

Thalia Learns the Details

Student: Kindergarten, age 5, August birthday

School: Amigos School, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Teachers: Jim St. Clair and Maria Castro

Class Size: 36 students in two classes

“Thalia’s very interested in the idea of literacy and she’s interested in books. It’s the details she’s a little bit fuzzy on. That’s a big part of our job this year, to focus a little bit more on the details of the process of learning to read and write.” —Jim St. Clair, kindergarten teacher

Overview

Video Summary

At the beginning of the year, kindergarten student Thalia expresses excitement about learning to read, but remains unclear about the specific skills needed to read. When asked what reading entails, she responds, “You look at the pictures, maybe you’ll know what the words say.” This video follows Thalia’s progress over the year as she engages in a variety of reading and writing activities that develop her awareness of letters, sounds, and words—the details of reading and writing. Her English-language teacher, Jim St. Clair, uses poems, songs, predictable books, reports on classroom activities, and student journals to build on her emergent literacy skills and to promote a love of reading and writing.

Factors that contribute to Thalia’s literacy development:

- Language-based activities
- Integration of language and literacy in daily routines
- Instruction based on student interests and needs
- Variety of texts appropriate to kindergarten
- Flexible grouping
- Parent involvement
- Collaboration between teachers

“[Thalia] has a very strong interest in learning to read. I think it’s really a goal for her.”
—Jim St. Clair, kindergarten teacher

Thalia’s Progress at a Glance

- Left-to-right reading
- Understanding that print carries the meaning in texts
- One-to-one word matching
- Letter/sound relationships
- Writing to communicate

Putting It in Context

The Student, Teacher, and Class

Thalia is a kindergarten student in a bilingual program at the Amigos School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she spends half of the time in an English-language class and the other half in a Spanish-language class. Her classmates include native-Spanish speakers and native-English speakers. According to her teachers, Thalia is “almost completely bilingual.”

Mr. St. Clair, Thalia’s English-language teacher, describes Thalia as a playful and social child who is excited about school and learning. She enjoys drawing, writing about her family, and singing, and demonstrates important skills developed during pre-school. According to her mother, Thalia loves to listen to stories at home and wants to learn how to read.

When Mr. St. Clair assesses Thalia at the beginning of the year, he finds that Thalia has a strong interest in books and in writing. In particular, Thalia avidly writes long strings of letters to communicate her ideas. The fall assessment indicates that Thalia still chooses letters randomly, and does not demonstrate awareness of the sounds of most letters.

Mr. St. Clair’s kindergarten program emphasizes oral language as the foundation for communicating and understanding ideas. He designs his instruction to meet the needs of the “whole child,” including emergent/early literacy skills, interests, and personal experiences. To meet Thalia’s needs, he plans activities that emphasize meaning and comprehension while developing her skills in letters, sounds, and words in both reading and writing.

Thalia’s Literacy Program

Shared Reading (whole class)

Guided Reading (small group)

Journal Writing

Phonemic Awareness Activities

Varied Reading Materials (big books, songs, poems, charts)

Home Reading

Assessment

Analyzing the Video

Before Viewing

The following activities prepare you to observe this case study video, whether alone or with a group.

Prepare To Record Your Observations

Make a copy of the Literacy Development Chart (found in the Appendix) to record your observations, reactions, and questions throughout your viewing. Pay particular attention to the strengths and needs Thalia demonstrates and to the home/school experiences that influence her growth in reading and writing during the year.

Review Important Terms

Review the definitions of the following Literacy Teaching Practices (page 4): read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, interactive writing, and independent writing.

Review the following definitions of the Essential Components of Literacy Development (page 2): oral language, phonological awareness, word study (vocabulary/concepts and word identification/phonics), comprehension, composition, and fluency and automaticity.

First Impressions

Use the following activities to reflect on the case study video.

Watch the Video

On your first viewing, observe how Mr. St. Clair creates a classroom environment that emphasizes language development, and reading and writing as a way of communicating ideas. Note how Thalia develops an understanding of print (i.e., concepts about print, see page 6).

Review What You Saw

Review your notes on Thalia's Literacy Development Chart. Then consider the following questions:

Thalia's Progress: How do Thalia's literacy skills develop over the year? What factors influence her development as a reader and a writer? Do you consider her progress to be adequate for a kindergarten student? What questions do you have about her growth in literacy and learning?

Classroom Environment: How would you characterize Mr. St. Clair's approach to instruction and assessment in kindergarten? What grouping options and instructional practices support Thalia's emergent literacy skills? How does the classroom environment encourage Thalia to focus on the details of reading and writing?

Home/School Connection: How does Mr. St. Clair collaborate with Thalia's mother and Maria Castro, the Spanish-language teacher, to create a complete profile of Thalia? What does each know about Thalia as a learner? How does this information help Mr. St. Clair plan appropriate instruction for Thalia?

Looking Closer

Take a second look at Thalia's language and literacy development to deepen your understanding of her changing strengths and needs over the course of the year. Use the video images below to locate where to begin viewing.

Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

Thalia Begins To Write: Video Segment

Find this segment 3 minutes and 41 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 3 minutes and 22 seconds.

In the beginning of kindergarten, Thalia uses language, personal experiences, and knowledge of letters to express her ideas in writing. In this segment, Thalia writes in her journal with support from her teacher, Mr. St. Clair. Use the Literacy Development Chart to record Thalia's current strengths and needs in oral and written language.



- How does Mr. St. Clair characterize Thalia as a reader and writer?
- How does Thalia view herself as a reader? As a writer?
- How would you describe Thalia's emergent writing skills? What can she do independently? What can she do with support from Mr. St. Clair?
- What other instructional strategies would support Thalia's written language?
- What goals and instruction would you plan for Thalia in the coming months?
- Develop a writing lesson that would help Thalia take the next step in writing.

