

# Workshop 1

## Creating Contexts for Learning

*“One of the things good teachers do is create a classroom context that in some ways mimics a real-world context. If a child learns how to use reading and writing to get things done in the classroom, then the child also knows how to use reading and writing to get things done outside the classroom.”*

Jeanne R. Paratore  
Associate Professor  
Boston University School of Education

How can classroom organization and daily routines help students become better readers and writers? In this session, literacy expert Jeanne Paratore outlines strategies teachers can use to enhance literacy skills. You will learn how classroom organization, everyday routines, and grouping practices affect literacy skills in the middle grades. You will explore research-based strategies that help students learn, and see examples from actual classrooms.

### Learning Goals

At the end of this session, you will better understand how to:

- plan and organize your classroom to promote reading and writing
- develop literacy routines that encourage students to use reading and writing in meaningful ways
- identify and use texts that are accessible and motivating for all students
- plan multiple grouping options to maximize student learning

### Materials Needed

- the Examine the Literature Response Chart found at the end of this chapter
- the Develop Grouping Plans Chart found at the end of this chapter
- articles: “Flood Insurance: When Children Have Books They Can and Want to Read” and “Grouping for Instruction in Literacy: What We’ve Learned About What Works and What Doesn’t” found on the *Teaching Reading 3-5* Web site at [www.learner.org/channel/workshops/teachreading35](http://www.learner.org/channel/workshops/teachreading35)
- a journal or notebook

**Facilitator:** You may want to have several copies of charts and articles available for participants without Internet access.

# Before You Watch

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## Session Preparation

To prepare for this workshop session, you will review the key terms, identify the strategies that you already use, and then read two articles on classroom organization and grouping practices.

**FACILITATOR:** Have participants complete these activities before arriving for the session.

### Key Terms

- Classroom contexts
- Grouping plans
- Needs-based groups
- Wall displays
- Writing center

Definitions for these terms can be found in the Glossary in the Appendix.



### Notebook

### What Do You Do?

Consider all the things that factor into your classroom environment: organization of materials and desks or tables; books and other literacy materials; daily reading and writing routines; and student groupings. Now jot down your answers to the following questions and, if you are taking this workshop for credit, save them for your Literacy Practices Portfolio:

1. How does your classroom organization support students' reading, writing, and peer discussion?
2. What daily routines are in place to advance students' use of reading and writing?
3. What decisions do you make when grouping students for literacy instruction?



### Assignment

### Examine the Literature

To complete this activity, use the Examine the Literature Response Chart found at the end of this chapter.

Read each article listed below, recording your ideas on the chart during and after reading. When you have finished, save your chart to submit as an assignment.

These articles can be found as downloadable PDFs on the *Teaching Reading 3-5* Web site at [www.learner.org/channel/workshops/teachreading35](http://www.learner.org/channel/workshops/teachreading35).

#### **Flood Insurance: When Children Have Books They Can and Want to Read**

This article examines the impact that appropriate, appealing, and sufficient books—along with teacher interactions concerning those books—have on students' reading skills.

Worthy, J., and N. Roser. "Flood Insurance: When Children Have Books They Can and Want to Read." In *Teaching All the Children: Strategies for Developing Literacy in an Urban Setting*, edited by D. Lapp, C. C. Block, E. J. Cooper, J. Flood, N. Roser, and J. V. Tinajero, 179-192. New York: Guilford Press, 2004.

# Before You Watch, cont'd.

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## **Grouping for Instruction in Literacy: What We've Learned About What Works and What Doesn't**

This article describes the three kinds of student groupings that enhance effective literacy instruction.

Paratore, J. R. "Grouping for Instruction in Literacy: What We've Learned About What Works and What Doesn't." *The California Reader* 33 (2000): 2-5.

## Analyze the Video

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**FACILITATOR:** When the workshop session begins, you may want to spend a few minutes discussing the key terms, participants' prior knowledge, and the readings.

### Video Summary

In this video, Boston University professor Jeanne Paratore discusses the organization strategies, routines, and reading practices that enhance students' literacy skills. You will also see classroom examples that illustrate the strategies and research that Professor Paratore describes. As you watch the video, consider the following questions:

- Why does classroom organization matter?
- Why are routines important?
- How does grouping affect students' learning?



