Six Scaffolding Strategies to Use with Your Students

By Rebecca Alber
5/24/11

What's the opposite of scaffolding a lesson? It would be saying to students something like, "Read this nine-page science article, write a detailed essay on the topic it explores, and turn it in by Wednesday." Yikes -- no safety net, no parachute, no scaffolding -- just left blowing in the wind.

Let's start by agreeing that scaffolding a lesson and differentiating instruction are two different things. Scaffolding is breaking up the learning into chunks and then providing a tool, or structure, with each chunk. When scaffolding reading, for example, you might preview the text and discuss key vocabulary, or chunk the text and read and discuss as you go. With differentiation, you may give a child an entirely different piece of text to read, you might shorten the text or alter it, and you may modify the writing assignment that follows.

Simply put, scaffolding is what you do first with kids, then for those students who are still struggling, you may need to differentiate by modifying an assignment and/or making accommodations for a student (for example, choose more accessible text and/or assign an alternative project).

Scaffolding and differentiation do have something in common though. In order to meet students where they are and appropriately scaffold a lesson, or differentiate instruction, you have to know the individual and collective zone of proximal development (ZPD) of your learners. (As education researcher Eileen Raymond states, "[T]he ZPD is the distance between what children can do by themselves and the next learning that they can be helped to achieve with competent assistance.")

In the Classroom

So let's get to some scaffolding strategies you may or may not have tried yet, or perhaps you've not used them in sometime and just need a gentle reminder on how awesome and helpful they can be when it comes to student learning:

#1. Show and Tell

How many of us say that we learn best by seeing something rather than hearing about it? Modeling for students is a cornerstone of scaffolding in my experience. Have you ever interrupted someone with "just show me!" while they were in the middle of explaining to you how to do something? Every chance you have, show or demonstrate to students exactly what they are expected to do.

- Try the fish bowl activity, where a small group in the center are circled by the class as the group in the middle, or fishbowl, engage in an activity, modeling how it's done for the larger group.
- Always show students the outcome or product *before* they do it. If a teacher assigns a persuasive essay or inquiry-based science project, a model should be presented side-by-side with a criteria chart or rubric. You can guide students through each step of the process, model in-hand of the finished product.
- Use think alouds, which will allow you to model your thought process as you: read a text, solve a problem, or design a project. Remember that children's cognitive abilities are still in development so opportunities for them to see developed, critical thinking are essential.

#2. Tap into Prior Knowledge

Ask students to share their own experiences, hunches, and ideas about the content or concept of study and have them relate and connect it to their own lives. Sometimes you may have to offer hints and suggestions, leading them to the connections a bit, but once they get there, they will grasp it as their own.

Launching the learning in your classroom from the prior knowledge of your students, and using this as a framework for future lessons is not only a scaffolding technique, many would agree it's just plain good teaching.

#3. Give Time to Talk

All learners need time to process new ideas and information. They also need time to verbally make sense of and articulate their learning with the community of learners who are also engaged in the same experience and journey. As we all know, structured discussions really work best with children regardless of their level of maturation. If you aren't weaving in think-pair-share, turn-and-talk, triad teams or some other structured talking time throughout the lesson, you should begin including this crucial strategy on a regular basis.

#4. Pre-Teach Vocabulary

Sometimes referred to as frontloading vocabulary, this is a strategy that we teachers don't use enough. Many of us, myself included, are guilty of sending students all alone down the bumpy, muddy path known as Challenging Text – a road booby trapped with difficult vocabulary. We send them ill prepared and then we are often shocked when they: a) lose interest b) create a ruckus c) fall asleep.

Pre-teaching vocabulary doesn't mean pulling a dozen words from the chapter and having kids look up definitions and write them out (we all know how this will go. Again, see above a, b, and c). Instead, introduce the words to kids in photos, and in context to things they know and are interested in. Use analogies, metaphors and invite students to create a symbol or drawing for each word and give time for discussion of the words (small and

whole groups). Not until they've done all this should the dictionaries come out. And the dictionaries will be used only to compare with those definitions they've already discovered on their own.

With the dozen or so words "frontloaded," students are ready, you as their guide, to tackle that challenging text.

#5. Use Visual Aides

Graphic organizers, pictures, and charts can all serve as scaffolding tools. Graphic organizers are very specific in that they help kids visually represent their ideas, organize information, and grasp concepts such as sequencing and cause and effect.

A graphic organizer shouldn't be The Product, but rather it's a scaffolding tool that helps guide and shape the student's thinking so that they can apply it. Some students can dive right into the discussion, or writing an essay, or synthesizing several different hypotheses without using a graphic organizer of some sort, but many of our students benefit from using them with a difficult reading or challenging new information. Think of graphic organizers as training wheels; they are temporary and meant to be removed.

#6. Pause, Ask Questions, Pause, Review

This is a wonderful way to check for understanding while students read a chunk of difficult text or learn a new concept or content. Here's how this strategy works: a new idea from discussion or the reading is shared, then pause (providing think time), then ask a strategic question, pausing again. By strategic, you need to design them ahead of time, make sure they are specific, guiding and open-ended questions. (Great questions fail without giving think time for responses so hold out during that Uncomfortable Silence.) Keep kids engaged as active listeners by calling on someone to "give the gist" of what was just discussed/discovered/ questioned. If the class seems stuck by the questions, provide an opportunity for students to discuss it with a neighbor.

