

Actively Engaged: Transferring Thinking to Written Comprehension

Cheryl DeSure

Fulton Academy

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Overview

As a second grade teacher, I feel a tremendous amount of pressure and responsibility to ensure my students are successful readers. One of the greatest challenges is the wide range in abilities of students who come into my classroom. One of the critical areas that I must face each day is helping to motivate struggling readers so that they become partners in their learning experience. In addition to providing explicit and systematic reading instruction, I must find meaningful literature to hook these students.

Often the books that are on struggling reader's readability level do not match his/her interests or age, nor do those books reflect the culture of his/her childhood. Making Read Aloud time an important instructional part of each day is an important component of this unit. Students need to hear text read correctly and fluently that is beyond their readability levels in order to practice the necessary comprehension strategies needed to unlocking meaning in text.

It is my intention to build a unit that addresses the various needs of my students by identifying appropriate literature to use in my classroom during flexible group time and Read Aloud time. Helping my students choose meaningful literature to read independently will also play a role so that they go beyond the district's goal of reading 25 books a year.

Prior knowledge plays a significant role in comprehension. For example, when inner city students are reading a story that takes place in a city as opposed to one that takes place on a farm, there is a marked difference in comprehension scores among the struggling readers. Adding an unfamiliar setting to one who is already struggling to read becomes burdensome. To facilitate students' ability to comprehend, this unit will include stories where strong personalities, character traits, and a sense of fairness abound. The stories included were chosen to be springboards for discussion to aid students with their comprehension.

In addition, the literature selected for this unit will be used to help students respond to literature. Written response to text continues to be one of the areas with which my students struggle the most. It seems to be an area that district-wide, we as teachers struggle with. Think-Alouds will be used as a means of transferring oral thinking into writing. As the unit takes shape, it is my hope that I will be able to incorporate it into Reading and English, helping my students become proficient readers and writers with a life-long urge to read!

Rationale

The following questions nag at me as I endeavor to help my students become proficient: If students are able to answer multiple choice comprehension questions proficiently, why do they still continue to score basic and below basic in the area of written comprehension? Why are students who are making growth in other areas of reading, such as fluency and decoding, not progressing when it comes to written response?

Mem Fox, in her book, Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to Children Will Change Their Lives Forever, says, “When an understanding of the world, language and print act together as a team reading happens.” Some students come into second grade still struggling with decoding skills. As teachers, we use a variety of methods to improve their phonics skills such as Word Building and Syllasearch. Improving phonics skills will help students on their way to reading; however, “we have to remind ourselves over and over again that reading means the ability to make *sense* out of the print, not *sound* out of the print” (81).

As students then begin the arduous task of improving their fluency, we teachers monitor oral reading fluency by requesting repeated readings. We teach the elements of fluency, helping students to learn to read by phrases rather than word by word. We put marks in the text to help cue our students, and then practice phrase-cued text readings to help these students become proficient, fluent readers, thus allowing their cognitive resources to focus on thinking and understanding. Many students focus on speed in an effort to increase their Oral Fluency score, often sacrificing punctuation and correct intonation and expression. Comprehension is sacrificed as well. A student’s oral reading only measures the rate and accuracy with which he/she reads; whereas prosodic reading mimics spoken language. It involves phrasing, expression and intonation. Currently, we do not have a reliable measure of prosody. “So it is possible to be read print correctly and also understand the language—yet not be reading,” says Fox (97). Until students are able to read accurately, smoothly and with the correct phrasing, pace, expression and intonation, the meaning of the words are lost. It is imperative to train students to go back to the text to search for meaning at an early age, and to frequently model it so it becomes second nature.

This curriculum attempts to aid those who struggle with comprehension and written response when asked to read a passage independently. Block, Rodgers, and Johnson say in their book, Comprehension Process Instruction:

For students to truly comprehend texts, they must apply multiple processes simultaneously. Comprehension occurs at many levels as readers engage a text. Comprehension processes must be taught with an emphasis on process itself. Students are enabled to apply processes independently as they encounter the challenges of reading. Gaining self-regulatory abilities is of utmost importance to young readers (85).