### Watch the Video

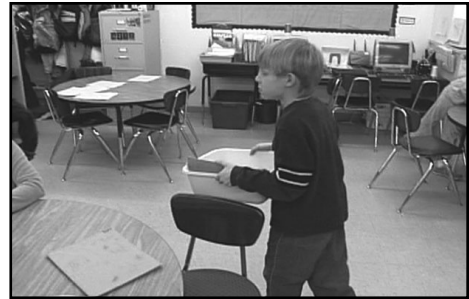
Watch the video, "Creating Contexts for Learning," taking notes as you watch. After you watch, jot down your answers to the questions below. If you prefer to watch the video in segments, pause the video when you see the next session heading.

# Analyze the Video, cont'd.

**Video Segment 1: Why Does Classroom Organization Matter?** (approximate times: 00:00-12:00): If you are watching the video in segments, you will find this image at the beginning of the video.

In the first video segment, Professor Paratore discusses the impact that an organized classroom has on student interactions, choices, and learning.

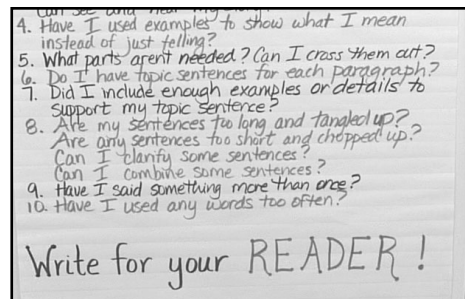
- Think about the wall displays in your classroom. Then compare them to what you learned about wall displays in the video. What might you change about the development or use of wall displays in your classroom?
- What are the ways in which a classroom library can be organized? What ideas might you implement in your own classroom?
- How is your classroom organized to support struggling readers? What books are accessible to them?



**Video Segment 2: Why Are Routines Important?** (approximate times: 12:00-18:00): If you are watching the video in segments, you will find this image approximately 12 minutes into the video.

In this video segment, Professor Paratore explores the effect that classroom routines can have on students' reading and writing skills.

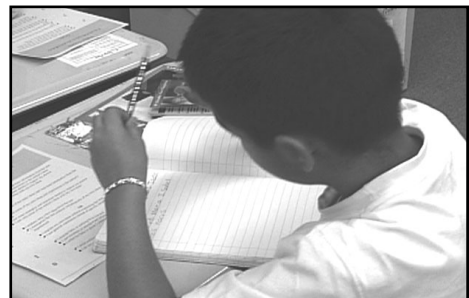
- What specific routines does the video suggest to help you increase the amount of time that students are engaged in reading and writing?
- What kinds of morning routines did you see? What did you notice about these routines?
- What routines might you implement to increase the amount of time struggling readers have to read?



**Video Segment 3: How Does Grouping Affect Students' Learning?** (approximate times: 18:00-end): If you are watching the video in segments, you will find this image approximately 18 minutes into the video.

In the last video segment, Professor Paratore examines the kinds of grouping options that give all students the amount of practice and interaction they need.

- How can teachers make thoughtful decisions about which grouping option will maximize students' learning?
- Consider your students. What grouping options might enhance reading and writing skills for all students?
- Consider struggling readers.
  - When can they be grouped with the whole class?
  - When should they be grouped with readers at their own level?
  - When should they be paired with a more capable peer?
  - When should they be paired with a reader at their instructional level?



# Extend Your Knowledge

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## Examine the Topic

Classroom routines vary from teacher to teacher, but research suggests that some routines are more effective than others. Read the following statements by Jeanne Paratore and Richard Allington. Consider how these ideas relate to the classrooms you just watched, and to your own classroom and teaching.

I'm really struck by the evidence that suggests that in classrooms where children excel, they spend a greater amount of time reading and writing than in classrooms where they don't. That seems to make sense. But, in different classrooms, there are huge variations in the amount of time children spend reading and writing. The amount of classroom time is fairly stable across classrooms, across schools, across states. What differs is the amount of time children spend actually engaged in reading and writing. And that time is dependent largely on the routines and procedures that teachers set up.

