

# Students Making Choices

**Teacher:** Becky Pursley

**Years Teaching:** 14

**School:** Barton Hills Elementary School, Austin, Texas

**Grade:** First

**Class Size:** 18 students

**Lesson Dates:** November 12 and 13

"I hope all first graders learn how to unlock words, use all parts of literature to make connections to their own lives, and make meaning from all written communication they come in contact with. [I want them to] learn how to be good communicators verbally, as well as in written form." —Becky Pursley

# Overview

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## Video Summary

Becky Pursley's first-grade students are confident and willing to take risks, especially in reading and writing workshops. Structured to meet the diverse needs of her students—who range from emergent readers to those nearing the end of second grade—workshops allow students to choose their work and to interact with each other. In reading workshops, choices include independent reading or “Readers’ Theater,” an opportunity to build fluency and intonation while reading to the class. In writing workshops, students read their written work aloud, edit using an editing checklist, then “publish” and share their writing with the whole group. Whether in workshops, shared reading, or one-on-one interactions, Ms. Pursley helps students to problem solve when reading and writing and to verbalize challenges they encounter.

Ms. Pursley's literacy lessons demonstrate the following:

- Strategies students can use independently as readers, writers, and learners
- Specific literacy routines that meet students' diverse needs and promote independence
- Explicit instruction on mechanics embedded in authentic reading and writing activities
- An emphasis on reading for meaning
- A problem-solving approach to a variety of texts
- Assessment that informs instruction and provides information for measures of accountability

“You have to be brave to do the workshop approach. Because children are doing different things at different times—sometimes you feel like you're lacking control. But if you step back and do a status check of everyone, and make sure that every child has something to do that's engaging, the workshop will work.”

### **Literacy Teaching Practices**

Shared Reading

Guided Reading

Independent Reading

Independent Writing

# Putting It in Context

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## The Teacher and the Class

First-grade teacher Becky Pursley places a lot of trust in her first-grade students at Barton Hills Elementary School in Austin, Texas. “I believe in giving children freedom and trusting they will do good things with it.” Using reading and writing workshops that limit “teacher talk,” Ms. Pursley emphasizes student choice throughout her literacy curriculum.

But Ms. Pursley’s commitment to a student-driven classroom is coupled with an equal commitment to meeting the Texas standards for first grade. “I can go with the flow of the classroom and still keep within the general Texas framework for learning,” she says. Continually observing students, Ms. Pursley introduces important skills and concepts as “teachable moments” arise in class. In this way, she caters to the needs and background knowledge of each student while keeping her eye on benchmarks identified by the state.

Ms. Pursley uses formal and informal assessment to identify individual student needs. She formally assesses students two to three times a year with instruments adopted by her district—the Texas Primary Reading Inventory and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). For informal assessment, Ms. Pursley listens to students read weekly—and sometimes daily—making notes, including marking miscues, in a binder containing records on each student.

### Day at a Glance\*

7:30	Arrival
7:45	BEAR (Be Excited About Reading) Time
8:15	Shared Reading/Scholastic Newspaper
8:45	Readers’ Workshop
9:30	Word Study
10:00	Recess
10:30	Readers’ Theater
11:15	Individual Assessment
11:45	Guided Reading
12:30	Writing Workshop
1:00	Preparation for Publishing
1:30	Sharing
3:00	End of the Day

\*In the video, you see excerpts from Ms. Pursley’s class on November 12 and 13. 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 conducting a reading or a writing workshop 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 how Ms. Pursley implements some of the Literacy Teaching Practices. In particular, note how she helps the students in reading and writing workshops.

### 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? Think about your classroom and the needs of your students. How are they different from or similar to what you saw in the video?

### Relate the Key Questions to Becky Pursley's Classroom

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

In reading and writing workshops, students choose their own books and activities. Reflect on the Readers' Choice List displayed prominently in the classroom. How does this level of choice and independence promote literacy? How would you implement this approach in your own classroom?

# Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

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## Looking Closer

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

### Reading Workshop: Video Segment

Find this segment 5 minutes and 47 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 3 minutes and 34 seconds.

Ms. Pursley's reading workshops give students opportunities to make choices and apply their skills and knowledge to the text they are reading.

- What does Ms. Pursley mean by the "just-right book" for a student? How does she determine it? How does she help students find their own "just-right book"?
- Ms. Pursley limits the amount of teacher talk during the reading workshop by carrying out short, focused mini-lessons. What is her focus in the lesson using onsets and rimes with a more emergent reader? How does she help the student understand how to apply the skill to her current reading book?



