

# Revisiting Reader's Workshop

Inquiry Paper 2004

By  
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## Rationale/Wonderings

We entered into our wonderings about Reader's Workshop as we prepared to teach our American Indian unit. This was our second unit of the year, beginning in December and ending in the beginning

of March. At this point in the year, we were preparing for our fourth grader's entry into reading chapter books independently. As we began to plan our unit, we noticed some similarities between our 2 fourth grade classrooms. We each had 3 reading levels emerging in our classrooms. Our highest group, known as the fluent readers, was reading above grade level and contained students who were extremely independent workers. We each had 6 children in our fluent group. Our second group was made up of our on grade level readers, known as the bridging readers. They were slightly dependent workers, who needed some support with their work habits. This was our largest group, and we each had 11 readers in this group. Our third group was our below grade level readers, known as the expanding group. They needed help with basic skill development and reading strategies. This group was made of extremely dependent workers. We each had 6-7 readers in this group.

Our wonderings began as we began to plan out which books would best fit the needs of each reading group. We realized that we needed to address both the reading level of our children, but also their work habit style. We also wanted to make sure the book they were reading appropriately challenged each group and the activities they completed for each section of the book met their needs. Our big questions changed and became 3 main wonderings, with 2 sub questions.

Our first wondering was:

- 1) How can we adapt our reader's workshop to meet the needs of the wide range of readers in our classrooms?

Our second wondering was:

- 1) How can we help both independent and dependent workers during Reader's Workshop?
  - a) How can we provide challenges and expand the knowledge of advanced literary devices with our independent students?

- b) How can we increase our dependent workers use and understanding of reading strategies to aid their comprehension?

Our third wondering was:

- 1) How do we help children refer back to the text and cite evidence to support their comprehension?

## Literature Review

We began looking for research about adapting our reader's workshop to meet the needs of all the instructional groups within our classrooms. When first choosing our texts, we had several items to consider. Choosing an appropriate text for each group requires consideration of student background knowledge about the subject, student's motivation to read the text, and having the text provide opportunities for critical thinking (McLaughlin & Allen, 2003). Once texts are chosen, organizing the students into 3 groups to account for variability offers students the opportunity to work within their instructional level (Strickland, Ganske, & Monroe, 2002). In a small group setting, teachers are better able to observe, monitor, and attend to the needs of the individual readers. Students whose confusions might go unnoticed and unassisted in a whole class environment, are likely to receive the help they need in a small group. With these points in mind, we were ready to begin our inquiry plan.

## Inquiry Plan

After reviewing our wonderings, we began to formulate a plan for our reader's workshop. In both of our classrooms, we had 3 distinct reading groups (fluent, bridging, expanding). For each group, we needed to find a book that would be an appropriate reading level, but also provide a challenge for the group. For our fluent group, we chose Sing Down the Moon by Scott O'Dell. This book provided difficult vocabulary and a

challenging author style for our highest group of readers. For our bridging group, we chose Guests by Michael Dorris. This book is set in a different time period and told the main story through the use of smaller stories within the text. This was an appropriate stretch for this group. It also had a main character that was similar in age to the students. Our final group, the expanding group read the book Eagle Song by Joseph Bruchac. This book occurs in modern day and has a main character that is similar in age to our students. This allowed this struggling group to have some connections to the chapter book they would be reading.

Once we determined the books we would be reading with each group, we began to develop our reading activities. We divided each book into 5 sections. For each week, students completed a vocabulary activity and comprehensions questions. The fluent and the bridging group completed a journal entry each week. In addition to these activities, the students met a group with a teacher and discussed their book and activities. The activities can be found in Appendix A.

As we began to develop our activities, we realized that we needed to address the differences in both reading levels and work styles. Our fluent groups were very independent, hard-working students. Our bridging students varied in their work style, but needed some direct instruction to complete activities that our fluent students could do independently. Our expanding groups were extremely dependent. They needed review of basic skills, and help with fluency and decoding skills. This group needed the most support with every aspect of their reading experience.

## VOCABULARY ACTIVITIES

In order to adapt our plan to meet the needs of each reading level and work style, the activities varied per group. The first activity each week was a vocabulary activity. The fluent group completed 2 vocabulary activities each week. Some of the vocabulary skills included exploring word

relationships, synonyms, analogies, and determining the meaning of multiple meaning words. The activities that the children completed to explore these skills included writing their own definition and checking it in the dictionary, matching terms, utilizing context clues from the story, and writing their own sentences to match the meaning.

Our bridging group completed one vocabulary activity each week with 8-12 words being highlighted. The main focus of these activities was utilizing the dictionary correctly. Their skills focused on alphabetical order, identifying base words, and synonyms. Students also wrote sentences using the words in context.

