

# Promoting Readers As Leaders

**Teacher:** Valerie Kostandos

**Years Teaching:** 20

**School:** Decius Beebe School, Melrose, Massachusetts

**Grade:** First

**Class Size:** 20 students

**Lesson Dates:** November 5 and 6

“What I would like my students to get by the end of this year is to become independent readers and writers—to want to take risks and to reflect on their own work. To know what they need and what they’re really good at, and how to be with others.” —Valerie Kostandos

# Overview

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## Video Summary

In Valerie Kostandos's first-grade classroom, students are readers, writers, and leaders who manage their daily routines. Whether taking attendance or lunch count, or helping another student reflect on a book, Ms. Kostandos's students are encouraged to become independent learners. Ms. Kostandos's varied instruction—at the whole-group, small-group, and individual level—supports both academic and social development. Throughout the day, Ms. Kostandos helps students think clearly about the purpose for each activity.

Ms. Kostandos's literacy lessons demonstrate the following:

- Confidence in students' ability to assume responsibility and monitor their learning
- Routines and management practices that help students develop leadership skills
- A collaborative learning environment
- Explicit and purposeful teaching and learning
- Ongoing assessment to guide instruction
- Student self-assessment and metacognitive awareness

"I think it is important that all kids get in that role of being the leaders. If we give them a challenge, they rise to it. They feel so empowered... and that carries over when they write and when they read. They have the sense that they can do it... What is hard is trying to stay back and not jump in."

### **Literacy Teaching Practices**

Shared Reading

Guided Reading

# Putting It in Context

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## The Teacher and the Class

For Valerie Kostandos, a first-grade teacher at the Decius Beebe School in Melrose, Massachusetts, a good teacher knows when to teach and when *not* to teach. In her student-centered classroom, stepping back and allowing her students to lead the class—and their own learning—is essential to fostering independence, self-awareness, and good reading and writing skills.

Ms. Kostandos believes that the goals and expectations of classroom activities and lessons should be made clear to students. “I think it’s important that kids have a purpose to what they’re learning—a reason why they’re learning it. We talk about that a lot: ‘Why are we spending time on this?’” Explicit teaching, according to Ms. Kostandos, helps students to reflect on their own learning process, and to develop good judgment about when they can work on their own and when they need help.

Trained as a reading specialist, Ms. Kostandos says she tries to keep up with the latest techniques in teaching literacy. “It’s important as a teacher to pick and choose what feels really right—because there is so much out there.” She draws on the work of Irene Gaskins and Patricia Cunningham for her explicit phonics instruction and Marie Clay for her assessment of students. She is also influenced by First Steps, the literacy program adopted by her district, which stresses a release of responsibility to students. She is the school’s First Steps tutor.

### Day at a Glance\*

8:15	Arrival
8:30	Morning Routines (Jobs, One-on-One Assessment)
9:00	Daily Schedule
9:15	Shared Reading
9:40	Independent Reading/ Guided Reading
10:15	Book Discussion
10:45	Word Study Activities
11:00	Recess
11:15	Shared Writing
11:45	Independent Writing
12:15	Guided Reading in Groups
1:00	Independent Reading
1:30	Afternoon Meeting (Reflecting on the Day)

\*In the video, you see excerpts from Ms. Kostandos’s class on November 5 and 6. On a typical day, other content areas are also included in the schedule.

# Analyzing the Video

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## Before Viewing

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

### Prepare To Record Your Observations

Make a copy of the Observational Checklist (found in the Appendix) to record your observations, reactions, and further questions that come up throughout your viewing. Copy the KWL Chart (also in the Appendix) and record what you already know and what you would like to learn about promoting readers as leaders in first grade. Groups can use the KWL chart to generate discussion and questions to consider while viewing.

### Consider Key Questions

Consider these questions as you view the video:

- How does the classroom environment encourage students to gain independence as readers and writers?
- How are the diverse needs of learners (language in particular) met in this classroom?
- What forms of assessment are apparent in this classroom, and how does assessment guide instruction?
- How are reading and writing connected in this classroom?