Most students treat reading as passively as they would watch television or a movie. They need to learn how to be an active participant, actively engaged in the story. This involves reading, pausing, questioning, and rereading when necessary. Within our district, we currently use Text Talk to help get K-2 students actively engaged in reading. This involves reading selected stories aloud, stopping and asking the students to either explain what's going on or make connections, rather than simply asking literal questions. The problem is that there isn't enough of a carry-over to when students are reading independently. In addition, all of the Text Talk activities are oral. The students are not required to write a response. Opportunities need to be created to help students transfer oral thinking into written thinking. Timothy Rasinski, in his book The Fluent Reader, says that, "both open-ended and prompted responses should be offered to students on a regular and balanced basis" (53).

My unit will complement the groundwork that Text Talk lays. The literature that I select will motivate my students by allowing them to make personal connections. Attention will be paid to activating background knowledge and bringing it to light. Emphasis will be placed on the character's mood, personality, strengths and weaknesses. Making those personal connections will help students develop a deeper understanding of both character and theme. Response journals can also be used to further student connections with the characters and themes in the books as a means of transferring oral thinking to written form. Other extensions will include letter writing, dialogue and dramatizations.

It is my intent to include expository text in this unit. Most of the stories in the basal readers are fiction, as are all but one of the Text Talk stories. I find that my students enjoy reading factual information. They are excited about learning new things. Learning about whales, tigers, wolves, frogs and toads are all highlights of the year. Since the second half of the second grade Science curriculum is insects, I'd like to find a way to incorporate expository text about insects and responses to that text. Students need to be taught reading strategies that are necessary for them to read informational books.

Starting this winter, the Pittsburgh Public Schools Reading Assessment included an expository passage as well as a narrative passage. Each passage was followed by multiple choice questions. Students then had to respond in writing to the narrative passage. As teachers, we must show children the structural differences between a narrative passage in which the reader looks for a beginning, middle, and ending, as opposed to an expository passage where a reader looks for introductions, explanations and conclusions.

Students need explicit instruction in the differences between the genres of fiction and nonfiction. Students need to be taught to approach them differently.

When a reader reads fiction he/she:

- Expects it to be untrue.
- Looks for setting, character, plot, conflict, climax, and resolution.
- Reads straight through from beginning to end.
- Expects to be entertained.

When a reader reads nonfiction he/she:

- Expects the information to be true and accurate.
- Uses photographs, charts, graphics, headings and captions to find information.
- Can read parts because it isn't necessary to read straight through.
- Expects to learn information.

In the study that Michael Kamil and Diane Lane did in “A Classroom Study of the Efficacy of Using Information Text for First Grade Reading Instruction,” they came up with the following conclusion regarding expository and narrative text:

We have come to believe that differences between text types are so important for readers that they must be part of instruction. If students are provided reading instruction ONLY in stories, they do not receive instruction in how to evaluate the truth value of a text. Consequently, they may not think of that dimension as an important one in comprehension when the move to reading exposition. Similarly, if students do not have the strategy of reading ONLY what is necessary in information texts, they may have to work their way through much information that is irrelevant and, ultimately, distracting for the task at hand--whatever it may be (Classroom Study).

This curriculum addresses the Pittsburgh Public Schools Content standards for reading, writing and speaking. This curriculum unit will specifically address Content Standard #2 “All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex text.” The unit will also address Content Standard #3 “All students will respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational text and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems. By addressing these content standards, any second grade teacher will benefit from incorporating the unit into his/her class.

It is the goal of this curriculum to motivate students by making text meaningful, and giving them the strategies to be actively engaged in their learning. The intent is to expose students to different types of text so that the students will be empowered to express themselves, demonstrating comprehension in a written venue.

This unit addresses comprehension of text—both fiction and non-fiction. The unit ties in written response to text and the importance of the connection between reading and writing. It is my intent to focus on extending the personal connections through open ended responses, and to begin to help my students generalize oral thinking with written

thinking. With fiction, the focus will be on personal connections and the major understandings of the text. With non-fiction, the focus will be on helping students deal with the organizational aspects of the text.

Objectives

Students who participate in this unit will have valuable practice writing, organizing their thoughts, asking questions and finding answers through journal writing and letter writing. We will use reading logs, simulated journals, double-entry journals and friendly letters. “Reading logs help students interact with texts. They provide a record of what they have read and a starter to discuss what they have read. They help students reflect on themselves as readers” (“Reading for Meaning”).