Trying Something New

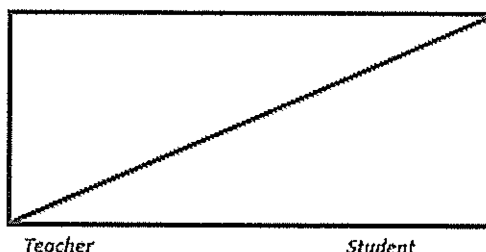
With all the diverse learners in our classrooms, there is a strong need for teachers to learn and experiment with new scaffolding strategies. I often say to teachers I support, you have slow down in order to go quickly. Scaffolding a lesson may, in fact, take longer to teach, but the end product is of far greater quality and the experience much more rewarding for all involved.

Please share with us scaffolding strategies that work well for your students.

Are You Scaffolding or Rescuing?
Terry Thompson

Do you remember where you were when you first saw the (now familiar) scaffolding diagram? Oh, come on. You know the one.

The long rectangle with a diagonal line stretching from the top right corner to the bottom left dividing it in two? On the far left hand side was the word *teacher* and on the far right was the word *student*? Remember?



I do. I was in our small campus library sitting at a child-sized study table around which sat our assistant principal, me, and the rest of my grade-level team. And I was overwhelmed. You wouldn't think that such a basic looking diagram could get me all worked up, but it did. I was suspicious. Looking at it, you'd think scaffolding was a fairly simple, straightforward concept. But somewhere deep inside me, I knew better. And as our balanced literacy trainer's voice echoed my concerns, I knew I'd be spending a lot of time getting to know this rectangle.

Over ten years later, as I've moved from classroom teacher to Reading Recovery teacher to literacy coach, I've seen that diagram and its many variations more times than I can count. No matter how many times I encounter it, its simplicity still remains a bit deceptive. Oh, don't get me wrong. It's a helpful visual, but scaffolding our instruction is anything but simple, requiring skillful teaching moves based on thoughtful interpretations of all the various information we can gather on our students. It can be even more difficult to build scaffolds for the students who need our intense instruction the most - those struggling and reluctant readers we encounter on a daily basis.

True scaffolding takes an in-depth knowledge of readers as well as the instructional practices that will most benefit them, and it involves a seamless, almost art-like dance to the beats of varying levels of support. A dance that is different for each student, and one where the steps can change based on the needs of the reader and the focus of the instruction.

As instructors, we take the lead in this dance, determined that our readers will eventually move to the captivating melodies of reading and writing - on their own and without our guidance. But we move cautiously. We know that too many missteps or leading too much will create readers who can't dance on their own or worse, don't want to dance at all.

In all of this, we continue to sharpen our skills as instructors. We continue to learn. We continue to grow.

Simple? I think not.

Rescuing: Scaffolding's Evil Twin Brother

Recently I had a chance to work for several weeks with a group of teachers who were eager to take a good, strong look at their teaching practices. I asked them to identify four students for daily individual tutoring just after school let out for the summer. In addition to coaching them during their individual tutoring sessions, I offered to design an ongoing staff development program to support their instructional goals. During the planning stages, the teachers asked that we spend time investigating their use of language to support their students' sense of agency.

I asked teachers to record their lessons and transcribe them for the group. During our staff development time each day, one of the teachers would share a transcript of a lesson, and we would look at the way she used language to support her student in moving toward independence.

As we investigated their instruction, I began to notice a recurring pattern. The group seemed to have a desperate need for their students to do well. Why wouldn't they? Isn't that the crux of a powerful lesson: to cater our book introductions and scaffolds in such a way that the reading - and the reader, as a result - is successful? But it seemed to run deeper than that. They definitely had a sense of urgency for their readers to *get it right* - however, the problem was that many of their readers didn't seem to share that same sense of urgency. The teachers were working harder than their students were. In some instances, they were doing almost all the work. This sent up a red flag and I decided we needed to take a closer look at the origins of their instructional decisions.

Returning to our original line of inquiry, we started to look at their use of language and our understanding of student agency. As we reviewed lesson transcripts and our instructional decisions, we noticed an overall pattern of teaching that included an impulsive need to sweep in and help at the slightest moment of difficulty. Sound familiar?

When I asked the group to their interpretations of this pattern, some initially reasoned that they were working within the zone of proximal development, some wondered if maybe they were jumping in too soon, and a few admitted that they really weren't sure why we were teaching this way.

I returned to that familiar scaffolding diagram and asked them to think about where they were on the scale of support during these moments. We had a lot of conversation around what it means to scaffold our instruction. In these conversations, we realized that when our scaffolds aren't strong and our students start to falter as a result, we tend to grab at straws instructionally - desperately trying whatever we can to "save the lesson". We wanted our readers to feel successful, but at the moments they weren't, fear and uncertainty had us jumping in (often too soon), taking over for the reader, and carrying the weight of the work at hand.

Eventually we came to recognize this behavior as **rescuing**, and dedicated the rest of our staff development time to investigating how rescuing occurs, how to differentiate it from **scaffolding**, and how to adjust our instructional techniques to prevent it.

When Rescuing Isn't Helping

There is certainly a fine line between scaffolding and rescuing, and in many ways, their similarities can be confusing. It's an easy mistake, because when you think about it, both rescuing and scaffolding stem from a foundation of collaboration and assistance. Both are helping behaviors. Both scenarios denote a more capable person (the teacher) supporting a needier individual (the learner).