### 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 classroom video.

### Watch the Video

On your first viewing, use the Observational Checklist to note Ms. Kostandos's implementation of the Literacy Teaching Practices. Note, in particular, how she teaches explicitly by making the purpose of classroom activities clear, and how she adapts some of the Literacy Teaching Practices to differentiate instruction. Also look for how her classroom environment, including her management techniques, promotes independence in students.

### Review What You Saw

After watching the video, review the Observational Checklist and reflect on what you saw. How do the practices you just watched compare to your own? How are they different from or similar to what you saw in the video?

### Relate the Key Questions to Valerie Kostandos's Classroom

*How does the classroom environment encourage students to gain independence as readers and writers?*

Review the elements of a classroom environment (page 5). What did you notice or record about how Ms. Kostandos's management and instructional techniques help students see themselves as contributing members of the class? As readers and writers who know what they can do and when they need help? How are students encouraged to take responsibility, work together, and model for each other?

# Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

## Looking Closer

Take a second look at Ms. Kostandos's classroom to deepen your understanding of specific literacy strategies. Use the video images below to locate where to begin viewing.

### Shared Reading: Video Segment

Find this segment 4 minutes after the beginning of the video. Watch for 6 minutes and 42 seconds.

In this shared reading activity, Ms. Kostandos introduces a story from the Basal Reading anthology, prompting students to recall another story by the same author. Following this text-to-text connection, she leads the class through a series of steps—a focused picture walk, making predictions, discussing how illustrations convey mood—to prepare them for reading independently or in a small group with her.



- How does Ms. Kostandos guide her students to interact with the text and with each other?
- Note how Ms. Kostandos combines explicit modeling, guided practice, questioning, and scaffolding as students get ready to read. How does she encourage them to be responsible for determining how they will read the text?
- Ms. Kostandos demonstrates how shared reading—often thought to be a practice directed to the whole class—can also be used with a small group. How does she use small-group shared reading to reinforce lessons introduced earlier to the whole group? How does she re-integrate the two groups and help individual students demonstrate their learning and teach each other?

### Guided Reading: Video Segment

Find this video segment 19 minutes and 3 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 4 minutes and 7 seconds.

In this video segment, Ms. Kostandos conducts two guided-reading groups at different levels. The first group reads *The Carrot Seed*, a book carefully selected because of the students' work in science. After listening to a brief introduction, the second guided-reading group begins reading another book in quiet voices, clearly familiar with the routine, as Ms. Kostandos listens to individual students, occasionally providing a strategic prompt.



- As you watch these two guided-reading lessons, use your Observational Checklist to note how Ms. Kostandos addresses different Essential Components of Literacy Development. What kinds of questions and prompts does she use to elicit students' comprehension and to build their vocabulary and awareness of their own reading strategies? How does she assess each student's reading process using a partial running record?

### Student Self-Directed Activities: Video Segments

Find the first segment 23 minutes and 21 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 1 minute. Find the second segment 54 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 1 minute and 28 seconds.

In these video segments, students are responsible for running their classroom, managing their learning, and reflecting on their behavior.

- What do you notice about Ms. Kostandos's language, her instruction, and the organization of classroom routines that encourage self-directed behavior?



# Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

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## Summing Up

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

### Reflecting on Your Viewing Experience

Review your Observational Checklist and other notes such as your KWL chart.

- What surprised or interested you?
- What did you find that affirmed what you already knew or had been doing?
- What new approaches or ideas will you try?
- What questions do you have?
- After watching the video, do you think differently about your own practices? About some of the students you teach? About how young students develop literacy?

# Making Connections

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## Apply and Extend

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

### Read This Article

Compare this article on assessment with what you observed in Ms. Kostandos's classroom.

West, K. "Noticing and Responding to Learners: Literacy Evaluation and Instruction in the Primary Grades." *The Reading Teacher* 51, no. 7 (April 1998): 550–559.

This reading is available as a downloadable PDF file on the Teaching Reading Web site. Go to [www.learner.org/channel/libraries/readingk2/](http://www.learner.org/channel/libraries/readingk2/).

### Watch These Videos

View the other first-grade videos in the *Teaching Reading* library, "Students Making Choices," "Assessment-Driven Instruction," and "Connecting Skills to Text," to see a variety of approaches to guided reading.