In a simulated journal, the student assumes the role of another person or character and writes from that character’s point of view. When doing letter writing, the students can either write to a character, the author or take on a character and write to someone else from that point of view.

In double-entry journals, “students usually divide their journal pages into two columns; in the left column they write quotes from the story or other book they are reading, and in the right column they relate each quote to their own life and to literature that they have read. Through this type of journal, students become more engaged in what they are reading, note sentences that have personal connections, and become more sensitive to the author’s language” (Tompkins 240).

The journal writing can and will be adapted according to the needs of the students in the classroom. Tompkins suggested adaptations are: draw journal entries, talk before writing, dictate entries, share in small groups, and focus on ideas (259). Drawing pictures to accompany writing is often more enjoyable and less threatening to struggling readers. Often times the illustrations are a big motivator. When students talk about writing before actually having to put the words on the paper, a sense of security prevails. Students should understand that the focus is on comprehension, on ideas, not mechanical correctness.

Strategies

When students are asked to respond in writing to text, they are often asked to:

1. make a value judgment
2. define a character trait and explain how the character demonstrates it and/or
3. identify a personality trait and how the character exhibits it.

The overall goal of this unit is not meant to be character education, but I find myself drawn to the types of prompts that deal with character. To facilitate students’ ability to comprehend, this unit will include stories where strong personalities, character traits, and a sense of fairness abound. The stories included were chosen to be springboards for

discussion to aid students with their comprehension. It will also provide an opportunity to introduce students to robust concept vocabulary words. If we want our students to move beyond words such as sad, mad and glad, we must introduce them to rich words. Children will express their understanding if we give them the rich vocabulary needed to do that.

According to Susan Hall in Using Picture Storybooks to Teach Character Education, “the overall goal of character education is to help kids function in a society with recognizably accepted virtues that are a community’s best values and ethical ideals.” Character can be taught within the curriculum as well as separately. There are advocates and critics of both methods. “Long-term research conclusions do not yet exist regarding the most pedagogical practice” (Hall xxv). For the purpose of this unit, character will be integrated.

As my second graders endeavor to explore and understand storybook characters, particular attention will be placed on “enhancing student understanding of values considered important in social interaction” (Hall xxix), making connections to real life situations to make text more meaningful to students.

In her book, Language Arts: Content Teaching and Strategies, Gail Tompkins discusses five types of reading and the advantages and disadvantages of each. They are: “Shared Reading, Guided Reading, Independent Reading, Buddy Reading and Reading Aloud to students” (100). A combination of all of them is necessary throughout the year to have students actively involved in reading.

Shared Reading is very similar to the integrated readings done when a new story is introduced. The teacher reads aloud while students follow along using individual copies of the book. It’s a great way to model fluent reading and reading strategies. “This *first* reading is a preparation for students so that they become familiar enough with the story line and the vocabulary that they can read the selection independently later (Tompkins 96).

Guided Reading is what most often occurs during flexible group time. The books chosen are based on the students’ reading level and ability. The teacher provides direction and support. Shared Reading is often done in the group.

Buddy Reading or partner reading is when two students read or reread a text together. This is an important strategy because it gives students an opportunity to develop reading fluency and to talk about texts to deepen comprehension; however behavior management can become an issue. In addition, the teacher must carefully partner the students, or one student may depend on the other to do the reading.

Another strategy to be utilized is Read Aloud. “As we share the words and pictures, the ideas and viewpoints, the rhythms and rhymes, the pain and comfort, and the hopes and fears and big issues of life that we encounter together in the pages of a book, we connect

through minds and hearts with our children and bond closely in a secret society associated with the books we have shared” (Fox 10).

Rasinski says that when teachers read aloud, it benefits students because they: “see reading as emotionally powerful, are motivated to read more, witness fluent reading, are exposed to multiple genres and explore sophisticated words and word structure” (20, 21). When teachers read aloud to students, it gives students access to books they could not read independently. It gives the struggling readers an opportunity to engage in comprehension activities with literature that is more age appropriate. When students are listening to a teacher read aloud, they can focus on the text, rather than the mechanics of reading the printed page.

Finally, students need the opportunity to have time to choose their own books to read independently. Children must learn how to choose the best books for them. In order to comprehend a book when a child is reading independently (silently), he/she should be able to decode most of the words in the book. “Independent reading is an important part of language instruction because it is the most authentic type of reading” (Tompkins 98).