Despite these connections, rescuing and scaffolding can often be polar opposites. In our work, we learned to differentiate the two by reflecting on one overarching concept: **agency**. I often ask teachers, "Who do you think worked harder during that lesson - you or the student?" In a rescuing situation, the teacher is generally the only one working - the sole responsibility is placed on the rescuer. On the other hand, when scaffolds are built into the instructional plan, the student is working just as hard as the teacher (if not harder) as the teacher assumes a facilitative role - supporting, modeling, and encouraging. But *not* taking over the reader's work at hand. In essence, scaffolders offer just the right amount of support to make it easy to learn. Scaffolding requires a shared responsibility with an end goal in mind. Rescuers simply take over.

The Rescued

Whether conscious or unconscious, rescuers envision a learner who is helpless - someone who can't do it on his own or is simply unable to pull himself out of whatever it is that is got him bogged down in the first place. While it can happen with just about any student in any situation, it appears to occur most often when working with struggling readers, unmotivated readers, ELL students, and any of our 'harder to teach' learners. Since many teachers don't want to risk pushing these readers even further away, they may feel reluctant or uncertain as they raise the bar for them. Additionally, since many of these struggling readers often come to us with a sense of learned helplessness, both teacher and student seem primed for a rescue scenario to unfold. In reality, as these are exactly the students who need our intentionally scaffolded focus the most. Instructional rescuing is often counterproductive and may even be detrimental. In a classic case of best intentions, our readers grow accustomed to our rescuing behaviors and learn that if they wait long enough, someone will eventually feel sorry for them and jump in to do the work for them.

The Rescuers

Teachers are essentially helpers and any one of us might don our rescuing cape at different times. It comes with the territory. But it's one of those traits where less is more. While I agree that there are teachers out there who are chronic rescuers, rescuing isn't a full-time sport for most teachers. It really is about looking at our own instruction and simply noticing our tendencies. Some teachers tend to rescue more with needier readers,

while others might rescue more when their overall energy is low or they're having a bad day. We may rescue when we're uncomfortable with a particular area of instruction or we haven't planned our lessons as well as we'd like. Some teachers rescue randomly based on the perceived needs of students in a particular instructional moment, while still others rescue out of a need to feel effective.

Rescuing appears to happen most when we don't have a strong plan for the scaffold in place or when we skip a step in the scaffolding process. When we've left learners high and dry without any support system, it looks like they need rescuing. For example, I've noticed a common situation where teachers are left to feel that we've no choice but to rescue - and it's one we often set ourselves up for. Consider one of the fundamental progressions of scaffolding which, in its most basic form, involves the following continuum of instructional steps:

1. **I Do/You Watch** - teacher models the task and the student observes

2. **I Do/You Help** - teacher does the majority of the work while the student helps

3. **You Do/I Help** - student does the majority of the work while the teacher helps

4. **You Do/I Watch** - student does the task while the teacher observes

When navigated correctly, moving through this instructional sequence produces incredible results. However, I've noticed that some teachers skip Steps 2 and 3 and in doing so, create a situation that is ripe for rescuing behaviors. Still others might redefine Step 1 as simply "I tell you about it/You listen" and then continue directly to Step 4. These oversights are generally unintentional and teachers are often unaware they even happened. Yet consider how directly related they can be to situations where readers start to drown and need a life boat.

Scaffolding vs. Rescuing

I've developed a couple tools to help you gauge if you are putting up scaffolds or performing rescues with specific students. The first is a compare and contrast chart of scaffold and rescue behaviors. You can download the chart at this link:

http://www.choiceliteracy.com/Scaffolding.pdf

The second tool is a self-test to assess how you interact with students.

Quick Self-Assessment

Consider your small group and individual reading instruction. If you answer "yes" to more than just a few of these questions, it may be time to take a closer look at your rescuing behaviors:

1. Do you often find the momentum of your lesson waning without a good reason?

While there are plenty of other variables that may be at the root of this problem, rescuing is one you might consider. It isn't unusual for a rescuer's lesson to start out with a bang and then wind down to a fizzle by the end. I've noticed this problem to be twofold: the teacher tires from 'dragging the student along' and the reader tires from the boredom of having to sit through the lesson.

2. Do you find yourself physically holding the text, turning the pages, and pointing to difficult parts as your reader(s) sits back, physically uninvolved?

While there are certainly times where these teaching behaviors are necessary, they are fewer than most of us would like to think. Rescuers have a difficulty 'pushing back' from the table and letting the reader give it a try on her own.

3. Are you exhausted after a lesson?

As a result of taking on most of the responsibility around the learning, teachers who rescue often work harder than their students, leaving them utterly exhausted, despite having started out fairly energized.

4. Are you doing most of the talking?

Rescuers tend to take over conversations with students. This can be a sign that they are doing the majority of the work, so the reader doesn't have to.

5. Do you avoid challenging students for fear of where that challenge might take you?

As a defense mechanism, rescuers often want the lesson to flow smoothly, so they avoid sticky situations at all costs. They especially tend to steer clear of ambiguous situations where they can't control the outcome. In this way, they're preemptive - avoiding situations where the reader would even need to be rescued at all.

6. Is it difficult for you to allow students to work through a challenging text on their own? Could your wait time be extended?

Many rescuers jump in entirely too soon. And when they do, they generally take on the work themselves. If too much time has gone by, consider jumpstarting the stall with a decisive, well-placed prompt such as: "I see you're stuck there. What could you do to help yourself?"

7. Do you struggle to take notes on student reading behaviors?

Though not always indicative of a rescuer, it may be the reason you can't take good instructional notes is due to the fact that you're too busy doing the reader's work for him and your hands are all over the text.

