

Guide to Classroom Programs

Program 9. Investigating Word Meaning	139
Angie Zapata—Grade 3, Matthews Elementary School, Austin, Texas	
Program 10. Fostering Book Discussions	140
Maria Ruiz-Blanc—Grade 3, Belmont-Cragin School, Chicago, Illinois	
Program 11. Choosing Words Strategically.....	141
Caroline Cockman—Grade 3, Rashkis Elementary School, Chapel Hill, North Carolina	
Program 12. Revising for Clarity	143
Tatiana With—Grade 4, Heath School, Brookline, Massachusetts	
Program 13. Reading Across the Curriculum	144
Gage Reeves—Grade 5, Vernon Elementary School, Portland, Oregon	
Program 14. Looking at Cause and Effect	145
Holly Concannon—Grade 5, Murphy School, Boston, Massachusetts	
Program 15. Close Reading for Understanding	148
Dana Robertson—Grade 5, Estabrook School, Lexington, Massachusetts	
Program 16. Summarizing Nonfiction	149
Eleanor Demont—Grade 5, Heath School, Brookline, Massachusetts	

9. Investigating Word Meaning

Teacher: Angie Zapata

"Some of my students are excellent decoders, but reading is more than decoding—it is active meaning making. I teach my students that they all have little reader voices. As we read, we're asking ourselves questions, making observations, and getting excited about our discoveries. Even when we've stopped reading, our reader voices continue to speak to us."

Angie Zapata

Angie Zapata teaches third grade at Matthews Elementary School in the heart of Austin, Texas. Ms. Zapata's class (ranging in size from 18–22) includes children who have been with the school since pre-kindergarten, homeless children who spend just three to six weeks at Matthews, and children whose parents attend or teach at the University of Texas. Matthews' proximity to the university also enables Ms. Zapata to receive classroom assistance from undergraduate student teachers.

In the lesson featured in the video, Ms. Zapata's students were learning to investigate word meaning. They were using context clues, root words, and their own personal reading strategies to tackle challenging words like "salutations." Ms. Zapata modeled how to use graphic organizers to take new information, add it to personal knowledge or intuited information, and arrive at a "plug-in," or reasonable inference. Students then broke up into smaller groups and had an opportunity to become "word detectives," testing out modeled strategies and their own approaches.

Ms. Zapata's literacy routine incorporates the use of Total Physical Response (TPR) exercises to help students comprehend word meaning. This includes physical gestures, verbal and audio cues, and color associations. She encourages her students to use color-coded sticky notes to identify challenging words, and she signals transitions from one lesson to another with a vocalized "ding, ding!" All of these cues enable students to become more aware of their own thinking and activity, a meta-cognitive approach that Ms. Zapata feels reinforces comprehension. For example, as students generate their "plug-ins" or rational inferences, they sing and move to the Glade commercial chant: "Plug it in. Plug it in."

Ms. Zapata records class-generated plug-ins on a large chart that her students can continually refer back to. Using the chart gives all students a chance to contribute. In this way, Ms. Zapata challenges her students to reflect on and refer to their own ways of making meaning.

10. Fostering Book Discussions

Teacher: Maria Ruiz-Blanco

"You have to have high expectations for students, no matter how well they speak English or how low their reading level is. They will work. I let them know exactly what I expect from them. I acknowledge that it's hard, and that I believe that they can do it."

Maria Ruiz-Blanco

Maria Ruiz-Blanco teaches third grade at the Belmont-Craigin School in an urban neighborhood on the west side of Chicago, home to a predominantly Latino population. The Belmont-Craigin School reflects the surrounding demographics, with 97 percent Latino students and a minority of African and Caucasian students. Most of Mrs. Ruiz-Blanco's 28 students are recent immigrants and English language learners. Mrs. Ruiz-Blanco speaks both Spanish and English, as do most of her students. She makes an effort to visit her students and parents at home, getting to know them and developing relationships.

The featured lesson is part of a yearlong unit on immigration called Cultures in Contact and Conflict. Mrs. Ruiz-Blanco begins the year with Native Americans and Europeans, then explores Jewish immigration, Ellis Island, the social context and consequences, the internal migration of African Americans from the South to the North, and the late migration from Latin America. Book group discussions, which take place two to three times each week, always feature books tied to immigration. Mrs. Ruiz-Blanco models questioning as a strategy to engage students and to teach them how to generate discussions in small groups. She leads a separate lesson on asking questions, referring to thoughtful questions that promote analysis as "thick" questions, and more general recall questions as "thin" questions.

