices. I thought we all knew how to use our library voices during reading time. Right now, turn to your neighbor and talk about what it means to use your library voice during reading time and why using library voices is so important." The teacher listens in as children talk briefly. "Okay, I heard you guys say that library voices are quiet voices and that we use library voices so we don't distract other readers. We have to remember that if we're going to have a reading workshop where all readers can concentrate on their work. Right now, I'm going to add another 5 minutes to reading workshop, and we're going to practice using our library voices. Then tomorrow I expect that reading workshop will be much quieter because I'm sure that you'll remember to use your library voices."



In this chapter, I've given a broad overview of the independent reading workshop. The chapters that follow look more closely at the work units of study composing independent reading workshop throughout the year.

Other Components of a Balanced Literacy Framework

Before moving toward a more detailed examination of the independent reading workshop, it's important to acknowledge that there are other components throughout the day within a balanced literacy framework in which we teach children to read, to write, and to be active thinkers and eager learners.

A balanced literacy framework is likely to have the following components as part of the daily approach to teaching reading and writing:

Components of a Balanced Literacy Framework

- Independent reading workshop
- Writing workshop
- Shared reading
- Interactive read-aloud with accountable talk
- Story time
- Small-group work (guided reading, strategy lessons)
- Word study (phonics, spelling)
- Interactive writing

If we think of the independent reading workshop as the heart, then we might think of the other components in a balanced literacy framework as the circulatory system that delivers the "goods" to the heart.

The other components of balanced literacy listed above work in service of independent reading time; they are not ends in and of themselves. After all, the goal of shared reading is not to help students be good at shared reading. We use shared reading as a supporting component to teach students the skills, strategies, and habits they need to be strong independent readers. In the same way, the main purpose of interactive read-aloud is not to teach children how to be good at interactive read-aloud. Rather, we use the interactive read-aloud as a component to model and teach the reading habits and comprehension strategies children need in their own independent reading. In other words, the reading children do in these other balanced literacy components is meant to transfer to the reading children do independently during reading workshop. And the work children do during independent reading workshop is meant to transfer to the reading children do outside the confines of the classroom.

Because the emphasis of this book is on the independent reading workshop, I only outline here the essential aspects of the other components. Many professional books detail the rich and important teaching that can be done within these components (see appendix).

Writing Workshop

The writing workshop follows the same structure as the independent reading workshop—it happens daily and begins with a mini-lesson followed by independent work time and a teaching share time. During independent writing time the children write or revise texts about self-selected topics while the teacher offers individual and small-group direct instruction during writing conferences and strategy lessons. During independent writing time children have access to the materials they need to write, revise, edit, and publish the pieces they've written.

The writing workshop provides valuable support as our youngest students become stronger readers by providing opportunities to develop letter-sound knowledge, word-level (lexical) knowledge, syntactic knowledge, and semantic knowledge (Clay 1998). Many of the skills and strategies our students need to control in order to be successful readers are also taught during the writing workshop. As children compose writing, they have another way of learning about letter-sound relationships, the structure of texts, reading with fluency and comprehension, and the joy of literacy.

Shared Reading

Shared reading, developed by Don Holdaway (1979), is a time in the school day that replicates the experience of a parent's reading a bedtime story to his child. During shared reading teachers gather their students around an enlarged text, such as a Big Book or a poem. All the children can easily see the text and illustrations, and the teacher and students together read and think about the story or poem, just as a parent and child might do as they interact with a book. The reading work during shared reading is shared between the

students and the teacher, with the teacher offering significant support as the children lead the way. During a shared reading session the teacher may spend some time working with the students on a focused teaching point, although she needs to be flexible and follow the students' interests and inquiries within the text.

In many classrooms the shared reading session begins with the class reading a familiar text together to warm up and then reading the text they are working on together for a set of days. Finally, many teachers expose the children to a new text at the end of a shared reading session. This new text will become the work text in future shared reading sessions.

Interactive Read-Aloud with Accountable Talk

No matter what side of the reading debate one is on, both sides agree that children need many opportunities to listen to texts read aloud by adults. The interactive read-aloud with accountable talk provides time for the students to listen to and talk about wonderful books that are most likely beyond their independent reading levels. Often early childhood teachers decide to begin the year reading picture books out loud, and then they move on to chapter books. During interactive read-aloud with accountable talk, the teacher models the work that careful readers do to comprehend texts and to foster ideas and theories about stories and characters.

Because the teacher is doing the reading, children can concentrate on using strategies for comprehension and having accountable conversations about the text. The conversations that children have about the read-aloud texts serve as models and scaffold the kinds of conversations we want them to have with their partners during the independent reading workshop. The interactive read-aloud is a time when we can model for the children what they will be able to do themselves as readers in the not-so-distant future.