### Shared Reading: Video Segment

Find this segment 1 minute and 12 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 3 minutes and 42 seconds.

Ms. Pursley's shared-reading lesson with the entire class is different from other shared-reading lessons in the *Teaching Reading* library. She uses a different medium—the newspaper—and mines "teachable moments" that arise during the lesson to discuss skills and concepts.

- How does Ms. Pursley integrate work on vocabulary and comprehension into her lesson? What new terms does she introduce to students?
- Ms. Pursley comments, "If children know why they are learning something and value it, they will be better able to learn it." What does Ms. Pursley do in this lesson that demonstrates this view?
- How does Ms. Pursley take advantage of a "teachable moment" that arises in this segment? How does Ms. Pursley segue into a lesson for the entire group?



### Readers' Theater: Video Segment

Find this segment 9 minutes and 36 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 3 minutes and 42 seconds.

Ms. Pursley believes that Readers' Theater promotes oral reading skills like fluency and intonation and enhances social skills and decision-making abilities.

- How do students prepare for reading *Arthur's New Puppy* to the class? Why does Ms. Pursley think having an audience is important?
- Research suggests that re-readings build fluency. How does Readers' Theater develop fluency? What other skills does it develop?
- What does this segment suggest about mixed-ability groupings? Why does Ms. Pursley think the lower-leveled reader improved significantly?
- Where else does Ms. Pursley use heterogeneous groupings? How do these heterogeneous groupings benefit learners?



# Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

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## Writing Workshop: Video Segment

Find this segment 17 minutes and 25 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 4 minutes and 11 seconds.

Ms. Pursley's writing workshop—with its routines and emphasis on choice and response—is a key component of her first-grade classroom.

- What are the stages of writing Ms. Pursley considers appropriate for first-grade writers?
- What role does presenting written work to the class have at the revision stage? How is it different at the publication stage?
- What guides Ms. Pursley's timing in presenting the writing checklist to students? What does she think is an appropriate emphasis in editing at the first-grade level?



## Summing Up

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

### Reflecting on Your Viewing Experience

Review your completed 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 the students you teach? About how young students develop literacy?

# Making Connections

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## Apply and Extend

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

### Watch These Videos

View the other first-grade videos in the *Teaching Reading* library, "Promoting Readers As Leaders," "Connecting Skills to Text," and "Assessment-Driven Instruction." Compare how the different teachers in the videos use guided reading in their literacy curricula. In particular, note Ms. Pursley's choice to sometimes conduct guided reading with heterogeneous groups rather than with groups of similarly leveled readers.

For more information on these videos, see the chapters on "Promoting Readers as Leaders," "Connecting Skills to Text," and "Assessment-Driven Instruction" in this guide.

### Take It Back to the Classroom

Identify one element or strategy from Ms. Pursley's classroom that you would like to try in your own classroom. List any supports or resources 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 experiences, focusing on the benefits for you and your students.

# Selected Resources

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## Resources Used by Ms. Pursley

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

Calkins, Lucy McCormick. *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1994.

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

Scholastic News: <http://teacher.scholastic.com/newszone/>

Texas Assessment of Academic Skills: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment>

Texas Essential Knowledge Standard: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/teks/>

Texas Primary Reading Inventory: <http://www.tpri.org>

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

Brown, Marc T. *Arthur's New Puppy*. Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown & Company, 1993.

De Regniers, Beatrice Schenk. *May I Bring a Friend?* New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster Children's, 1974.

*Scholastic News*, Scholastic Classroom Magazine. New York, N.Y.: Scholastic Inc.

## Additional Resources

### Books and Articles

Avery, Carol, and Donald Graves. *...And With a Light Touch: Learning About Reading, Writing, and Teaching With First Graders: Second Edition*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2002.

Beaver, Joetta. *The Developmental Reading Assessment*. Lebanon, Ind.: Pearson Learning Publisher, 1999.

Fisher, Bobbi. "Writing Workshop in a First Grade Classroom." *Teaching PreK-8* 26, no. 3 (November 1995): 66-69.

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

Routman, Regie. *Conversations: Strategies for Teaching, Learning, and Evaluating*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1991.

Routman, Regie. *Invitations: Changing As Teachers and Learners K-12*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1991.

Routman, Regie. *Transitions: From Literature to Literacy*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1991.

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