8. Do you generally ask closed questions?

Closed questions usually require a one-word answer without a lot of thinking. They are a common form of rescuing, because they give the illusion that both the teacher and the student are successful. For example, Did you like the character? *vs.* What can you tell me about the character? *is the kind of questioning shift you might try.*

9. Do you machine-gun students with follow-up questions, not allowing time to really share their thinking?

This is a frequent rescue behavior. I've seen many teachers who will risk an open-ended question only to follow it up all too quickly with an onslaught of rapid-fire closed questions. There is discomfort with the silence the student's thinking time invokes.

10. Do you struggle to define a focal point for your lesson, teach many lessons "on the fly," or have difficulty keeping the lesson focused?

Even though it may 'all seem important', we can't teach everything at once. Without a focus, our lessons can feel scattered, leaving us feeling unprepared. And when we're unprepared, we tend to rescue more. Choosing an overarching focus supports teaching that is more deliberate in its scaffolding.

Deliberately planned and intentionally executed scaffolding is the antithesis of instructional rescuing. Often, readers who appear to need rescuing actually need a stronger scaffold. It takes intentional planning on our part, not to mention lots of practice, but the first step is awareness. When we take a moment to investigate our instruction with an eye toward screening for rescuing behaviors, we are making powerful movements toward helping our students become independent lifelong learners.

ELA Shift #3: Staircase Complexity

Instructional Shift:

K–12 reading emphasizes text complexity as the most important factor in developing skilled readers (CCR.RL/RI.10). In order to prepare students for the complexity of college and career-ready texts, each grade level requires a "step" of growth on the "staircase". Instruction should be centered around grade-appropriate text which requires close reading. Teachers should be patient and create more time and space in the curriculum for this close and careful reading and provide appropriate and necessary scaffolding and supports so that it is possible for all students reading below grade level to participate and learn.

Assessment Shift:

Passage and/or text selection for assessments need to be based on text complexity guidelines for each grade level. (CCSS Appendix A)

Instructional Implications

- Ensure students are engaged in more complex texts at every grade level
- K-2 need exposure to complex read alouds
- Engage students in rigorous conversations
- Give students more time on more complex texts
- Provide scaffolding; i.e., reading/thinking aloud, digital media to build background knowledge, collaborative routines such as reciprocal teaching, collaborative strategic reading
- Use leveled texts carefully to build independence; do not supplant opportunities for engagement with grade level complex text

Administrative Implications

- Ensure that complexity of text builds from grade-to-grade in accordance with R.CCR.10
- Review current grade level materials and resources to determine appropriate text complexity
- Provide professional development and collaborative planning to encourage the scaffolding of complex texts across a period of time
- Encourage teachers to allow students to productively struggle with complex texts
- Look for students who are productively struggling with complex texts

Resources:

Shift 3: Staircase of Complexity (Video and Discussion Organizer)
Introduction to Text Complexity (Video)
Complex Text and its Implications in the Classroom (Video)
The Challenge of Challenging Text (Article by Shanahan, Fisher and Frey)
Kansas Text Complexity Tools
Preparing for Close Reading with Students (Video)
CCSSO Supporting District and Teachers with Text Complexity (Webinar)
CCSS with Appendices
Text Complexity and the Growth of Comprehension (CCSS p. 8)
Standard 10: Range, Quality, and Complexity of Student Reading K-5; Range of Text Types K-5 (CCSS p. 31)
Standard 10: Range, Quality, and Complexity of Student Reading 6-12; Range of Text Types 6-12 (CCSS p. 57)
Appendix A: Text Complexity, Key Considerations, Grade Bands Associated with Lexiles (pp. 2-16)
Appendix B: Text Exemplars
Revised Publishers' Criteria K-2 In addition to students learning to read texts at the K-2 level of complexity, the standards encourage students to encounter more complex texts to build knowledge through read-alouds. (p. 5)
Revised Publishers' Criteria 3-12 Another key priority of the CCSS is a requirement that students be able to demonstrate their independent capacity to read at the appropriate level of complexity and depth. (pp.8-10)

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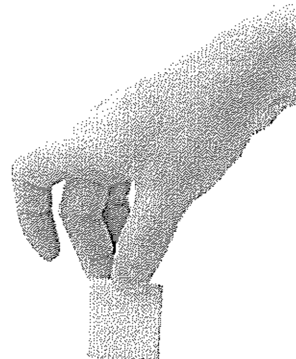

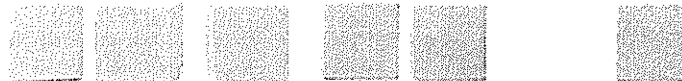

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7 Actions that Teachers Can Take Right Now: Text Complexity

By Elfrieda H. Hiebert
Text Project & the University of California, Santa Cruz

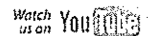
A separate standard for text complexity in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) means that this feature of reading development is at the center of many conversations among educators. How this standard translates into classroom instruction is less clear. Even with current texts, teachers can take some important actions to support their students on the staircase of text complexity—right now!

Download

Text Matters – 7 Actions That Teachers Can Take Right Now: Text Complexity (389 KB)

With the introduction of CCSS, it's easy to think that text complexity is a new way to look at text. But this is not the case. It has been around for almost a century as part of readability formulas by governmental and educational agencies. It's just that text levels weren't explicitly identified. Statements were made that "students should recognize figurative language in a grade-level text" but grade level was never specified. The situation has changed with the CCSS. An entire standard is devoted to increases in students' ability to read complex text over the school years to the point of college and career readiness.