Story Time

In addition to read-aloud with accountable talk, I try to have at least two other times in the day when I read aloud to my class. These story times provide opportunities to expose children to wonderful literature, beautiful story language, a range of vocabulary, and beloved authors. Story time is also an opportunity to read aloud texts that I could later use to make some kind of teaching point. For example, I make sure to read aloud books, such as *Shortcut*, that I can later use to mentor my students during writing time. I want to ensure that they have had a chance to listen to and enjoy the story as literature before I use it to serve a teaching purpose for writing workshop or other content areas.

Even though my story times may not have the same teaching rigor as the interactive read-aloud with accountable talk, I still model my thinking and provide opportunities for children to talk about the text.

Small-Group Work (Guided Reading, Strategy Lessons)

There are many versions of small-group work, so this component is particularly hard to describe in a brief manner. In many of the classrooms I've worked in, teachers tend to do small-group work in the form of strategy lessons (Goodman, Watson, and Burke 1987) or guided reading sessions (Fountas and Pinnell 1996). In *The Art of Teaching Reading* (2001), Calkins charts some of the differences between strategy lessons and guided reading. I've found it helpful to think of strategy lessons as being efficient opportunities to gather children who need extra support with a particular skill or strategy. I tend to bring children together for guided reading sessions when they are on the verge of moving to or have just begun reading a more difficult level of text.

Word Study (Phonics, Spelling)

It's important to spend time each day systematically teaching our students about letter-sound relationships, spelling, and strategies for encoding and decoding words. There are many methods, approaches, and programs for teaching these things (see appendix).

When we plan word study and phonics instruction we must ensure that we teach children how to transfer what they learn during this time into their own writing and reading work. After all, what good would it do if our children knew digraphs but didn't have opportunities to use them in their own writing? And just because a child can make the /ch/ sound in a whole-class phonics lesson does not mean that she will know what to read if the word *choose*, *change*, or *exchange* is in the text. We must always contextualize the work we do in word study with the work that readers and writers do in their own texts.

Interactive Writing

During an interactive writing session, the teacher and students co-create a text and "share the pen" to write it on chart paper or sentence strips. In my class, for example, during our neighborhood study, we visited the local veterinary hospital, and when we got back to class, we decided to write a thank-you note to the veterinarian who had given us the tour. Together, we decided what we'd write, and we co-wrote the text on a large piece of chart paper. I called children up to the easel to do some of the writing while the other children sat in the meeting area trying to do the same thing on the dry-erase boards.

This interactive writing session provided an opportunity for me to teach the children about the genre of thank-you notes and to focus on how writers stretch out words to make sure they get the letters in the middle. In most interactive writing sessions the teacher chooses a focus for teaching children something they need to know for their own writing or reading.

Scheduling the Literacy Day

How to schedule the literacy day is one of the most frequently asked questions at workshops and presentations, and it's one of the hardest questions to answer. Every school has particular issues, such as overcrowding, so that in some buildings first graders have to go to lunch at 10:15 a.m. in order for the school to cycle all the students through the cafeteria. In other places, teachers are forced to have a 90-minute literacy block with every single minute mandated by the administration. Still other schools have one half-day per week off for children so that teachers can have professional development. This doesn't include field trips or school assemblies. There must be hundreds of permutations of burdens that teachers endure with regard to scheduling, so I acknowledge that it can be almost impossible to propose a schedule good for everyone. Having said that, I share herewith a possible classroom schedule:

Sample Schedule for a Literacy Day

8:30 a.m.	<i>Arrival</i> , morning jobs, library time
8:45	Morning meeting
9:00	Shared reading
9:15	Independent reading workshop
10:05	Word study
10:15	Writing workshop
11:10	Interactive read-aloud with accountable talk
11:30	<i>Lunch and outdoor play</i>
12:15 p.m.	Quiet time, free reading
12:20	Math workshop
1:15	Social studies, science, art, choice time
1:45	Preparation
2:35	Story time
2:50	Homework, pack up
3:00	<i>Dismissal</i>

Arrival, Morning Jobs, Library Time

Children arrive and do morning jobs. As they do their morning jobs, I greet them, gather notes, try to check homework, and do all the usual first-thing-in-the-morning tasks that teachers have to do. After children finish their morning jobs, they may go to the classroom library and read anything with anybody until it's time for the morning meeting to begin.

Morning Meeting

During the morning meeting in the class meeting area, we go over the schedule for the day and do the quick math work that our math program requires. Three days a week, we do interactive writing via a kind of morning message.

Shared Reading

In the class meeting area, we start with a familiar shared text to warm up and then work on the current work text, which we use for several days. A few times a week, I end the session by introducing a new text that we'll use as a work text in the future. The texts I most often use for shared reading are Big Books, short poems, or interactive writing pieces that we've created.