Parents and Teachers Working Together: Video Segment

Find this segment 7 minutes and 4 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 2 minutes and 9 seconds.

In December, Mr. St. Clair and Ms. Castro, the Spanish-language teacher, meet with Thalia's mother at a parent/teacher conference to discuss Thalia's developing strengths as a learner.

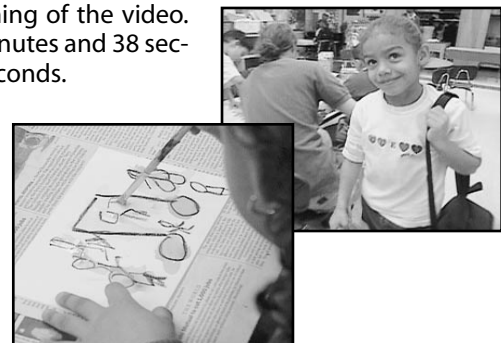


- What kind of observations do Mr. St. Clair, Ms. Castro, and Thalia's mother share with each other at the parent/teacher conference? How does each perspective create a complete profile of Thalia? How do they enhance the understanding of all adults involved in her learning?
- What suggestions would you give to Thalia and her mother for reading and writing at home at this point in the year?
- How might Mr. St. Clair and Thalia's mother collaborate on setting goals and planning instruction for Thalia's language and literacy development?

Developing in Reading: Video Segments

Find the first segment 9 minutes and 14 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 1 minute and 17 seconds. Find the second segment 14 minutes and 38 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 1 minute and 2 seconds.

Thalia re-reads predictable books at home and school. In the first segment, it's December and Thalia is reading a book she took home the night before. In the second segment, Thalia is reading with Mr. St. Clair in a small guided-reading group three months later, in March.



- What strategies does Thalia use for constructing meaning and using print when re-reading her book to Mr. St. Clair?
- What strategies does she use when reading in her guided-reading group? How would you assess her reading of "hang-gliding" as "kiting"? What does this reveal about Thalia's reading?

Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

- How might these different reading settings affect her use of strategies?
- What progress has Thalia made between December and March? How has Mr. St. Clair's instruction and support changed?
- What does Mr. St. Clair mean when he says Thalia is a "voracious reader"?
- How would you help Thalia attend to print while she is reading? What instruction would you plan for Thalia for the remainder of the school year?

Developing in Writing: Video Segment

Find this segment 15 minutes and 41 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 2 minutes and 57 seconds.

Mr. St. Clair emphasizes oral language in daily activities to promote literacy development. In this segment, the whole class is engaged in an experiment with sand, followed by a writing activity. Thalia writes in her journal about a personal experience with her father.



- How does Mr. St. Clair promote and support oral language in these activities? How does Mr. St. Clair guide Thalia in her writing? Is he helping too much? Too little? What would you do to lead Thalia to independence in writing?
- How does Thalia use oral language to help herself when writing? What other strategies does she use when writing in her journal?
- Why do you think Thalia chose to write about her trip with her father rather than the sand experiment?
- Compare Thalia's writing in this segment with her writing in November. What has she learned? What goals would you set for Thalia for the remainder of the year?

Summing Up

Wrap up your impressions of the video with a final reflection.

Reflecting on Your Viewing Experience

Review your notes on Thalia's progress throughout the year. Consider the following questions for discussion:

- In what ways does Thalia develop as a reader and a writer over the year? What would you tell Thalia's first-grade teacher about her abilities at the end of kindergarten?
- What classroom practices and home experiences contributed to her progress in literacy? What goals does Mr. St. Clair set for Thalia during the year? How does he support Thalia in her reading and writing? How did his instruction influence her ability to focus on "the details"?
- What other classroom practices would you plan for her? What questions do you still have about Thalia's knowledge and use of reading and writing?
- How does the instruction Thalia receives in Spanish support her language and literacy development in English, and vice versa?
- How has this video influenced your teaching practices? What segments affirmed what you already knew and had been doing? What will you do differently as a result of watching this video?

Making Connections

Apply and Extend

Here are some opportunities to apply and extend what you've seen.

Watch These Videos

View the kindergarten classroom videos in the *Teaching Reading* library, "Becoming Readers and Writers" and "Writer's Journal." How are these classrooms similar to Mr. St. Clair's? How are they different? Which instructional practices in these two videos would support Thalia's literacy development?

For more information on these videos, see the chapters on "Becoming Readers and Writers" and "Writer's Journal" in this guide.

Selected Resources

Resources Used by Mr. St. Clair

Clay, M. *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1993.

Valeri, Michele, and Michael Stein. "The Dinosaur Song" from the album *Dinosaur Rock*. Silver Spring, Md.: Dinorock Productions, Inc., 1983.

Developmental Reading Assessment: <http://www.pearsonlearning.com/celepress/observation.html>

Resources Used by Thalia

Christelow, Eileen. *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*. New York, N.Y.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989.

Cowley, Joy. *Go, Go, Go*. From the Story Box Series. New York, N.Y.: Wright Group/McGraw Hill, 1995.

Cutting, Jillian. *Going To School*. From the Sunshine Series. New York, N.Y.: Wright Group/McGraw Hill, 2000.

Additional Resources

Bromley, K. "Teaching Young Children To Be Writers". In Strickland, D., and L. Morrow. eds. *Beginning Readers and Writers*. New York, N.Y.: Teachers College Press, 2000.

"Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children." A joint position statement of the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), adopted 1998. *The Reading Teacher* 52 (1998): 193–216.

Rog, L. J. *Early Literacy Instruction in Kindergarten*. Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 2001.

For more resources on literacy, see the General Resources section of the Appendix.