It should be noted that there are no clear paths for how this standard translates into classroom instruction. Compounding the issue is the text itself. Many teachers purchase books to read aloud or for special units but textbook purchases usually occur at the school or even district and state levels. There are also many questions about assumptions of the CCSS's construct of text complexity such as how far texts can be stretched before students' comprehension breaks down. Until researchers answer such questions and until educators



Contact Us:
info@textproject.org

and publishers determine how text complexity will be measured, most teachers have the texts that they have.

Action 1

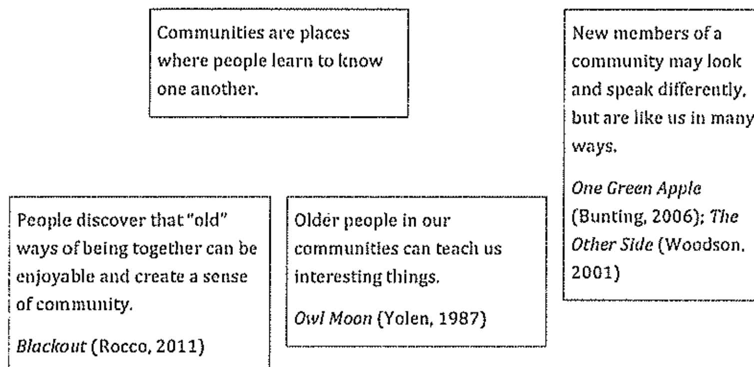
Focus on Knowledge

The first action is to ensure that the focus of classrooms is on knowledge acquisition. The biggest reason why reading is so important is that texts are the place where human beings record their knowledge. Typically, the informational texts of content areas—biology, chemistry, physics, economics, geography mathematics, even the arts (e.g., music, art history) —are the ones that come to mind when we think of knowledge. It is true that the content areas are laden with new concepts and knowledge for students and that the critical role of content areas is recognized in the CCSS with its emphasis on informational texts.

But when teachers think of strengthening the knowledge of their students, they should also think of the knowledge within literature. The central themes of literature are the content of the humanities (philosophy, literary theory) and certain social sciences (history, psychology, anthropology). Literature deals with the human condition such as relations among human beings and that of the individual to society and nature. Literature has other features such authors' uses of language or features of genres. But the purpose of literature is to convey themes about the human experience—themes of survival, courage, family ties, and the joys and perils of growing up. Some text may not have the most profound themes—especially the texts of beginning reading but true literature, even in picture books, grapples with the great themes of human experience, as the individual's relationship to family, community, and even morality.

The first action that teachers can take to support students with complex text is to bring to the foreground the themes of literature, even in the primary grades. The content map below illustrates how several narrative texts that might be read-aloud to second graders or read as part of instructional and independent events by third graders relate to the theme of community connections and relationships.

A Knowledge Map for Narrative Texts



Action 2

Create Connections

For knowledge to be useful, new ideas and information need to be connected to existing knowledge. The integrated view of the language arts in the CCSS recognizes this need to reflect, share, and use knowledge.

The five terms represented in the acronym KNOWS are ways in which teachers support the connection of knowledge for students. First, teachers connect students' existing **knowledge** to the text at hand. In the extensions of the CCSS to guidelines for publishers, the CCSS writers minimize this role of the teacher and emphasize the text as the source of knowledge. But, for many students, a comment or question by the teacher about the text and how it connects to students' knowledge can be critical (e.g., a few comments about World War II before reading Winston Churchill's speech Blood, Toil, Sweat, and Tears).

The second kind of connection—new knowledge—gives students a purpose and focus for reading. An anticipatory set on the role of speeches to inspire (e.g., Churchill's speech) can contribute to students' sense of why and what they are reading.

Support for organizing knowledge comes when teachers encourage students to write a response or make a concept map after reading. In a world with massive amounts of knowledge, learning to organize knowledge is one of the most enduring strategies of lifelong learning.

Connections to additional sources for learning widen students' webs of knowledge. Direction to the two other speeches that Churchill made as a new prime minister (and helped turn the tide of public sentiment in Britain) illustrates how teachers widen the web of knowledge.

Finally, teachers support connections of knowledge by giving students occasions to share what they have learned. The chance to share knowledge gained from reading, whether orally or in writing, underlies retention and ownership of knowledge.

Creating Connections: KNOWS

K	Did I draw on students' existing knowledge and experience?
N	Did I identify what new knowledge can be gained from this text and guide students in gaining it?
O	Did I support students in organizing their new knowledge with their existing knowledge/experiences?
W	Did I show students ways to widen their knowledge?
S	Did I support students in sharing their knowledge?

Action 3
Activate Students' Passion

Most American students can read but many don't like to read. This finding is sobering—and sad. In the 21st century, the world of knowledge represented by books is open to individuals as never before. According to researchers, an explanation for American students' disinterest in reading may stem from the fact that much of their school days are spent reading assigned texts. Further, reading events are often short with few connections from one event to another.

Students need the chance to delve into topics. They also need some choice in what they read. These choices, researchers have shown, do not have to be great. Even getting to choose between two books can go a long way in increasing students' engagement in reading. Teachers can do a great deal to engage students' passion and interest in reading by giving them the chance to read widely and deeply. The Funds of Information Initiative ("Funds") illustrates how this might happen. The Funds project has three components.