Jeanne R. Paratore

In many schools the official school day—the instructional day—begins at around 8:30 a.m. But at 8:30 a.m. in many schools, children are still on the playground or in the school cafeteria when the bell rings, signaling the beginning of the instructional day. At the bell, students begin the process of moving to their classrooms. This often involves lining up and waiting to be released to travel down the hall to enter the classroom. After the children enter the classroom, the teacher takes attendance, collects lunch money, book money, excuses for absences, homework, and other such administrative details. Then comes the Pledge of Allegiance and, often, morning announcements. Finally, at 8:50, the teacher cues the children to take out their books, and the instructional work actually begins. Students have already sat for 20 minutes of non-instructional activity—often more time than they will spend actually reading during the remainder of the day.

End-of-day routines often take another 15-20 minutes—now more time has been spent on lining up, unpacking, packing up, and assorted other non-instructional activities than was spent reading and writing combined. For efficient use of scheduled instructional time, teaching would continue until the very end of the official instructional day. If the instructional day ends at 2:30, then 2:30 is when kids should put down their books or journals and begin the management process of getting ready to go home. In many schools we can readily locate another 30-50 minutes every day for reading and writing activity.

We must better organize schools to capture every minute of instructional time. A good first step in planning for improved reading achievement is reworking the organization of the school day so that teachers and children have all of the official instructional time for productive academic work. This may mean rethinking procedures for taking attendance and getting needed information out. If your school or your classroom uses many minutes of official instructional time for non-instructional activities, you have located one area to begin your efforts for improving organizational efficiency.

Excerpted from Richard Allington. *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Research-Based Programs*, 35-36. New York: Addison Wesley, 2001.

# Extend Your Knowledge, cont'd.



## Notebook

### Describe a typical day in your class.

- How much time is devoted to non-instructional routines in the morning, at lunchtime, and at the end of the day?
- How can you change these routines so that additional time is devoted to literacy instruction and practice?
- If you cannot change the school routines, what tasks or activities can students engage in during the early morning, noon, and end-of-day times? How can you structure these times so that reading and writing are not interrupted?
- What routines do you have in place throughout the day that allow time for working with students who struggle in reading and writing? What do you do during this time?



## Interactive Activity

### Design a Schedule

Go to the *Teaching Reading 3-5* Web site at [www.learner.org/channel/workshops/teachreading35](http://www.learner.org/channel/workshops/teachreading35)

All teachers wish they had more time. Fitting everything into the day or week is an ongoing challenge. In this activity, you will have a blank schedule and a fixed number of things that have to fit into the school day, including announcements, lunch, recess, and other subject areas. Using the interactive schedule, map out a week-long schedule with time allotments for each reading and writing activity. The goal is to have at least 90 minutes of reading and writing each day.

### Tips for New Teachers



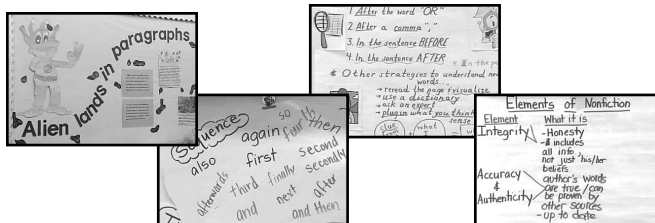
## Tip

### Creating a Vibrant Classroom

The best classrooms are not only efficient, they're enticing. They are brightly colored and almost magical in terms of their appeal to children. They include lots of books, objects, and student-produced work and artwork. They have snakes, birds, gerbils, and other animals for students to look at and think about. However, building a classroom environment doesn't happen overnight. If you are just getting started, here are some ideas to consider at the beginning of the year and in the months ahead.

Things to do at the beginning of the school year:

- Supply your classroom library with books of different genres, topics, and reading levels.
- Arrange books by genre, topic, and reading level.
- Create a chart for signing out and returning books.
- Place colorful alphabet letters on a wall for a future Word Wall.
- Designate a bulletin board for student work.
- Design a wall space where students can introduce themselves to each other (an "All-About-Me" poster, a letter describing some favorite activities, etc.).



# Extend Your Knowledge, cont'd.

Things to do throughout the year:

- Add a section for student book recommendations to the classroom library.
- Add new books and genres to your library based on your curriculum and students' interests.
- Co-construct colorful charts as you teach reading and writing strategies.
- Develop bulletin boards and displays for units of study.
- Add to your Word Wall.



