

# Cassandra Becomes a Fluent Reader

**Student:** Grade 1, age 6, November birthday

**School:** Young Achievers School for Science and Mathematics, Boston, Massachusetts

**Teacher:** Hildi Perez

**Class Size:** 20 students

“When I think about Cassandra back in September and where she was, and how hard she’s worked throughout all this time to get where she is, there is a lot to be celebrated. There is a lot to feel good about.” —Hildi Perez, first-grade teacher

# Overview

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## Video Summary

At the beginning of first grade, “Cassandra is a typical beginning first-grade reader,” according to her teacher, Hildi Perez. In this video, we follow Cassandra’s progress in reading throughout the school year. Ms. Perez uses routine assessments and regular conferences with Cassandra’s mother to plan instruction that addresses Cassandra’s developing needs in reading and writing. Varied instruction and reading practice—guided-reading groups, whole-class shared reading, partner reading, and independent reading—provide Cassandra with the necessary skills and strategies to become an accurate, fluent reader. By the end of first grade, Cassandra applies new reading strategies, chooses books that interest her, and feels confident as a reader.

Factors that contribute to Cassandra’s literacy development:

- Ongoing assessments
- Opportunities to read and write every day
- Explicit instruction in word study
- Flexible grouping practices
- Parent involvement
- Cassandra’s motivation to read
- Reading at home

“Once Cassandra gets that instruction in a small group, she can usually go back to the book the next day and practice on her own, and read it independently. The only way she’s going to become fluent is by practicing. The more she reads, the more fluent she’ll become.” —Hildi Perez, first-grade teacher

### **Cassandra’s Progress at a Glance**

- Word recognition
- Decoding strategies
- Oral reading fluency
- Comprehension
- Self-monitoring

# Putting It in Context

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## The Student, Teacher, and Class

Cassandra is a first-grade student at the Young Achievers School for Science and Mathematics in Boston, Massachusetts, where she attended a two-year kindergarten program. The youngest of three children, Cassandra enjoys reading songs, poems, predictable and familiar stories, and books about animals.

In September, Cassandra's mother worries that Cassandra is behind in reading compared to her older siblings' progress as readers. Cassandra's mother reports that Cassandra seems uninterested in reading at home, and is easily frustrated. But according to Cassandra's teacher, Hildi Perez, Cassandra developed important reading-readiness skills in kindergarten, and is where she needs to be to begin first grade.

Ms. Perez formally assesses students four times a year to measure progress in phonics, automatic word recognition, oral reading fluency, and comprehension. She uses this information to plan appropriate instruction and to place students in guided-reading groups, which change throughout the year as students' needs change. She expects Cassandra to develop strategies for reading new words and to develop accuracy and fluency in reading.

Establishing literacy routines early in the year, Ms. Perez plans a literacy block that includes whole-class shared reading of literature and poetry, phonics and word study lessons related to literature, literacy centers, and guided-reading groups. As the year progresses, guided-reading groups change and students become more independent as readers, applying strategies modeled by Ms. Perez and reading self-selected books during independent reading time.

### **Cassandra's Literacy Program**

Shared Reading (whole class)

Guided Reading (small group)

Partner Reading

Independent Reading

Read-Aloud

Assessment

Home Reading

Writing in Response to Reading

# Analyzing the Video

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## 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 strategies Cassandra develops for reading unfamiliar words and to the factors that influence her oral reading accuracy and fluency.

### Review Important Terms

Review the definitions of important terms related to 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, 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, note how Cassandra's reading fluency develops over the year. How does she approach words in isolation and in context in September and then in May? How does she make connections with the text?

### Review What You Saw

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

**Cassandra's Progress:** How does Cassandra progress in reading during the year? How does her progress compare to that of your own students? What factors influenced her reading progress? What questions do you have about her literacy development?

**Classroom Environment:** What classroom contexts and instructional practices support reading fluency? How does the classroom environment encourage Cassandra to gain independence as a reader and writer?

**Home/School Connection:** How do Ms. Perez and Cassandra's mother collaborate to create a complete profile of Cassandra? How do they monitor her progress to encourage her as a reader?

## Looking Closer

Take a second look at Cassandra's reading 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.

### Assessment at the Beginning of the Year: Video Segment

Find this segment 2 minutes and 24 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 6 minutes and 9 seconds.

In the beginning of first grade, Ms. Perez uses both informal and formal assessment to determine Cassandra's reading skills and appropriate teaching strategies. In this segment, Cassandra participates in a guided-reading group and in a one-to-one



# Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

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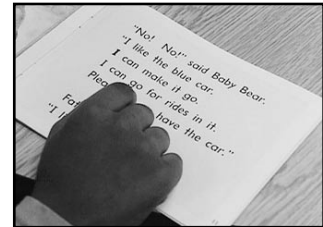
assessment with Ms. Perez. Add your observations about Cassandra's strengths and needs to the Literacy Development Chart.

- What areas of early literacy does Ms. Perez assess?
- How does Ms. Perez combine instruction and assessment in the guided-reading group? What strategies for identifying new words does Cassandra use?
- During the individual teacher assessment, what strategies does Cassandra use to read high-frequency words in list form? What strategies does she use to read words in the story?
- What do we know about Cassandra's reading comprehension?
- Cassandra's teacher says she is "exactly where she needs to be in first grade." What does this mean? Do you agree?
- What instruction would you plan in order to develop Cassandra's reading skills and strategies?

## Developing Reading Fluency: Video Segment

Find this segment 12 minutes and 37 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 5 minutes and 56 seconds.

By January, Cassandra is reading more difficult texts. Ms. Perez reports that Cassandra avoids new and more challenging books during independent reading, and "plays it safe" by choosing to reread only familiar books. In this segment, Cassandra reads with her guided-reading group, and reads a poem with a partner.