- First, appropriate books for students need to be identified for genres or topics such as the texts in the chart below. The categories are not comprehensive but the list illustrates books on often-overlooked topics (e.g., math, music).
- Second, Funds has only two guidelines: Students need to read a text from each of the designated categories and they need to read deeply—three books or more on a topic of their choice (including topics not on the list).
- Third, the sample record form for the Funds project illustrates that students' reading needs to be recognize. Forms can be more elaborate (e.g., symbols or explanations for likes or dislikes). What is critical is that students have a structure for reading widely and also deeply—and learning to access the wealth of information in books.

Sample Record Form

The Funds of Information Initiative

Stories About Heroes	Music
Tales: Old and New	Math
Animals in the Wild	History & Geography
How People Live	Your Choice

The Funds of Information Initiative
Identifying Appropriate Books for Selected Genres

Stories about Heroes

- *Joan of Arc* (Diane Stanley)
- *Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Rosemary L. Bray)
- *Seven Brave Women* (Betsy Hearne)
- *She's Wearing a Dead Bird on Her Head!* (Kathryn Lasky)

Music

		• *I Like Music* (Leah Komaiko) • *The Philharmonic Gets Dressed* (Karla Kuskin) • *Moses Goes to a Concert* (Isaac Millman)
Tales: New & Old		• *The Huckabuck Family and How They Raised Popcorn in Nebraska and Quit and Came Back* (Carl Sandburg) • *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* (Virginia Hamilton) • *Rapunzel* (Paul O. Zelinsky)
Math		• *Math Curse* (Jon Scieszka) • *Grandfather Tang's Story* (Ann Tompert) • *A Very Improbable Story: A Math Adventure* (Edward Einhorn)
Animals in the Wild		• *Manatee Blues* (*Vet Volunteers* series) (Laurie Halse Anderson) • *Animals and the Seasons* (Susanne Riha) • *Amazing X-Rays: Wild Animals* (Jacquelin A. Ball)
History & Geography		• *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* (Eleanor Coerr) • *The Scrambled States of America* (Laurie Keller) • *Shaka: King of the Zulus* (Diane Stanley)
How People Live	Fashion	• *I Want to Be a Fashion Designer* (Stephan Maze) • *My Wonderful World of Fashion: A Book for Drawing, Creating, and Dreaming* (Nina Chakarabarti) • *Frankly, Frannie: Fashion Frenzy* (AJ Stine)
	Sports	• *The World's Greatest Soccer Players* (Matt Doeden) • *The Wild Soccer Bunch: Kevin the Star Striker* (Joachim Masannek) • *A Beautiful Game: The World's Greatest Players and How Soccer Changed Their Lives* (Tom Watt)

Action 4

Develop Vocabulary

About 90% of the words in texts come from a small percentage of the words in English—about 4,000 word families (e.g., help, helped, helps, helping, helper). The other 10% of the words that make texts unique from a group of at least 300,000 words. The words in the 10% are different for narrative and informational texts. The unique words in narratives usually come from networks of words that students already know. Fourth-graders may not know the words *exasperated* or *irate* but they know *mad*. The unique words of informational texts—*convection, radiation, inflation rate*—often represent new concepts for students and are understood through inquiry, discussion, demonstration, reading, and writing extensively.

Teachers can find the unique words to teach in the content areas—they are clearly called out in glossaries and curriculum guides. Where there is more ambiguity as to what to teach are the words of narrative texts—the place where most vocabulary instruction occurs in the elementary grades. One author will use the word *incensed* and then *enraged*, while another author uses *furious, riled*, and *up in arms*. Students know the underlying ideas; they simply do not know the specific words.

It is the vocabulary instruction of the unique words of narratives that requires more direction, if students are to be prepared to read complex texts. All of the 300,000+ words can't be taught but what can be taught is an expectation for the kinds of words in narrative texts—a metacognitive stance. The Word Reminders form that is attached is in aid of such instruction. Another source for teachers to develop this disposition of word meaning families are the 32 lessons (one for each week of the year) at TextProject where "everyday words" have been taken and networks of words around them have been identified as the basis for quick, on-the-spot lessons for teachers.

Word Reminders™

Words You Already Know	Sometimes, a new word has a meaning close to that of a word you already know.
	Sometimes, a picture can help you remember a word's meaning.

Words You Can Picture	
Word Meaning Family	Often, the meaning of words are connected to the meanings of other words.
Word Part Family	Many words belong to families of words that have the same root words and meanings. Some root words are the same in English and Spanish.
Word Changes	Sometimes, the same word has several different meanings. Often, the meaning of a word changes when it is in a phrase or compound word.
Word Summary	Words are part of families or networks. When you learn the members of a word's family, your vocabulary grows.

Action 5
Increase the Volume

Most American students do not read a great deal. An often-heard response to this observation is "kids just don't read enough at home." True, students need to read more at home but, especially for students whose reading primarily occurs at school, models and interest in reading originate in the classroom. If students don't read much at school, they are unlikely to read much at home. In the typical classroom, students read less than 20% of the reading/

language arts block. Even a little more time can go a long way. An additional 7 minutes of reading per day has been found to be the difference in classrooms where students read well from those where students did less well. Taking on the **7-minute challenge**—where the goal is to increase the amount that students read daily by 7 minutes—can make a huge difference in students' knowledge acquisition and capacity for reading complex text.

The 7-minute challenge begins with solid baseline data on current reading habits. The "Eyes on the Text" form is useful for establishing a baseline and for tracking progress toward the goal of 7 additional minutes. Students in grades three and above can track their own data. The goal is not to simply accumulate more words. *What* students learn from their reading matters.