## Grouping and Routines That Support Learning

One of the most difficult decisions teachers face is how to group students in ways that promote reading, writing, and talking. Below are some ideas for building a framework of grouping options and related routines throughout the school year.

Grouping Option	What It Entails	Teacher Responsibility	Routines
Reading Workshop (Independent Reading)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student-selected text</li> <li>• Independent reading level</li> <li>• Individual response to reading</li> <li>• Apply strategies from mini-lesson</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini-lesson (5-10 min.) for whole class</li> <li>• Individual conferencing (assess and record reading behaviors, 30-35 min.)</li> <li>• Wrap-up (5-10 min.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using the classroom library</li> <li>• Learning procedures for signing out books</li> <li>• Recording reading</li> </ul>
Whole-Class Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher-selected text</li> <li>• Grade-level text</li> <li>• Individual/group response to reading</li> <li>• Apply strategies from mini-lesson</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini-lesson (5-10 min.)</li> <li>• Flexible grouping to support or extend reader understanding (30-35 min.)</li> <li>• Wrap-up (5-10 min.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner reading</li> <li>• Responding in a journal</li> <li>• Responding with a partner or small group</li> </ul>
Guided Reading Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher-selected text</li> <li>• Instructional-level text</li> <li>• Individual/group response</li> <li>• Apply strategies from mini-lesson</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini-lesson (5-10 min.)</li> <li>• Guided reading groups (30-35 min.)</li> <li>• Wrap-up (5-10 min.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What to do when teacher is working with a group</li> <li>• How to get help when teacher is with a group</li> </ul>
Literature Circles/Book Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before students choose books, teacher gives a book talk on each book</li> <li>• Teacher-/student-selected text theme or topic-related books</li> <li>• Interest-level text</li> <li>• Individual response</li> <li>• Peer discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini-lesson (5-10 min.) for whole class</li> <li>• Monitoring student reading and discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to ask questions</li> <li>• How to listen and respond</li> <li>• Taking turns</li> </ul>

# Put It Into Practice

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## Choose Activities

In this section, you will build on what you have learned and develop strategies that you can use in your own classroom. The following activities are designed to help you develop resources for creating a more effective classroom environment. Choose one or both of the activities from the list below.

### Activity 1: Create Text Sets

In this activity, you will develop a lesson using a range of books based on the curriculum, skills, interests, and cultural backgrounds represented in your classroom.

### Activity 2: Develop Grouping Plans

In this activity, you will develop classroom charts, grouping students together in reading based on their strengths, needs, interests, and work habits.



## Assignment

### 1. Create Text Sets

One of the challenges teachers face is collecting and providing accessible and motivating texts that support the content-area curriculum. In order to learn and understand the concepts of specific topics, students need to have a wide range of reading materials that are appropriate in reading level and that will engage and motivate all students. In this activity, you will research and gather a variety of texts from your classroom, the school library, and other sources that reflect and support a common theme or topic in your curriculum. Write out the plan outlined below. When you have finished, save your work to submit as an assignment.

1. Decide on a theme or topic of study in a content area of your curriculum.
2. Consider related sub-topics for the theme.
3. Identify a set of texts that relate to the theme or sub-topics and place them in a bin, crate, or corner of the room. These reading materials should reflect:
  - a range of reading levels that match those of your students
  - a variety of genres (e.g., informational books, trade books, picture books, biographies, poetry, magazines, newspapers, reference books)
  - the culture and first language of your students
  - the interests of your students
4. Develop a unit or lesson to introduce and review the texts, explaining how they can be used to learn about and respond to the topic(s).



# Put It Into Practice, cont'd.

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## Assignment

### 2. Develop Grouping Plans

To complete this activity, use the Develop Grouping Plans Chart found at the end of this chapter.

Think about the ways in which students were grouped in the classroom video clips: whole class, small group, partners, and individual performance. Now consider your own classroom—the strengths and needs of your students and the grouping options that address them.

In this activity, you will develop classroom charts identifying students who will work together in reading because of their strengths, needs, interests, and work habits. You can use the charts you prepare in this session to group students for practice in reading and writing, and revise them throughout the year as you assess student performance. When you have finished, save your charts to submit as an assignment.