In this lesson, the students were introduced to the book *My Name Is Maria Isabel* by Alma Flor Ada. This mini-lesson segued into a book group discussion. Mrs. Ruiz-Blanco intentionally chose a book about Latino immigration not only because it was part of the larger unit, but also because she knew that many of her students would be able to relate to the story. Another activity in this unit entails interviewing parents, grandparents, or friends about their immigration experience. Students ask what the economic and political reasons were for the move, and what the trip was like. With this activity, Mrs. Ruiz-Blanco encourages parent involvement, as students and parents read together, and emphasizes the value of telling their story of coming to America.

There is a range of reading levels among her students, and so Mrs. Ruiz-Blanco makes sure that when a book is challenging to some of her students, the topic is relevant and interesting to them. Although some students struggle to read and speak English, their interest in the reading topic gives them added incentive to participate. Mrs. Ruiz-Blanco encourages students to work together, with stronger students helping struggling students.

11. Choosing Words Strategically

Teacher: Caroline Cockman

"My goal is for students to become strong, independent writers. I try to model the writing process by showing students my own work and revisions. I want them to learn to evaluate their own work as well, and to understand that writing is a process, a lifelong skill, not just something you do to get through the third grade."

Caroline Cockman

Caroline Cockman teaches third grade at the Rashkis Elementary School in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Situated among the University of North Carolina and nearby Duke University, Rashkis Elementary School draws from the local college community and its affiliated medical research industry.

Mrs. Cockman's students represent diverse backgrounds and skill levels. About half of her students are Caucasian, one-quarter are African American, and one-quarter are Asian American. Three students work with an English language tutor, three students have independent education plans (IEPs), and one student has special needs and works in class with a special education assistant.

In the lesson featured in the video, Mrs. Cockman's students were in the process of learning to write biographies. As part of the writing process, students were revising and editing their reports for specific word choice and transitions. As she introduces a new writing, revising, or editing convention, Mrs. Cockman models the convention in a writing piece that the students contribute to in a whole-class instructional setting. This gives Mrs. Cockman an opportunity to review a piece of writing with the whole class in a way that lets everyone participate without feeling like they are being evaluated.

Mrs. Cockman, and all of the teachers at Rashkis, use the Writer's Workshop format for teaching writing, based on the Literacy Collaborative model from Lesley College. Each writing assignment entails several drafts, each with its own focus and routines, such as editing in different colors for different tasks.

The writing process begins with an exploration phase, as students identify who they will write about and develop an outline. As they develop their biographies, the first draft is called the discovery draft. In this draft, students focus just on getting their ideas down. Next, they revise their draft using a revision checklist (see next page). Then students edit their pieces for spelling, grammar, and other mechanics of writing. At any point in the process, students can discuss their work with their teacher. When they are ready to present their pieces, final drafts get submitted to the editor (Mrs. Cockman), who returns written work to students. After any final edits are made, students can choose to publish their work. If they choose to publish, students type their work. One copy goes on the wall in the hall outside the classroom, and another copy goes in students' portfolios.

Throughout the year, Mrs. Cockman's students keep writers' notebooks, where they sketch and jot down their ideas so that they always have a source of ideas, and so that their writing is student-driven.

Name: _____

Revision Checklist

Do I need to ADD any information?

- Do I have a good beginning?
- Have I included all the important details?
- Do I need to add an ending?

Do I need to REMOVE any information?

- Have I stuck to the topic?
- Have I repeated myself in some parts?

Do I need to MOVE any parts?

- Are my sentences in the best order?
- Do any ideas or details seem out of place?

Do I need to SWITCH or rewrite any parts?

- Are there ideas or sentences that are unclear?



Name: _____

Editing Checklist

COPS:

- Capitalization:** Have you capitalized names and the first word of each sentence?
- Organization:** Did you indent the first line of the paragraph and continue the rest of the lines along the left margin? Are all of your sentences complete?
- Punctuation:** Have you put the correct end punctuation mark after each sentence?
- Spelling:** Have you spelled your words correctly?

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12. Revising for Clarity

Teacher: Tatiana With

“Writing needs to be clear, and not just in the world of journalism where I started my career. I try to communicate to my students that most of the time they are not writing for themselves. Their audience needs structure, supporting details, and clarity.”

Tatiana With

Tatiana With teaches fourth grade at the Heath School in Brookline, Massachusetts, just outside of Boston. Heath is the smallest public school in the town, with almost 400 students in grades pre-K–8. Ms. With’s class (ranging in size from 17–23 students) includes a majority of Brookline residents and a minority of students based in from Boston.