With students in grades 1–2, the teacher gathers the data. It is especially critical to keep information on students with different proficiency levels—low reader, medium reader, and high reader. For younger students, some of the reading can come from guided or scaffolded reading that is directed by the teacher. But remember that students only get good at reading independently if they read texts that engage them and that, simultaneously, are accessible.

And, remember: Habits don't change overnight. The goal is to steadily incorporate an additional 7 minutes (and even more) of reading into a classroom program. This does not happen in a single day or even week but over a month.

"Eyes on the Text" Form

Reading Sweeps Week: A Record of My Reading & Learning

What I Read	When I Read It	How Much I Read (in pages)	What I Learned (and plan to remember)

Summary

How many words I read this week

How long I read

My single longest reading event

Action 6
Build Up Stamina

The CCSS calls for students to think critically across extended texts and to extend their knowledge from one text to another. Reading across texts and reading long texts requires students to sustain their attention—a trait of reading that is called stamina. Many American students who fail to attain national standards (approximately two-thirds of a grade cohort) can read but they don't have the rigorous reading habits that are needed to read long texts and to remember what they have read in one source and transfer it to another.

"Academic emotions" are intertwined with students' willingness to pursue a task. When students think that they are not capable or anticipate failure in reading, their willingness to participate with a task is diminished. That makes entire sense. Most adults spend time on what they are good at and not as much time (if any) on things on which they are unsuccessful.

The challenge for teachers is how to increase levels of success. One feature of success is the ability of students to read the texts. When students aren't good at the core vocabulary, it is highly unlikely that they will be able to read many texts proficiently. This factor interacts with the other factors that we have described throughout this piece. For students who have experienced many years of failure, changing their interactions with the text won't be easy. But accessible texts is one of the means.

Teachers can also use the "Eyes on the Text" form to get a baseline as to how long students are reading at any one stretch (and how much text they are reading). Once baseline information has been gained, the amount that students are asked to read and the amount of time that students spend on reading can be steadily increased. Habits are not changed overnight. Steady and consistent is the name of the game when it comes to reading stamina.

"Eyes on the Text" Form

Reading Sweeps Week: A Record of My Reading & Learning

What I Read	When I Read It	How Much I Read (in pages)	What I Learned (and plan to remember)

Summary

How many words I read this week

How long I read

My single longest reading event

Action 7

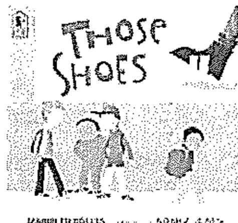
Identify Benchmarks

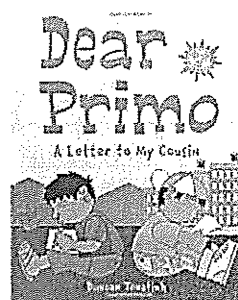
The CCSS provided exemplars of complex texts at different levels. But no information accompanied the exemplars as to what made texts complex for students at particular grade bands (or even whether the exemplars fit into the quantitative levels set by the Standards). For teachers to understand how text features influence their students' reading, teams of teachers in schools need to identify exemplar or anchor texts in their school sites. Teachers learn about text features as they discuss with one another what makes one text challenging and another easier for particular groups of students to understand and remember. Identifying texts, as grade-level and school-wide teams, permits such discussion to happen. The texts that are labeled as "anchors" or benchmarks are not the ones that are used for instruction. Anchor texts are ones that are used to gauge the appropriateness of instructional texts for particular students and tasks

The anchor texts below illustrate narrative texts that represent different points for second-grade readers. In primary grades where growth in reading is substantial, benchmark texts should be identified for different periods in the school year (e.g., trimesters or semesters). The chart that accompanies these anchor texts shows the criteria for why these texts were sorted the way that they are. These texts show features of knowledge, both conceptual and

also word recognition, that is the focus of instruction over second grade. These texts also illustrate ones that are germane to a particular community of students—students in the inner city with a range of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic group.

Example of Anchor Narrative Texts for Second Grade





Grade 2.1

"Tell me a story," Ling says

"Okay," Ting says. Once upon a time there were twin girls. They were named Ling and Ting. People saw them and said, you two are exactly the same."

"Oh good" Ling says. "I know this story."

Grade 2.2

I have a dream about those shoes. Black high tops. Two white stripes.

"Grandma, I want them."

"There's no room for want around here, just need," Grandma says. "And what you need are new boots for winter."

Grade 2.3

Dear primo Carlitos,

I live in a city. From my window I can see a bridge and cars zooming by. I can see skyscrapers, too. Skyscrapers are buildings so tall they tickle the clouds. At night all the lights from the city look like the stars from the sky.

Second Grade Narrative Texts Sorted by Curriculum Criteria

Level	Source	Title	Curriculum	
			Word Recognition	Comprehension Strategies
2.1	CCSS	*The Fire Cat* (Averill, 1960)	600 most-frequent words (and inflected endings) + less-frequent words with 1–3 letters	Follow story structure with a dilemma that is fairly common (e.g., a mischievous cat, twins who are different)
	High Recognition	*Frog and Toad Are Friends* (Lobel, 1970)		
	Contemporary	*Ling and Ting* (Lin, 2010)		
		Fly High, Fly Guy (Arnold, 2008)		
2.2	CCSS	*The Treasure* (Shulevitz, 1978)	1,000 most-frequent words (and inflected endings) + less-frequent words with 1–4 letters	Follow story structure where characters need to make choices (e.g., giving away shoes)
	High Recognition	*Henry & Mudge* (Rylant, 1987)		
	Contemporary	*Those Shoes* (Boelts, 2007)		
		Grandfather Counts (Cheng, 2003)		
2.3	CCSS	*Tops & Bottoms* (Stevens, 1995)	1,000 most-frequent words (and inflected endings) + less-frequent words with 1–5 letters	Understand that characters may be "playing" tricks (as in a fable); compare/contrast contexts
	High Recognition	*Good Luck, Ronald Morgan* (Giff, 1999)		
	Contemporary	*Dear Primo* (Tonatiuh, 2010)		
		Amazing Grace (Hoffman, 1991)		