In the past when students were asked to demonstrate comprehension of text, teachers asked literal, inferential and evaluative questions. Most of the questioning was literal, and there was not enough explicit and systematic instruction teaching children how to comprehend. One of the strategies that will be implemented in this unit is modeling by thinking aloud. “Think-alouds occur when the teacher verbalizes the comprehension processes used to understand a section of text while reading the selection. In short, the teacher models the silent, mental processes of comprehension,” (Block, Rodgers, and Johnson, 22). “Effective teacher think-alouds explain what expert readers do before, during, and after they have read a large selection of text” (23). Rasinski says, “Good readers-readers who understand what they read-often carry on a conversation with themselves during reading. Thinking aloud while reading aloud allows you how to show your students how this might take place” (Rasinski 47).

Block, Rodgers, and Johnson’s respondent-centered questions are broken down into four categories: Elaboration, Metacognition (thinking about thinking), Problem Solving, and Supporting Answers (30). These categories are a means of helping students more independently answer questions about text with the teacher acting as facilitator.

Classroom Activities

In this section, there are suggested ideas to use with text. The same strategies could be applied to whatever texts are available in your classroom with a little effort and a lot of planning.

Dear Diary

This activity could be modified depending on the age and abilities of the children involved. The purpose of this activity is to get children to respond to nonfiction text in a

creative way. It allows the teacher to identify different story elements such as character and setting. Students who like to draw can showcase their artwork along with the text. The degree of humor will vary depending on the age of the students.

- Begin by asking your class, “What is a diary?”
- Read aloud The Diary of a Worm or The Diary of a Spider by Doreen Cronin.
- As you read, have students note true things that they learned about a worm or spider.
- Point out the author’s use of humor.
- Discuss reality and fantasy elements of the text.
- Discuss the main character’s personality. Have the class give examples.

Pass out nonfiction text about selected animals. Refer to New Virtual Field Trips by Gail and Garry Cooper if you’re looking for text online. You can go to the Australian outback or stay at home to explore worms. Have your students work in groups to identify the characteristics or personality of the animals (ex. turtle-slow, fox-sly). Ask each group to make a diary entry for their animal. Have them do artwork to accompany their writing. Share with the class.

Examples:

Three things I don’t like about being a _____...

Three good things about being a _____...

Three things I should always remember...

Three things that scare me...

Three things that I scare...

Realistic Fiction

Second graders are deeply concerned by what they perceive to be as fair treatment. In the book Own Foote, Second Grade Strongman by Stephanie Greene, Owen is the smallest kid in his class. He happens to be friends with Joseph, the largest kid in the class. Both are stressed because it’s height-and-weight chart day. This chapter book would work nicely when using Buddy reading where students respond in double-entry journals.

Read Chapter 1

Right Side

Describe Owen and Joseph.

How do the boys feel about their looks? Use examples from the text to explain your answer.

Left Side

How do the boys support each other? How do you support your friends when they’re concerned with how they look?

Read Chapter 2 pages 8-14

Right Side

How does Owen feel about height-and-weight chart day and the school nurse? How do you know?

Left Side

If you were Mrs. Jackson, what could you do to help students like Owen feel better? Tell about a time that you felt like Owen because of something an adult said to you.

Read Chapter 2 pages 15-18

Right Side

Why does Owen want to talk to dad? How does he feel afterward?

Left Side

Who do you talk to when something is bothering you? Tell about a time that you talked to that person and how they helped you feel better.

Read Chapter 3 pages 19- middle page 26

Right Side

How does Owen's invention get him in trouble?

Left Side

Tell about a trick that you pulled on your brother or sister, or one that they pulled on you. Did someone get in trouble like Owen? Was it worth it?

Read Chapter 3 pages middle 26-31

Right Side

What new information did you learn about Owen and Joseph? How does it connect to what you already know?

Left Side

Joseph's cousin calls him Pudgie-Wudgie. What do you think about that? Has anyone ever called you a name? How did it make you feel? What did you do about it? How did you get them to stop?

Read Chapter 4

Right Side

How are Joseph's and Owen's personalities alike? How are their personalities different?

Left Side

Describe a friend. How are your personalities alike? How are they different?