In the featured lesson, Ms. With’s students were learning to revise for clarity. Before this lesson, her students completed several prescriptive writing assignments. By the time they began this lesson, many students demonstrated basic mastery of the mechanics of writing (editing), but few understood the need for improved structure and clarity (revision). Ms. With discussed these differences with her students and accompanied the discussion with a revision activity. Using an InFocus projector, Ms. With modeled the revision process and incorporated class suggestions. She chose a writing sample that didn’t have any mechanical errors so that her students could focus strictly on structural issues. She then assigned them to different groups to work more closely with the text.

Ms. With’s writing routine involves a pre-writing stage, a first draft, up to three revisions of the first draft, a second draft, a revision of the second draft, a final edit, and a final draft. Taking her students through this rigorous process means that students will typically complete and polish six to eight pieces over the course of the year. Some assignments just allow students to practice specific phases of the process. For example, sometimes students focus on a particular theme and just work up to a graphic organizer or a first draft. Ms. With constantly models and practices revision strategies with her students at all stages of draft development.

Ms. With has seen the results of practice and repetition in her students’ work. Students typically revise their own pieces in red ink, while Ms. With adds her comments in green. Over the course of the year, the quality and amount of self-correction reflects students’ increased understanding of the revision process.

13. Reading Across the Curriculum

Teacher: Gage Reeves

"You have to teach without fear. Most of my students don't like to take chances, so I push myself to take risks that will help meet their diverse learning needs. It's more than youthful exuberance, it's a genuine desire to build personal relationships."

Gage Reeves

Gage Reeves teaches fifth grade at the Vernon School in Portland, Oregon. Vernon is one of the smaller schools in the city, serving approximately 350 students (pre-K–6). Vernon's student body reflects the surrounding demographics, with a largely African American population and a smaller Hispanic and Asian population. All of Vernon's students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Mr. Reeves' class size ranges from 23–25 students.

In the featured lesson, Mr. Reeves modeled reading strategies to solve unfamiliar words, orchestrated a "call and response" kinesthetic exercise to help students recall vocabulary, and demonstrated how to use a graphic organizer to identify main ideas and supporting details. His students practiced these strategies on both fiction and non-fiction pieces. Two to three days before the taping, Mr. Reeves' students developed their own rhythms, rhymes, and motions to help them remember complex science words. They also read and re-read the nonfiction passage on global warming prior to the lesson.

Mr. Reeves plans lessons in six-day segments so that his students are introduced to new words and themes each week. The elaborate song and gesture seen in the video is the work of his students, who create equally involved performances from each weekly list of vocabulary words. If students panic during a test, Mr. Reeves hums part of the tune to help them recall vocabulary words. Mr. Reeves' literacy routine also includes fluency training. He divides students into pairs and has them grade each other as they read aloud; they must note any hesitations or mispronounced words. At the end of each six-day lesson, Mr. Reeves tests his students' retention and comprehension of the content and vocabulary associated with each theme. Readings will often include varied genres—from science and historical fiction to nonfiction pieces.

Mr. Reeves relies on both structure and spontaneity in his teaching, and attributes his willingness to take risks in his teaching to the classroom community and close relationships with and among his students.

14. Looking at Cause and Effect

Teacher: Holly Concannon

"I want to help my students develop a sense of wonder when they're reading. That's what good readers do. They wonder, they form questions, and they pay attention to what's going on in the text. They identify the cause and effect, and then take it one step further—they respond."

Holly Concannon

Holly Concannon teaches fifth grade at the Richard J. Murphy School in Dorchester, Massachusetts, an urban community on the outskirts of Boston. The Murphy School reflects Dorchester's African American and Asian American communities: the student population is 72 percent minority. As in any school, many students have special needs. In Mrs. Concannon's class, there are six students with special needs.

In the lesson featured in the video, Mrs. Concannon's students were discussing two books that they have recently read. *Woodsong*, by Gary Paulsen, is a nonfiction text that chronicles the author's experience in nature. *Mississippi Bridge*, by Mildred Taylor, presents historical fiction in the story of one African American family's experience during the Depression.

In the featured lesson, the instructional focus was on helping students identify and understand cause and effect. Throughout the year, Mrs. Concannon scaffolds instruction across the curriculum by accessing students' prior knowledge, and then building on what they know. She regularly uses questions to encourage students to think about, anticipate, and interpret events. She encourages them to think about cause and effect in all subject areas. For example, in a science lesson, she might ask what would happen to ice if it were left in the sun. In social studies, she might ask why people emigrate to America.

