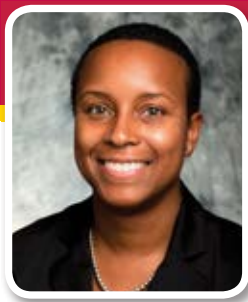




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Reaching Your Reading Potential

by Deborah J. Short and Jennifer D. Turner

Our classrooms are very diverse across a range of variables: income, culture, first language background, learning styles, and more. Children enter our classrooms with different early literacy backgrounds—strengths and weaknesses in reading and writing, varied personal experiences that could be activated as prior knowledge, ranges of vocabulary knowledge, Roman or other alphabetic/graphic systems, and perspectives on print. Even with similar backgrounds, students learn to read at different rates.

Nonetheless, all students have the potential to be effective readers, writers, and thinkers. They need more than basic skills instruction to reach their potential, however. They benefit from meaningful, generative activities that ask them to analyze and apply what they are learning, make connections and compare ideas, solve problems, and create new products. The call for college and career readiness standards now being instantiated in many state standards and for deeper learning (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011) demonstrate that many educators are ready to shift away from rote learning and standardized testing of facts to promote instruction that can lead students to be successful in school and beyond.

While the thought of high school graduation may be far from the average first or third grader's mind, these thoughts should be front and center in their teachers' minds. We want all students to start on the path to postsecondary learning and we want to give them critical tools to move forward. Unfortunately, many students from lower income or language minority families are not in classrooms that focus on challenging, creative learning (Au, 2006; Snow, Griffin & Burns, 2005; Edwards, McMillon & Turner, 2010). Sadly, research has shown that these classrooms often focus on basic skills instruction with decontextualized worksheets and memorization drills. If these students start to struggle with reading, they receive more of the same, perhaps with more intensity. This is not a winning solution.

Reach for Reading has been designed to break this cycle. It provides rich, robust instruction for all students with relevant and engaging literature that gives students satisfaction when they reach the conclusion of a story, article, or poem. Moreover, the series has connected reading instruction to the content areas—giving students tools to access the content and fostering higher-level reading skills across all subjects encountered during the school day.

Differentiated instruction is the underpinning of all lesson activities. As we discuss below, whether the class is working on vocabulary, post reading responses, unit projects, or another task, *Reach for Reading* gives teachers multiple approaches for delivering new knowledge to the students and for enticing the students to practice and apply that knowledge.

Content-based reading

How will *Reach for Reading* move students along the pathway to reading success? The move begins with content-based units centered around a Big Question that connect to science or social studies. These are not questions with simple, factual answers, but questions that require both facts and analysis. Students can think about questions the way one might in the real world, a college course, or a workplace. The Big Question thread is pulled through the unit. *Reach for Reading* holds fast to the thematic plan and addresses grade-level content standards in addition to foundational skills development, grade-level reading, and language arts standards.

Oral language

Big Questions are written to promote academic talk among students, giving them an opportunity to consider the topic from their personal perspectives and read the selections. But if we want to generate more productive talk in classrooms, we also have to ensure students have the skills and knowledge to participate in academic discussions (Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg, 2008).

To facilitate academic talk, *Reach for Reading* involves students in a range of vocabulary development activities focusing on subject-specific words and general academic words which have been carefully selected to convey conceptual knowledge. Lessons incorporate many opportunities for students to learn and practice using the words through discussions, sketches, brief writing tasks, role plays, and hands-on activities. Technology supports learning with resources including online photographs, video clips, and a student's own personal vocabulary notebook.



Linking discussion with reading and writing strengthens all skills. *Reach for Reading* systematically taps all language domains for student activities. For instance, oral language practice is not just fluency work. We know that competent readers can talk about what they have read, make predictions as to what will happen next in a story, and express an opinion about a character or action. Yet to do so orally, they must have structure for their utterances.

Many students have rich oral language backgrounds, but they may not have developed the academic language proficiencies that advance literacy and content learning in schools. So students will benefit from *Reach for Reading's* academic language frames. According to the purpose of their statements, students learn how to start a sentence or how to organize their thoughts effectively. Teachers can help students make statements with increasing levels of sophistication, too, so their oral language development grows. Plus, these academic language frames help with reading and writing. Structures students use orally they learn to recognize in print and employ in writing.

Language Frames

- I wonder _____.
- I read _____.
- So _____.
- Now I wonder _____.