Read Chapter 5 pages 40-44 (second paragraph)

Right Side

Owen's mother says, "You are who you are. Save your energy for the things you can change." What does she mean by that?

Left Side

How could that same advice help you? Give examples.

Read Chapter 5 pages 44 (second paragraph) – 48

Right Side

Why does Owen get sent to the principal's office by Mrs. Jackson?

Left Side

Pretend that you are the principal. What would you say to him?

Read Chapter 6

Right Side

Describe the different reactions that Owen gets for getting sent from the office from Mr. Mahoney, the principal, Lydia, his sister, and Clyde Barnes, a seventh grader.

Left Side

Who do you agree with and why? Use information from the text to back up your answer.

Read Chapter 7 pages 55-58

Right Side

Owen's *in the doghouse*. Explain what that means and why he's there. How does he get out?

Left Side

Tell about a time that you were *in the doghouse*. How did you get there and how did you get out?

Read Chapter 7 pages 59-63

Right Side

Why does Owen decide he has to talk to Mrs. Jackson?

Left Side

What would you do?

Read Chapter 8

Right Side

Stephanie Greene writes, "Owen walked down the hall. His head was swimming with all the things he had to think about." What did Owen have to think about after talking to Mrs. Jackson? How did it make him feel?

Left Side

Why does Owen compare himself to the Better Boy tomatoes? What would you compare yourself to and why?

Read Chapter 9

Right Side

Owen's grandmother says that his grandfather's greatest strength was his character? How did his grandfather show character? What does she mean by that?

Left Side

Give examples to show how you show a strong character. Which is more important a strong character or physical strength? Why?

Biography

Have students read Kate Shelley and the Midnight Express by Margaret K. Wetterer. Ask them to write down the famous person's name, the date of her birth and death, where she lived and three words to describe her. Then ask the students to give details from the story to support the words used to describe the hero/heroine. For example, if a student described the heroine as brave, they should have a detail demonstrating her bravery. The information can be collected using a chart, which could later be used to write a summary.

Nonfiction Text

Whales and Sharks by Jillian Powell are useful books to use when contrasting the language of fiction and nonfiction. The books are child-friendly and are high interest. Both contain photographs, captions, charts, glossaries and subtitles. Neither book has to be read cover to cover. Powell's books are good to use in small groups. Children can start by making K-W-L charts, writing what they **know** and **what they'd like to learn**. Later they can fill in the last column stating what facts they **learned**.

Fiction

Great-Uncle Dracula by Jane Harvey is written on a 2.4 reading level. It's a fun book to do with your students. Emily Normal leaves Plainville with her Dad and brother when her parents divorce. She relocates to Transylvania to live with her Great-Uncle Dracula. There she has to find a way to fit in with a new group of friends who are witches and werewolves. This book allows children to explore differences in a fun way. After reading each chapter, ask students to do simulated journal entries from Emily where she writes about her experiences. As an alternative, students can pretend to be Emily and

write letters to a pretend classmate back in Plainville. Students can work with partners—one can write from Emily’s perspective, and the other can write a return letter.

Read Aloud-Think Aloud

Choose an exciting book to read to your students. Ask questions and make comments as you read so that your students begin to build strategies for comprehension through the teacher’s modeling.

Annotated Bibliography/Resources

Teacher Reading List

Block, Cathy Collins, Lori L. Rodgers, and Rebecca B. Johnson. Comprehension Process Instruction. New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2004.

Comprehension Reading Instruction provides a three strand model t enable young readers develop their comprehension abilities regardless of their reading level.

Cooper, Gail and Garry Cooper. New Virtual Field Trips. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 2001.

You will find yourself using this book in all subjects, not just reading! Cooper and Cooper arrange the virtual field trips by a variety of subjects. It’s easy to use and fun as well.

Fox, Mem. Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their Lives Forever. New York, NY: Harcourt, Inc., 2001.

Mem Fox emphasizes the importance and educational benefits of reading aloud to children in her book Reading Magic.

Hall, Susan. Using Picture Storybooks to Teach Character Education. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 2000.

Hall’s introduction discusses the need and reasons for character instruction. She then goes on to list book titles and their summaries by individual character traits. This would be useful to those teachers trying to implement character education within their reading curriculum.

Kamil, Michael L. and Diane Lane. “A Classroom Study of the Efficacy of Using Information Text for First Grade Reading Instruction.”