View "Students Making Choices" and "Assessment-Driven Instruction" to compare the ways in which other first-grade teachers conduct shared reading. Make a list of steps and techniques for shared reading used in the different classrooms.

For more information on these videos, see the chapters on "Students Making Choices," "Assessment-Driven Instruction," and "Connecting Skills to Text" in this guide.

### Take It Back to Your Classroom

Identify one element or strategy from Ms. Kostandos's lesson that you would like to try in your classroom. List supports or resources that you would need to implement it. Use the Classroom Strategy Planner (found in the Appendix). If you are participating in a study group, share what happened when you tried out the new strategy. Or keep a reflective journal of your experience, focusing on the benefits for you and for your students.

# Selected Resources

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## Resources Used by Ms. Kostandos

Allington, Richard. *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Research-Based Programs*. Boston, Mass.: Allyn & Bacon Publisher, 2000.

Atwell, Nancie. *In the Middle: New Understandings About Writing, Reading, and Learning*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1998.

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

Cunningham, P., and D. Hall. *Making Words*. Torrance, Calif.: Good Apple Publishers, 1994.

Fletcher, Ralph. *What a Writer Needs*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1993.

Gaskins, I. W., et al. "Procedures for Word Learning: Making Discoveries About Words." *The Reading Teacher* 50, no. 4 (1997).

Holdaway, Don. *Stability and Change in Literacy Learning*. London, Ontario: Althouse Press, 1983.

Pinnell, G. S., I. C. Fountas, and M. E. Jacobbe. *Word Matters: Teaching Phonics and Spelling in the Reading/Writing Classroom*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1998.

Curwin, Richard L., and Allen N. Mendler. *Discipline With Dignity*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1999.

Smith, Frank. *Reading Without Nonsense*. New York, N.Y.: Teachers College Press, 1997.

First Steps: <http://www.first-steps.com/home.asp>

## Books for Students in Ms. Kostandos's Classroom

Krauss, Ruth. *The Carrot Seed*. New York, N.Y.: Harperfestival, 1993.

Kafka, Sherry. *I Need A Friend*. New York, N.Y.: Putnam Publishing Group Library, 1971.

Mueller, Virginia. *A Halloween Mask for Monster*. New York, N.Y.: Viking Press (Penguin Putnam Inc.), 1988.

Mueller, Virginia. *Monster Can't Sleep*. New York, N.Y.: Viking Press (Penguin Putnam Inc.), 1988.

Mueller, Virginia. *A Playhouse for Monster*. Morton Grove, Ill.: Albert Whitman and Co., 1985.

Mueller, Virginia. *Monster and the Baby*. Morton Grove, Ill.: Albert Whitman and Co., 1985.

Shaw, Nancy. *Sheep out to Eat*. Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1995.

Shaw, Nancy. *Sheep in a Jeep*. Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997.

## Additional Resources

### Books and Articles

Avery, C. ...*And With a Light Touch: Learning About Reading, Writing and Teaching With First Graders*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1993.

Dahl, K. L., et al. *Rethinking Phonics: Making the Best Teaching Decisions*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2001.

# Selected Resources, cont'd.

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Dahl, K. L., and P. L. Scharer. "Phonics Teaching and Learning in Whole Language Classrooms: New Evidence From Research." *The Reading Teacher* 53, no. 7 (2000).

Gaskins, I. W., et al. "Procedures for Word Learning: Making Discoveries About Words." *The Reading Teacher* 50, no. 4 (1997).

Morrow, L. M., et al. "Characteristics of Exemplary First-Grade Literacy Instruction." *The Reading Teacher* 52, no. 5 (1999).

Moustafa, M., and E. Maldonado-Colon. "Whole-to-Parts Phonics Instruction: Building on What Children Know To Help Them Know More." *The Reading Teacher* 52, no. 5 (1999).

Price, D. P. "Explicit Instruction at the Point of Use." *Language Arts* 76, no. 1 (1998).

## Web Sites

International Reading Association: <http://www.IRA.org>

National Council of Teachers of English: <http://www.NCTE.org>

National Association of Education of Young Children: <http://www.naeyc.org>

Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Ability, CIERA: <http://www.ciera.org>

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

# Notes

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