Authentic literature libraries and anthology selections

While the Big Question can whet the students' appetite for reading, good literature seals the deal. *Reach for Reading* includes Caldecott and Newbery winners as well as National Geographic exclusive articles and interviews with scientists and explorers. The rich multicultural selections and the assortment of genres entice the students. When they have something in front of them that they want to read, they are motivated to learn how to read well. And *Reach for Reading's* leveled libraries will help ensure that students have access to high-interest fiction and nonfiction texts at their appropriate reading levels. Pre-reading supports, such as video clips from National Geographic and summaries of the selections in multiple languages, coupled with the vocabulary development work, set the stage for reading success.

If students struggle with comprehension, differentiation is available, particularly with flexible reading groups that can accommodate varied reading levels, English language proficiency, and genre preferences. Some of the supports built into *Reach for Reading* include specialized collections of leveled readers. One set has thematically linked books for each unit at different reading levels. Another set has content-related readers for independent reading and fluency work. Young learners can partner read with Read with Me Big Books. For students who are working on decoding, Read On Your Own decodable texts are also included.

- The Great Wall of China**
- BL** *Sitti's Secrets*
- BL** *Miss Rumphius*
- OL** *Everest: The Climb, Part 1*
- AL** *The Cay, Part 1*

Week 1 Teaching Resources

Objectives: Read and Comprehend Informational Text, Gather Vocabulary

Hurricane Hunters

Mini Lesson: Comprehend Visual Information

Activate Prior Knowledge: Display the front cover, pointing out that it shows a hurricane, or big storm. Ask: "What happens during a hurricane? (Possible responses: heavy wind, heavy rain, trees are destroyed, trees fall.)"

Build Background: Explain that hurricanes are the most dangerous storms that can strike the United States. They can cause a lot of damage and loss of life. Display the front cover of the book. Explain how to use the cover and table of contents to find information. Ask students to use information from the front cover to describe the different categories of hurricanes.

Check & Reteach: Have students practice comprehending visual information by comparing the photos of the West Coast of the U.S. or can go out to see these hurricanes with the information about the different types of hurricanes. (Possible response: I talk to them, only they are on the West Coast where a hurricane usually hits land.)

Week 1 Teaching Resources

Objectives: Read and Comprehend Informational Text, Gather Vocabulary

What?

Mini Lesson: Comprehend Visual Information

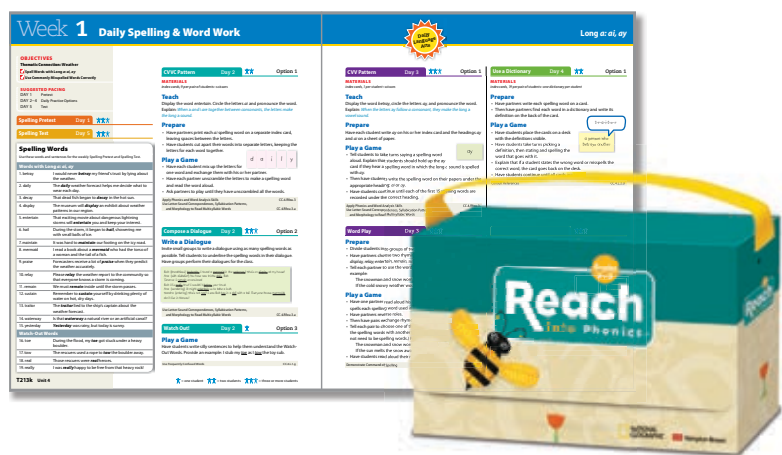
Activate Prior Knowledge: Ask: "What does the weather do to you? (Possible responses: It makes me feel hot, cold, or wet.)"

Build Background: Show Digital Library photos and video clips of weather, such as wind, storms, tornadoes, and hurricanes. Explain that weather changes when heat, water, and air combine in different ways.

Check & Reteach: Have students practice comprehending visual information by comparing the photos and video clips from the Digital Library. Explain that weather is the state of the atmosphere at a certain time and place. Ask: "What does the weather do to you? (Possible responses: It makes me feel hot, cold, or wet.)"

Explicit, systematic instruction and assessment

Furthermore, the building blocks for reading, phonemic awareness and phonics, are present in the grade-level books. In the primary grades students experience daily lessons on these elements. In the upper grades for the small percentage of students who still need help decoding or for the recent immigrant students new to English, a supplementary kit, *Reach into Phonics*, is available. At any grade, online phonics games can supplement the regular instruction. Teachers have flexibility in choosing the amount of support to provide students based on their needs.



Explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies, another critical piece of the reading puzzle, is also present throughout the units. With step-by-step instructions and practice with a portion of the selection to be read, students experience a consistent introduction to each strategy. These strategies are the focus of the comprehension checks while they read texts at their level and the post-reading activities that link the topics to the Big Question.

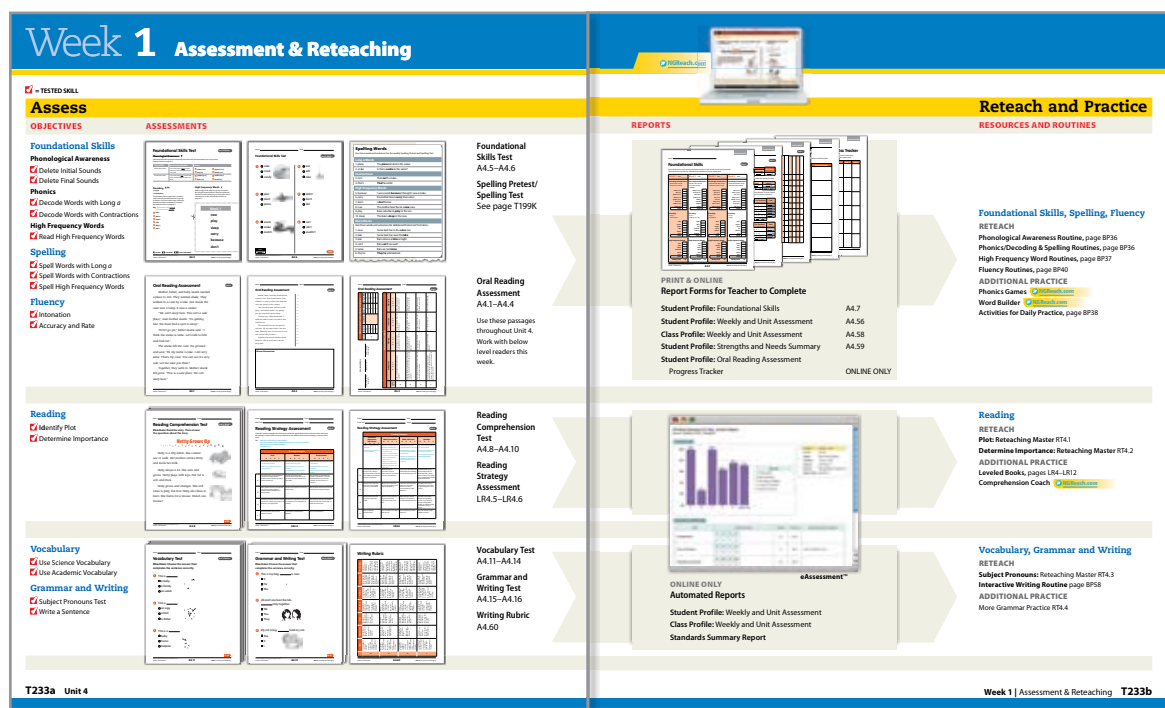
Reach for Reading offers teachers and students multiple ways of demonstrating understanding. Students respond to reading through writing activities designed for their reading and language proficiency levels. *Reach for Reading's* informal assessment tools, including running records and comprehension strategy checklists, help teachers to monitor students' progress and tailor instruction to meet their needs on a daily basis, while unit tests and projects allow teachers to gauge their learning over time.

A major concern for all teachers is what to do when children struggle. What if they can't read well despite one's best efforts? Before moving students to intensive interventions, we encourage teachers to try the monitoring and reteaching techniques built into *Reach for Reading*. Students can use online games, Comprehension Coach, and other technology resources for extended practice.

An extensive array of scaffolding features helps teachers to readjust instructional tasks so that students are challenged at the appropriate level. Cooperative learning activities anchor each lesson so that students support one another as they are learning the subject matter, and practice their oral language skills as they interact verbally. Additionally, on-the-page text supports, including Before You Move On and In Other Words, scaffold students' vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Writing activities are designed to guide students through the process of authoring and editing texts in print (e.g., stories, essays) and online formats (e.g., blogs, emails).

Conclusion

By 2050, demographers predict the U.S. population will be majority-minority. In many of our school districts, this trend has become a reality. We have to reach all our students with core reading instruction that will move below-level students to on-grade level and on-grade level students up to an advanced level. Our advanced readers, who may be in these classrooms as well, need to be challenged so they make progress, too. With *Reach for Reading* we will help all students—below-level, on-level, and above-level—become better readers, writers, and thinkers.



For research citations see page R27.