<http://www.stanford.edu/~mkamil/Aera97.htm>

Kamil and Lane’s study provides important findings on the importance of using expository text in the classroom starting at an early age.

Kristo, Janice V. and Rosemary A. Bamford. Nonfiction in Focus. U.S.A.: Scholastic, Inc, 2004.

Kristo and Bamford wrote Nonfiction in Focus to help educators have a better understanding of nonfiction so that they would be able to implement their suggested comprehensive framework and scaffolded instruction.

Overmeyer, Mark. When Writing Workshop Isn't Working. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 2005.

Overmeyer's book asks and answers ten key questions addressing stumbling blocks that teacher's face doing Writing Workshop in their classroom. It's an easy to read reference book that's helpful to have on hand.

Rasinski, Timothy V.. The Fluent Reader: Oral Reading Strategies for Building Word Recognition, Fluency and Comprehension. New York, NY: Scholastic Professional Books, 2003.

Rasinski uses a research based rationale for oral reading. In his book he explains how oral reading building word recognition, fluency and comprehension, and provides strategies to develop those areas.

"Reading For Meaning." Reading Logs. 13 June 2005. New Zealand Ministry of Education. 23 April 2006

<http://english.unitecology.ac.nz/resources/units/close_reading/logs.html>.

This article presents information on the usefulness of reading logs.

Sunflower, Cherlyn. Really Writing! Ready-to Use Writing Process Activities for Elementary Grades. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1994.

Sunflower's book provides a variety of lessons, modifications and reproducible pages. Each lesson is designed as a model with objectives, motivators, brainstorming, group composing, responding to student writing and publishing.

Tompkins, Gail E.. Language Arts Content and Teaching Strategies. Fifth. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2002.

Tompkins provides an array of strategies and ideas to use in the classroom. The language arts program emphasizes four instructional approaches: literature focus units, literature circles, reading and writing workshop.

Worthy, Jo and Karen Broaddus and Gay Ivey. Pathways to Independence: Reading Writing and Learning in Grades 3-8. New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2001.

According to the authors, this book is about recognizing the varied pathways to literacy taken by upper elementary and middle school students, although I found much of the information relevant and useful to me as a second grade teacher.

Student Reading List

Bender, Robert. Toads and Diamonds. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1995.

Toads and Diamonds teaches that it pays to be kind. Merth's evil mother and cruel sister pay the price for being unkind.

Cronin, Doreen. The Diary of a Spider. U.S.A.: HarperCollins Children's, 2005.

Cronin's story is in the form of diary entries written from a spider's point of view. This humorous story is useful when teaching point of view, fiction vs. nonfiction and journal writing.

Cronin, Doreen. The Diary of a Worm. U.S.A.: HarperCollins Children's, 2003.

Like Diary of a Spider, this charming book is told from the point of view of a worm. Children will enjoy seeing spider previously reading his diary.

de la Bedoyere, Camilla. Why Why Why Are Orangutans So Hairy? Essex: Miles Kelly Publishing, 2005.

This colorful nonfiction book will grab your students interest as they learn about orangutans, cheetahs, wolves, tigers, rhinos and chimps.

de la Bedoyere, Camilla. Why Why Why Can't Penguins Fly and Other Chirpy Questions About Birds? Essex: Miles Kelly Publishing, 2005.

The book asks and answers questions in a fun way. Children will enjoy looking at the illustrations.

de la Bedoyere, Camilla. Why Why Why Did Dinosaurs Lay Eggs and Other Prehistoric Questions About Dinosaurs? Essex: Miles Kelly Publishing, 2005.

This book engages students will small chunks of information that will have them searching for more answers. This would be a great book to use when introducing a unit dealing with dinosaurs.

Greene, Stephanie. Owen Foote, Second Grade. New York: Clarion Books, 1996.

Owen is the smallest kid in his class, but on height-and weight day he speaks up and gets himself in trouble. This book is useful in promoting discussion on friendship, self-image and loyalty.

Harvey, Jayne. Great-Uncle Dracula. New York: random House, 1992.

Children will relate to Emily as she struggles through her parents' divorce, moving to Transylvania with her father and brother to live with her great-uncle. She deals with being different from others and finding her place in the community.

Henkes, Kevin. Chrysanthemum. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1991.