Text Matters—7 Actions That Teachers Can Take Right Now: Text Complexity (889 KB)

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TextProject, Inc.
Bringing the right texts to beginning and struggling readers
Santa Cruz, California

My Close Reading Tips

Note: The kind of text you're reading--play, poem, story, etc.--will alter which of the questions below are most relevant. The questions below assume you've chosen a passage of your text that you now want to focus on. A first step might be to choose this passage. You will probably also be led to choose new passages to close read based on your close reading of previous ones. There are many questions here, and I doubt that it's humanly possible to keep them in one's mind all at once. But this is why a close reading always involves many readings of the same passage. It's often a good idea, in fact, to do an intensive close reading of a passage one day, and then come back to it again with a new look on a following day.

1. Paraphrase in ordinary language: Read the passage and carefully paraphrase its meaning in ordinary language. Does your paraphrase resonate with other important themes or issues in the text? Does your passage merely recapitulate these other themes (hint: it probably doesn't) or does it change your understanding of them in some ways? Does the passage contest or undermine suppositions made elsewhere in the text? What's the significance of the contradiction?

2. Logic of the passage: Think about the logic of the passage's argument. Does your paraphrase flow smoothly from one point to another, or does it reveal significant gaps? What's assumed, missing, or being glossed over in the passage? Do these gaps in the argument suggest tensions or problems visible elsewhere in the text? Does the passage seem to repeat itself by telling the same idea in a different way? Do these retellings recapitulate one another (see hint above) or do they present subtle variations or tensions within a particular issue or theme? Does the argument of the passage ever contradict itself? What is the significant of the contradiction? Does it raise issues active elsewhere in the text?

3. Language of the passage: key words or phrases: Now examine carefully the language of the passage (a paraphrase is a good start, but never enough for a close reading). Look at key words or phrases in the passage (which are these?). Are any of them repeated at other important--or not so important--points in the text? A word or phrase repeated from one passage to another is usually a sign that the two passages should be read in conjunction. Do these words or phrases change in meaning or connotation from one passage to another? Are their meanings or connotations ever at odds with one another? Do these changes resonate with larger problems or issues active in the text? How do the two passages as a whole relate to one another?

4. Language of the passage: repeated words: Don't finish with the words yet. Are there ever any words repeated right in the same passage? Does the meaning of the word change from use to use? Is there a stable configuration between the two meanings of the words, or can the two swap their meanings? Does the sliding between meanings change your paraphrase of the passage? (You could also ask this question about words repeated between passages, as in 3.)

5. Language of the passage: connotation and pun: Don't finish with the words yet. Can you find words in the passage that seem to have more than one meaning? Does one word have several different connotations, or even two contradictory meanings (this happens more than one might expect)? How do these different meanings change your paraphrase? Do the differences between one reading and another resonate with any larger problems in the text? Can you find any puns? How do the different meanings of a pun change your paraphrase? Does the pun suggest any other contexts for your passage? For example, a passage about "sons" might lead you to a passage about "suns."

6. Language of the passage: metaphor and imagery: Now consider the metaphors and other figures of speech, such as vivid images, employed in the passage. Do you recognize them from elsewhere in the text? Like repeated words or phrases, repetition of a metaphor or an image should be a signal to you that one passage is relevant to another. Ask yourself the same kinds of questions as in 3 above. Also think about how the metaphor or image signifies what it does. Does this consideration reveal a range of possible significances for the figure? For example, take a familiar metaphor, the rose for love. What makes the rose a metaphor for love? Its beauty, its rarity, its color (red, color of passion)? Does the fact that a rose has thorns and dies quickly alter the significance of the metaphor? This more pessimistic reading of the rose as love might not always be implied by the metaphor, but you'd want to consider whether this possibility was activated in the particular text in which the metaphor appeared, through its resonance with other moments in the text.

7. Language of passage: form: Consider the passages formal characteristics. This can be tricky to relate to the content of a passage, but you might wish to consider it, especially if you're reading poetry. How is the language of a passage structured? Is the passage verse? Does it rhyme? Does it make use of any rhetorical tropes such as alliteration, chiasmus, anaphora, parallelism, antitheses, etc. (if you're not familiar with these terms you can look them up in a guide to literary terms, such as the one by M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms).

8. What happens?: If something happens in the passage, think about how this element of the plot relates to or repeats others. All the questions above about related passages apply.

9. Logic of events: What happens or what is said right before or right after the passage in question? Here you'll want to ask questions similar to those in 2 above. Why does the passage come when it does? Are there any gaps or missing links between the passage and its context? What implicit logic or (less logical) associations might connect the passage and its context? How does what happens or what is said before or after your passage comment on the passage's meaning? Does it support it or undermine it? Or something else?

10. The speaker: Think about who is speaking your passage? Is the speaker being ironic? Can you trust the speaker? On the other had, don't assume that just because a "bad" speaker or character says something, it isn't true, or within a range of possible beliefs for an author. Sometimes "bad" speakers or characters tell us truths that we don't likes to hear. Also, are you sure the speaker or character is really "bad"?