Independent Reading Workshop

After shared reading and before beginning the independent reading workshop, I ask children to leave the meeting area to get their independent book bins and take them to their seats. This gets them up and moving before they come back to the meeting area for a mini-lesson.

Word Study

No matter what method you use to teach word study, phonics, and spelling, it is crucial to facilitate the transfer of these skills to children's own reading and writing. They need to understand that the things they learn during word study will help them as they write and read. I incorporate handwriting and letter formation practice into the word study session.

Writing Workshop

After word study and before beginning writing workshop, I ask the children to leave the meeting area to get their writing folders and writing tools ready for writing time. Again, my purpose is to get the children moving, if only briefly, so that they'll be ready to focus on the writing mini-lesson. Writing workshop follows the same structure as reading workshop: mini-lesson, work time, and then share time.

Interactive Read-Aloud with Accountable Talk

In the class meeting area, students sit next to their read-aloud partners to listen to and talk about the book I'm reading aloud. This is an opportunity to work on comprehension and conversation strategies. I read a variety of types of texts, including picture books, chapter books, short stories, poetry, and nonfiction throughout the year.

Quiet Time, Free Reading

When the children return from lunch, I give them 5 minutes or so to calm down and read anything from their book bins. They may talk quietly to the children sitting next to them about their books.

Math Workshop

Our math program begins with a mini-lesson and then work time, just like the reading and writing workshops. At the end of math time, I try to have a brief share time, but I admit I don't do it consistently.

Social Studies, Science, Art, Choice Time

In my school, we alternate between social studies units and science units throughout the year. So, if we are immersed in a four-week science unit, I tend not to do social studies at the same time. I believe strongly that children need regular opportunities to create art and to learn about the different art-making media, so I try to ensure that we have at least a period or two of art each week. Also, it's important that we broaden our view of art to include not only the visual arts but also music, drama, and dance.

Fortunately, my school is committed to providing young children with choice time at least a couple of times a week. During choice time, children might do things like build with Legos and blocks, work on their own writing or reading projects, explore math materials, cook, create art, act in plays. In an ideal world, children would have time each day for art, choice, and recess, but in reality, if I can fit these things into the schedule two or three times a week, I'm (sort of) happy.

Homework, Pack Up

I quickly go over the homework assignment and pass out homework folders and take-home book bags.



When we plan out our schedules, fitting everything in on a daily basis can feel like we're trying to solve a Rubik's cube. We switch things this way and that, only to find that something important gets pushed out of the way. When I work with teachers on scheduling, one of the things I tell them is that it's helpful to look at their schedules across a week rather than on a daily basis. When we look across a week, we should make sure that our balanced literacy framework is indeed balanced. We should account for several sessions of shared reading, interactive writing, daily word study, and daily reading and writing workshops, which include small-group instruction.

In an ideal world, everything important happens every day. In reality, however, the only parts of my schedule that are non-negotiable are the daily reading, writing, and math workshops as well as a time when I read aloud to my students. There are days when I might switch shared reading for interactive writing, or I might condense the time allotted to a workshop or two because of a field trip or assembly. Also, one day per week our administration provides each first-grade class with an extra 20 minutes of recess, in addition to the daily recess that preceded lunch. On my bonus recess day, I have to make necessary schedule adjustments.

I realize that it may be difficult for readers to lay this schedule alongside their own because they most likely have completely different school cultures, sets of district mandates, or value systems about what to spend time on. However we schedule, I want to suggest that we don't forget our students. I'm reminded of an important lesson about children and scheduling that I learned from Hannah Schneewind, a colleague at P.S. 321. A couple of times a week Hannah scheduled math in the morning and writing workshop after lunch. When I asked her about this, she said she scheduled that way for children who struggle with literacy. Hannah helped me realize that it must feel really overwhelming for students who struggle with reading and writing to arrive at school each day and face only literacy tasks until lunchtime. Hannah scheduled math (or science, social studies, inquiry, or choice time) in the mornings a couple of times a week out of consideration for those children. When I made this adjustment to my schedule, I saw immediate effects. Herbert and other students like him would light up when they checked the schedule upon arrival and saw that we were going to have math in the morning. Herbert would pump his fist and exclaim, "Yes! Morning math!"

Balance is a good thing. We strive for balance in our lives, our diets, our checkbooks, and our teaching. As I work with young children, I've come to realize that teaching within a balanced literacy framework provides many points of entry into the club of readers and writers (Smith 1987).

This chapter has described components of the literacy day with a particular emphasis on the independent reading workshop. In the chapters that follow, I suggest ways to plan for a balanced curriculum within the independent reading workshop that produces well-rounded readers who decode words proficiently, comprehend texts deeply, and pursue reading joyfully in their lives inside and outside of our classrooms.