1. Create a classroom list of students who can work together because of similar needs in reading. List the students by group and include the specific areas of literacy learning that you will address in your instruction. The fewer groups you have, the more time you can spend with each group. It is more manageable to have three groups, but you may need to have four depending on the needs of your students.
2. Create a class list of students who can work together because of similar interests in a given subject or topic that you are teaching. Include the common areas of interest or background knowledge that the groups can use when reading and responding to texts. These students may differ in reading level. You may want to conduct an “Interest Inventory” to determine common interests among your students.
3. Create a class list of students who can be paired for reading and writing activities because of work habits. You may want to pair a student demonstrating stronger work habits with another student who needs support in this area.
4. Create a class list of students who can be paired to read or share their writing for feedback on revising and editing. These students may be paired because they are working on reading and/or writing of common books or topics.
5. Use these charts to group your students for varied reading and writing activities during the day. You may want to explain to students that they will be working with different groups and that groups will be changing continually. Review your student groups each month. Revise them based on changes in student performance and to ensure that students have opportunities to interact with many of their peers.

# Reflect on Your Learning

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## Assignment

### What Did You Learn?

Review the notes you have taken throughout this session. Next, write a summary of what you have learned. Use the following questions to guide your thinking. When you have finished, save your written summary to submit as an assignment and, if you are taking this workshop for credit, include it in your Literacy Practices Portfolio.

- What did you learn about the influence of classroom environment on student learning and achievement?
- Which ideas in this session are most relevant to your teaching?
- What ideas or strategies do you plan to use?
- What support and/or resources will you need to implement these ideas?



## Assignment

### Create a Literacy Practices Portfolio

If you are taking this workshop for credit, the final project begins here. As you complete each session, you will be putting together a portfolio of ideas and strategies to enhance your practice. For each topic, you will include information related to:

- current practices in place in your classroom
- changes you would like to make
- a description of one change you have implemented
- evidence of student learning

Use the questions that follow to guide your thinking as you document your current practices, as well as changes you would like to make.

#### 1. Current practices

Include your written response from What Do You Do? Also, describe the current organization of your classroom.

- How inviting and attractive is your classroom?
- How are the desks organized?
- Do you have a clearly defined reading center?
  - How is it organized?
- Describe your classroom library. How many books are in the library? How are they organized? Do they offer diversity for students?
- How and when do children access books?
- What are your wall displays? How do they help children “get their work done”? Do children have ownership of the material? Are children accessing the information?

# Reflect on Your Learning, cont'd.

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- Do you have a clearly defined writing center?
  - How is it organized?
  - How do children access materials?
  - What is on the walls? How does it help children “get their work done”? Do children have ownership of the material? Are children accessing the information?
- What are the routines that are in place in your classroom?
  - before-school work
  - transitions
  - reading routines
  - writing routines
  - when a student needs help
- Describe the grouping practices that you use.
  - How do you group students?
  - What decisions do you make when grouping students?

## 2. Changes you would like to make

Include your written response from What Did You Learn? Then:

- List several changes to the organization of your classroom that would promote student learning.
- List several routines you would like to initiate or change and why.
- List several grouping practices that you are considering changing.

## 3. One change you have implemented

### a. Make a change

Choose one instructional change from your list that you will implement now. What is your thinking behind making this change? Describe the change in detail and explain how it will be implemented (e.g., an instructional practice, a lesson plan, a plan for modeling a strategy, etc.). What are the expected outcomes for student learning?

### b. Reflect on the change

Write a brief reflection about what worked when you implemented this change and what you will change the next time you teach this lesson. (If you are taking this workshop during the summer, describe the learning goals and expected outcomes of this change.)

## 4. Evidence of student learning

In this section of your portfolio, you will include samples of student work that reflect the changes you made. How did the students become better readers, writers, thinkers, and communicators as a result of the change you made? You may want to include some of the following pieces of evidence:

- a photograph
- student writing
- a student reflection
- a student response to reading
- notes from a teacher-student reading and/or writing conference
- evidence of a classroom context that “mimics the real-world context”
- samples of charts or other wall displays co-constructed with students

# Assignments

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If you are taking this workshop for graduate credit, submit the following assignments for Workshop 1: Creating Contexts for Learning:

## **1. Examine the Literature**

Read two articles on classroom organization and grouping practices and complete the Examine the Literature Response Chart.