As students read and discussed *Woodsong* and *Mississippi Bridge*, Mrs. Concannon used questions not only to gauge students' understanding, but also to model questioning and discussion as a way of understanding literature in more depth. In both whole-class settings and guided reading groups, Mrs. Concannon asked students to find their answers in the text, and to explain how they interpreted the text and what they thought the author meant. In this lesson and throughout the year, Mrs. Concannon creates anchor charts (see samples on the following pages) from student discussion and answers.

In discussions, Mrs. Concannon asks questions that connect to students' lives and gives students opportunities to discuss their answers with partners. "Stop and share" is another strategy she uses to give shy or intimidated students a chance to share their ideas and be heard in a whole-class setting. Mrs. Concannon finds that fifth-grade students are eager to share their opinions and make connections to their own lives.

Teaching Reading 3-5

Featured Classrooms > Holly Concannon

Anchor Charts > page 1

Readers Use Punctuation to Find the Author's Message.

- parentheses (gives extra info)
- hyphen to show an interruption
- quotation marks tell when someone is speaking
- exclamation point shows excitement
- italics tell us when the author wants us to pay extra attention to words
- question mark tell us to change expression

Good Readers Check for UNDERSTANDING!

Readers react.
Read the summary to get information.

Use context clues or dictionaries to learn new vocabulary.

Reread to understand.
Identify the characteristics of genre.

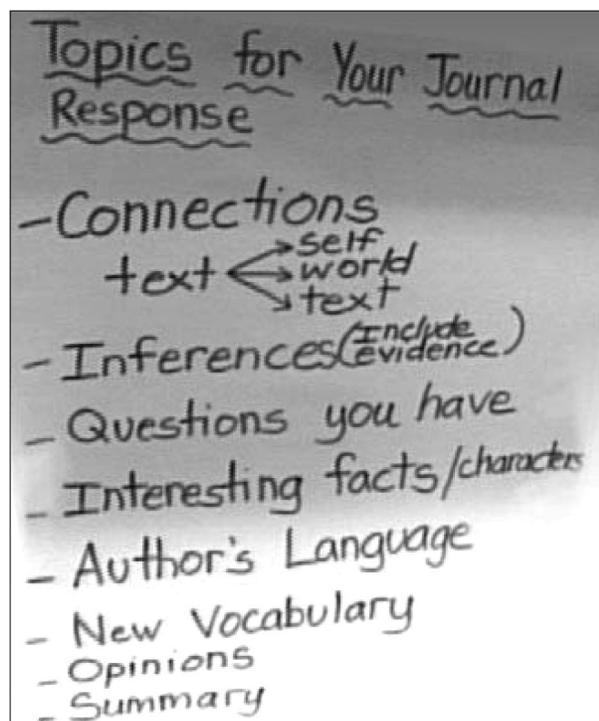
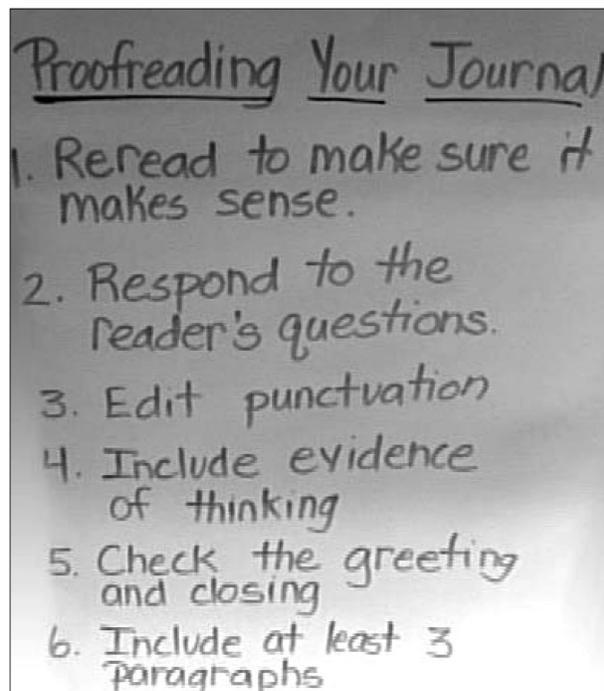
Notice when something does not make sense.
Stop and think.