Our expanding group also completed one vocabulary activity a week. However, their focus would be on 6-8 words a week. We focused on teaching direct basic skills, such as identifying adjectives, writing complete sentences with appropriate capitalization and punctuation, correct use of proper nouns, using the dictionary, and alphabetizing the words. We began this group with cloze activities that allowed them to use their text as a resource to complete the activity.

#### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

When developing our comprehension questions for each group, we had to decide what area we wanted to focus on. For the fluent group, we incorporated the skill of multiple questions within one main question. There were very little literal comprehension questions for this group. We focused on inferential comprehension utilizing supporting details from the text to answer the question. We also used this activity as a way to explore literary elements, such as foreshadowing.

The bridging group also answered comprehension questions weekly. Their questions were mostly single questions with 1-2 multiple questions each week. When writing their questions, we focused on being specific, and giving them how many examples they may need to answer the question. Their

questions were mostly literal with some inferential questions mixed in each week. We also used this activity as a way to explore the unique setting of the story.

Our expanding group had fewer questions than the other groups to answer, and their questions were focused on straightforward literal answers. We instructed them on how to answer their questions in a complete sentence. Their questions were shorter in length and shorter in number due to the dependent workers in this group.

## JOURNAL ENTRIES

We utilized the journal entries with our fluent group to provide a challenge in taking what they had read and making indirect connections that may occur outside of the text. The focus of their journals remained inferential comprehension. They had the opportunity to project future events for main characters, and to explore and expand upon character traits and the setting of the story.

The bridging group also completed journal entries each week. Their focus was on making direct connections to the text and their own life. Their questions focused on one idea for each entry, such as character traits. Their journals required an understanding of literal and inferential comprehension of the text.

The expanding group only completed journals for the last 2 weeks of the book. This was due to their dependent work style, and the need for basic skill work to occur prior to the journals. Their entries were literal and related to a single event in the text. They had to make a single connection of their life that related to the question asked.

## ADAPTATIONS

After we began implementing our inquiry plan, we began to notice some adaptations were needed for

each group. In our fluent group, we needed to provide more focused instruction on the literary elements that we were asking them to respond to in their comprehension questions. This group also required a much higher level of questions during our weekly discussions. They were ready to leap into the more inferential, thought provoking questions and have meaningful discussions about them. While they were ready to have higher discussions, we did find that we needed to model essay structures for them. We discussed ways to organize our thoughts and ways to take notes, prior to beginning to write our journal entries.

Our bridging group provided an eye-opening moment after week 1 when we realized that they needed some guidance in how to locate evidence in the text. For some students, this was their first experience with answering multiple questions in a chapter book, where rereading sections to locate the answer was necessary. After we noticed this trend in both of our classrooms, we worked as a group each week to locate passages in the book that would answer the questions. We would record page numbers next to the questions, so that later the students could independently reread to answer that particular question. We also reviewed each week's essay with the group, and provided specific feedback on the previous week's work. We also gave some attention to the skill of rephrasing questions and how to answer multiple questions. This group often required a refresher in a skill, but once they were reminded, they were able to complete it independently the next time the skill was needed.

Our biggest challenge was our expanding group. This group needed a lot of focused attention and support to help guide them through the text. We practiced reading aloud for fluency and expression. We often would read passages multiple times to gain confidence and understanding. After reading the passages, we would orally retell the chapter as a group. This group was very verbal and able to discuss the book, but had difficulty writing about the events. The questions that they were answering always had page number references. We reviewed the

questions and the answers orally together to help them be able to independently answer the questions in writing. We only added essays the final 2 weeks, once they were more confident and independent in their other activities.

## FINDINGS

After reviewing our data and experiences, we concluded several findings for each reading group. Our fluent group spent more time on inferential comprehension and had more opportunities to make deeper connections to their readings. With this group, we were able to explore new vocabulary, and to extend their knowledge of literary devices. These extensions allowed this group to add new reading strategies to their repertoire.

In our bridging group, we found the need to provide direct instruction on how to go into the text to extract answers to the comprehension questions. This direct instruction provided the framework for the students to be successful independently as they answered their comprehension questions. We also found the modeling of how to rephrase questions into sentence answers beneficial for this group. Finally, providing vocabulary development each week expanded this group's reading vocabulary.

Finally, our expanding group needed explicit direct instruction of basic reading and writing skills. This group benefited from oral readings and retellings. The extra practice of orally reading increased their fluency and reading for expression. Without this extensive scaffolding of strategies, this group would not have been able to make the gains that they did over the course of the unit.

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