- How has Cassandra's reading progressed since September? What specific reading strategies has she developed?
- How has Ms. Perez's instruction changed since September? What decisions did she make to advance Cassandra's reading development?
- How does Cassandra's individual reading of her book during guided reading differ from her reading of the poem with a partner? Which is more fluent? Why?
- What does Cassandra's choice of books for independent reading reveal about her beliefs in her ability to read?
- How does Ms. Perez promote Cassandra's perceptions of herself as a reader throughout the year?
- What goals would you set for Cassandra for the remainder of the school year? What instruction would you plan to meet these goals?

## Independent Reading: Video Segment

Find this segment 19 minutes and 4 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 3 minutes and 28 seconds.

After her March assessment, Ms. Perez implements an independent reading program for all of her students. In contrast to guided reading, independent reading promotes individual student choice of texts that reflects both personal interests and reading levels. In this video segment, Cassandra reads a self-selected book during independent reading and works with a partner to share her book and to review high-frequency words on cards.



# Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

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- How would you characterize Cassandra's reading of her chosen book on frogs?
- How does Cassandra demonstrate motivation to read and engagement with the text?
- What factors have influenced her fluent reading of this book?
- How is Cassandra's reading of individual sight words different from her September assessment? What strategies does she use now to read words?
- What are the milestones in reading Cassandra has reached over the year?
- What instructional plans and contexts for reading over the year have contributed to Cassandra's reading development?

## Parent and Teacher Working Together: Video Segments

Find the first segment 54 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 1 minute and 29 seconds. Find the second segment 10 minutes and 3 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 2 minutes and 11 seconds.

Cassandra's mother meets with Ms. Perez throughout the year to share thoughts on Cassandra as a learner and to discuss goals she has for her progress in school. In the first segment, Cassandra's mother describes Cassandra's approach to learning; in the second segment, Cassandra's mother meets with Ms. Perez to discuss Cassandra's progress and to set goals for the rest of the year.



- What does Cassandra's mother share in the beginning of the first segment to help Ms. Perez in her instruction?
- Based on the parent/teacher conference, what does Cassandra's mother know about Cassandra's reading? What does her teacher know?
- How do the teacher and parent collaborate to gain a deeper understanding of Cassandra? How do their descriptions of Cassandra differ?
- What information might Ms. Perez provide as a result of this conference at the next parent/teacher conference?

## Summing Up

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

## Reflecting on Your Viewing Experience

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

- In what ways did Cassandra grow in her reading development over the year?
- How did Ms. Perez's instruction change over the year?
- How was assessment used to plan instruction for Cassandra?
- How did Ms. Perez's instruction develop Cassandra's fluency in reading?
- What questions do you still have about Cassandra's reading? What other classroom practices would you have planned for her?
- How might this video influence your teaching practices? What segments affirmed what you already know and practice? What will you do differently as a result of watching this video?

# Making Connections

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## Apply and Extend

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

### Watch This Video

View Ms. Perez's classroom video, "Assessment-Driven Instruction," from the *Teaching Reading* library. How does seeing the classroom video affect your understanding of Ms. Perez's instructional approach? Does it enhance your understanding of Cassandra's literacy development?

For more information on this video, see the chapter on "Assessment-Driven Instruction" in this guide.

# Selected Resources

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## Resources Used by Ms. Perez

Beaver, Joetta. *Where Is My Hat?* from The Developmental Reading Assessment. Lebanon, Ind.: Pearson Education, Inc., 1997.

Cunningham, P. *Systematic Sequential Phonics They Use*. Greensboro, N.C.: Carson-Dellosa Publishing, 2000.

Jack, David, and Susan Jack Cooper. "Gotta Hop" from the album *Gotta Hop!* Encinitas, Calif.: Ta Dum Productions, Inc., 1990. [www.davidjack.com](http://www.davidjack.com)

Rahaman, Vishanti. *Read for Me, Mama*. Honesdale, Penn.: Boyds Mills Press, Inc., 1997.

Randell, Beverly. *Baby Bear's Present*. From Rigby PM Collection. Barrington, Ill.: Rigby Education, 1994.

Randell, Beverly. *House Hunting*. From Rigby PM Collection. Barrington, Ill.: Rigby Education, 1996.

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

## Resources Used by Cassandra

Prelutsky, Jack. "My Fish Can Ride a Bicycle." A poem from the book *Something Big Has Been Here*. New York, N.Y.: Greenwillow Books, 1990.

Rosen, Michael. ed. *Poems for the Very Young*. London: Kingfisher Publishing Co., 1993.

## Additional Resources

### Books and Articles

Fountas, I. C., and G. S. Pinnell. *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1996.

Kuhn, M. R., and S. A. Stahl. *Fluency: A Review of Developmental and Remedial Practices*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, 2000.

Morrow, L., et al. "Characteristics of Exemplary First-Grade Instruction." *The Reading Teacher* 52 (1999).

Paratore, J. "Home and School Together: Helping Beginning Readers Succeed." In A. E. Farstrup and S. J. Samuels. eds. *What Research Has To Say About Reading Instruction* Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 2002.

Pressley, M., et al. *Learning To Read: Lessons From Exemplary First-Grade Classrooms*. New York, N.Y.: Guilford Press, 2001.

Rueda, R. and G. E. Garcia. *How Do I Teach Reading to English Language Learners?* Ann Arbor, Mich.: Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, 2001.

Samuels, S. J. "Reading Fluency: Its Development and Assessment." In A. E. Farstrup and S. J. Samuels. eds. *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*. Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 2002.

Winograd, P., and H. Arrington. "Best Practices in Literacy Assessment." In L. Gambrell et al., eds. *Best Practices in Literacy Instruction*. New York, N.Y.: Guilford Press, 1999.

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