Ways Readers Solve Words

1. Use context clues
2. Use a dictionary ^{* pictures} ^{glossary} ^{index} ^{thesaurus}
3. Break them down (compound words, prefixes, suffixes...)
4. Use prior knowledge
5. Look for author's clue or message
6. Reread for meaning.
7. Read around the words.

Ask for help
Stop and think

Anchor Charts > page 2



15. Close Reading for Understanding

Teacher: Dana Robertson

"I want my students to become literate people, and understanding literature is more than just reading and writing. It's about the desire to read. I want students to love to read and write, and to love to talk about what they're reading. I want them to say, 'Hey, I just read this great book...'"

Dana Robertson

Dana Robertson teaches fifth grade at the Estabrook Elementary School in Lexington, Massachusetts. Just outside of Boston, the town of Lexington is best known as Paul Revere's destination in his legendary ride and a site of Revolutionary War battles. Today, Lexington draws professors from Boston's colleges and universities, and more than 70 nationalities are represented in the town. Lexington schools also participate in the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunities (METCO), Boston's voluntary busing program.

Mr. Robertson has 25 students, three with special needs and two with learning needs. His students represent a wide range of reading levels, from second to eighth grade. An aide provides one-on-one support for special-needs students, and students with learning needs receive support from the school's special education assistant.

In the featured lesson, Mr. Robertson led a reading workshop. He started with a mini-lesson, pre-teaching any new words and introducing a story, and then allowed time for guided practice and independent reading. The reading workshop ended with the whole class coming together and sharing what they'd learned.

During this lesson, and throughout the year, Mr. Robertson focuses on reading closely for understanding. Before and during reading, Mr. Robertson models questioning techniques to encourage his students to really think about what is going on in a given story or text, engaging students by asking them to make inferences or predictions. One strategy Mr. Robertson uses in a whole-class instructional setting is pausing to "turn and talk." This gives all students a chance to discuss what they're reading and share their thoughts, but without taking a lot of time. As students read independently, Mr. Robertson encourages them to jot down questions or comments on Post-it notes. These thoughts form the basis of class discussions and writing assignments.

Mr. Robertson models the kind of close reading and note-taking he wants his students to do. He even brings in books that he is reading and shows his students the Post-it notes he uses to analyze the text and form questions for discussion.

In the end, Mr. Robertson's students spend a lot of time talking about reading. He notes that parents comment on their children's enthusiasm for reading and discussing what they have read.

16. Summarizing Nonfiction

Teacher: Eleanor Demont

“Literacy development is a lifelong process. Anyone new to the field should talk to literacy specialists, gather administrative support, research and collect the best materials, and visit other classrooms.”

Eleanor Demont

Eleanor Demont teaches fifth grade at the Heath School in Brookline, Massachusetts, a city that is home to many of Boston’s teaching hospitals. Heath is the smallest public school in the town with 350–400 students in grades pre-K–8. Its literacy development program spans vertically across grades levels, enabling teachers to be aware of students’ long-term development.

Ms. Demont’s classroom of 20 is predominantly Caucasian students from Brookline, and includes some minority students that come to Heath through Boston’s busing program.

In the featured lesson, Ms. Demont was teaching her students how to use summarization for comprehension of non-fiction texts. She discussed with her students the purpose behind summarization, and they worked together to identify vital information in a passage about Egyptologists. As a class, they applied strategies for summarization that they learned previously throughout the year. These strategies included inferencing, finding important information, coding texts, and making text-to-world connections. Ms. Demont’s students knew how to read for important information, but they were just beginning to learn how to use these summarization strategies to make meaning.

After the group discussion, Ms. Demont encouraged her students to select their own texts and decide how they were going to read them (alone, in pairs, in small groups, or with her supervision). By differentiating instruction, Ms. Demont is able to teach the same information and strategies to a broad range of learners, allowing all students to participate equally in the same discussion. For example, in the taped lesson, students chose to read from a set of trade books (on the same topic) that ranged in reading level from third to sixth grade. Ms. Demont made certain that all texts would provide the same essential information despite variations in reading level. She carefully monitored student selections to be certain each was at an appropriate level or a “just right” reader.

Ms. Demont helps students identify “just right” books as a part of the school’s literacy initiative. Every week, she spends one-on-one time with each student to discuss his or her literacy goals and progress. Her students read in class for a half-hour daily, allowing Ms. Demont the time she needs for these individual weekly conferences.

Ms. Demont’s students applied the strategies learned from the summarizing lesson throughout the school year, segueing into other comprehension activities like research projects and class presentations.

Notes