## **2. Create Text Sets**

Develop a lesson using a range of books based on the curriculum, skills, interests, and cultural backgrounds represented in your classroom.

## **3. Develop Grouping Plans**

Develop classroom charts, grouping students together in reading based on their strengths, needs, interests, and work habits.

## **4. What Did You Learn?**

Write a summary of the ideas and strategies you explored in this session.

## **5. Create a Literacy Practices Portfolio**

If you are taking this workshop for credit, the final project begins here. As you complete each session, you will be putting together a portfolio of ideas and strategies to enhance your practice.

# Related Resources

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## Print Resources

Cunningham, P. M., and R. L. Allington. *Classrooms That Work*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999.

Diller, D. *Literacy Work Stations: Making Centers Work*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2003.

Flood, J., and D. Lapp. "Teaching Writing in Urban Schools: Cognitive Processes, Curriculum Resources, and the Missing Links—Management and Grouping." In *Perspectives on Writing: Research, Theory, and Practice*, edited by R. Indrisano and J. Squire, 233-250. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2000.

Fountas, I., and G. S. Pinnell. *Guiding Readers and Writers, Grades 3-6*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001.

Johnston, P., T. Bennett, and J. Cronin. "I Want Students Who Are Thinkers." In *Reading to Learn*, edited by R. Allington and P. Johnston, 240-265. New York: Guilford Press, 2002.

Morrow, L. M. *The Literacy Center: Contexts for Reading and Writing*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2002.

Opitz, M. F., and M. P. Ford. "What Do I Do with the Rest of the Kids? Ideas for Meaningful Independent Activities During Small-Group Reading Instruction." *The Reading Teacher* 58, no. 4 (Dec. 2004/Jan. 2005): 702-714.

## Web Resources

### **Council for Exceptional Children Student Groupings for Reading Instruction**

[www.ericec.org/digests/e579.html](http://www.ericec.org/digests/e579.html)

This site features an article for teachers on effective grouping practices for all students to develop literacy learning.

### **Learn North Carolina: Creating Classroom Environments**

[www.learnnc.org/articles/basicenv1](http://www.learnnc.org/articles/basicenv1)

This site, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, provides information for teachers on creating an effective classroom environment for student learning.

### **Learn North Carolina: Creating Wall Displays**

[www.learnnc.org/articles/bulletinboards](http://www.learnnc.org/articles/bulletinboards)

This site, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, provides information for teachers on developing meaningful wall displays.

### **New Horizons for Learning**

[www.newhorizons.org](http://www.newhorizons.org)

This site provides teaching strategies and information on effective classroom routines to meet the needs of all students.

### **Read, Write, Think**

[www.readwritethink.org](http://www.readwritethink.org)

This site, sponsored by the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), includes information and lesson plans for research-based literacy instruction for all students.

# Teaching Reading 3-5

Creating Contexts for Learning > Before You Watch

## Examine the Literature Response Chart

Title	Big Ideas	Notes and Questions
1.		
2.		

# Teaching Reading 3-5

**Creating Contexts for Learning** > Put It Into Practice

## Develop Grouping Plans

### Similar Needs

Date	Students	Instructional Areas of Focus
9/30	Group 1 Jose Caitlin Anna Miranda Mark	Inferring while reading Vocabulary development Reading and comparing related texts
	Group 2	
	Group 3	
	Group 4	
	Group 5	

## Develop Grouping Plans

### Similar Interests

Date	Students	Interests
9/30	Group 1 Charlie Caitlin Sebastian Larry	Science: nature, animals, insects
	Group 2	
	Group 3	
	Group 4	
	Group 5	



## Develop Grouping Plans

### Work Habits

Date	Students	Approach to Learning
9/30	Group 1    Martin Amy Jessica	Focused, intense Completes all assignments Can be distracted easily; needs good role models
	Group 2	
	Group 3	
	Group 4	
	Group 5	

## **Develop Grouping Plans**

### **Pairs for Supporting Reading and Writing**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Common Books, Topics for Writing</b>
9/30	Group 1    Jose William	Reading Biographies of sports figures Reports on favorite sports figure
	Group 2	
	Group 3	
	Group 4	
	Group 5	