In Henkes's book, Chrysanthemum deals with children teasing her because of her name.

James, Simon. Dear Mr. Blueberry. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1991.

This charming story is a series of letters between Emily and her teacher Mr. Blueberry. Emily is convinced that she has a blue whale living in the pond of her backyard. Mr. Blueberry shares facts about whales in his letters back trying to convince Emily that's not possible.

Llewellyn, Claire. Then and Now. Austin: Steck-Vaughn, 2004.

The theme of Then and Now is change. In this easy reader children get to see how cars, telephones, watches, televisions, and computers have changed. There are not a lot of words, but the contrasting black and white versus color pictures will send a message on their own.

McDermott, Dennis. The Golden Goose. New York: Morrow Junior Books, 2000.

This is the traditional folktale that tells what happens when someone is good and kind.

Murphy, Jess. The Life of Swans. Austin: Steck-Vaughn, 2004.

Murphy tells how a cygnet grows into a swan.

Oxlade, Chris. Why Why Why Do Tornadoes Spin and Other Breezy Questions About Weather? Essex: Miles Kelly Publishing, 2005.

Second graders in the Pittsburgh Public Schools study weather. Oxlade's book is high interest.

Oxlade, Chris. Why Why Why Does My Heart Begin to Race and Other Brainy Questions About Your Body? Essex: Miles Kelly Publishing, 2005.

This book addresses body parts such as skin, hair, bones, teeth, heart and the brain.

Pattison, Darcy. Searching for Oliver K. Woodman. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2005.

Imagine Poplar, a private eye, searches for her friend Oliver. Pattison uses different styles of writing to tell the story including friendly letters, newspaper articles and postcards.

Powell, Jillian. Sharks. Austin: Steck-Vaughn, 2004.

Children enjoy reading about sharks. This book provides opportunities to discuss captions, and how they help the reader of nonfiction better understand the text.

Powell, Jillian. Whales. Austin: Steck-Vaughn, 2004.

Powell's book has compelling photographs illustrating the differences between toothed and baleen whales.

Pulver, Robin. Punctuation Takes a Vacation. U.S.A.: Holiday House, 2003.

This is a fun book to use when getting to proofreading in the writing process. As the title suggests, it tell what happens without punctuation.

Standiford, Natalie. The Bravest Dog Ever: The True Story of Balto. New York: Random House, 1989.

This true story tells the story of the brave Alaskan sled dog, Balto, and how he helped bring medicine from Anchorage to Nome to stop the spread of diphtheria.

Teague, Mark. Dear Mrs. LaRue: Letters from Obedience School. New York: Scholastic Press, 2002.

Dear Mrs. LaRue is a series of letters written by a dog named Ike who was sent to obedience school by his owner Mrs. LaRue. It's useful for teaching letter writing, point of view and simulated journal writing.

Van Allsburg, Chris. Two Bad Ants. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988.

Van Allsburg's book is great for teaching setting. Two ants decide to stay behind while the others take the delicious crystals back to the queen ant. They end up getting into trouble along the way.

Wells, Rosemary. The Fisherman and His Wife. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1998.

Be careful what you wish for and don't be greedy are lessons that one can learn from The Three Wishes.

Wetterer, Margaret K. Kate Shelley and the Midnight Express. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, Inc., 1990.

This is a fun book for students to read when responding to nonfiction text. Kate Shelley's bravery at fifteen years of age is inspiring.

Winthrop, Elizabeth. The Castle in the Attic. New York: Random House Inc., 1985.

This is a favorite of mine! Children love hearing Winthrop's story read aloud. They understand and sympathize with William as he struggles with his independence. They root for the Silver Knight as he tries to defeat the evil Alistair, and they fall in love with the good Mrs. Phillips as she supports others. The Castle in the Attic is a great book to get children thinking aloud so that they can work on writing down those thoughts as responses to literature.

Zemach, Margot. The Three Wishes. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1986.

This book talks about wishes and being content with what you have.

Appendices/Standards

Content Standards for the Pittsburgh Public Schools

Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening

1. All students use effective research and information management skills, including primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.
2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.
3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.

4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, to inform and persuade, in all subjects.
5. All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.
6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.
7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify their purpose, structure and use.
8. All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform or describe.
9. All students communicate appropriately in all situations.
10. All students communicate appropriately in business, work and other applied situations.