



Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District

Instructional Office Newsletter

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Focusing on Content-Area Reading Skills in Upper-Elementary Grades

"Learning to read fairly simple texts in the early grades doesn't fully prepare students to decipher the wide variety of text structures, vocabulary, purposes, and visuals unique to specific disciplines," says author/consultant ReLeah Cossett in this article in *Principal*. She believes students in the upper-elementary grades need specific instruction in the following skills:

English Language Arts: When readers and writers read, they:

- ✚ Question the text;
- ✚ Use text structure as a tool for comprehension;
- ✚ Understand use and effect of literary devices.

Math: When mathematicians read, they:

- ✚ Look for patterns and relationships;
- ✚ Use information to piece together a solution;
- ✚ Seek accuracy.

Science: When scientists read, they:

- ✚ Ask "why" and "how" more than "what";
- ✚ Interpret data, charts, and illustrations;
- ✚ Pay attention to details.

Social Studies: When historians read, they:

- ✚ Identify bias;
- ✚ Examine primary and secondary sources;
- ✚ Analyze multiple accounts and perspectives.

IMPORTANT DATES

March 2	Read across America Day
March 6	Early Release K-5 Parent Conferences 6-12 PD
March 8	Early Release K-5 Parent Conferences 6-12 PD
March 11	DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME BEGINS
March 17	St. Patrick's Day
March 30	NO SCHOOL // GOOD FRIDAY (Passover begins at sundown)



IMPORTANT NOTICE:

Central office is a **fragrance-free zone** so please be respectful and plan accordingly when you visit.

We ask that staff visiting/meeting at the Administration building refrain from using any scented products. Fragrances from personal care products, air fresheners, laundry and other cleaning products have been associated with adversely affecting a person's health. We ask that we all work together to make the environment a safe and healthy workplace for everyone.



Thank you very much for your cooperation!

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Physical Education: When active people read, they:

- ✚ Activate prior knowledge;
- ✚ Search for answers to relevant questions;
- ✚ Interpret and analyze data, charts, and illustrations.

“Encouraging reading across and *within* the curriculum,” says Lent, “means looking inward to the teachers who best know their content, providing the necessary literacy learning in a collaborative setting, and supporting all of this work with a strong schoolwide culture of literacy.” Here are her suggestions for turbocharging instruction in reading, writing, listening, and speaking:

• **Leadership and collaboration** – It’s essential that teacher teams have time to discuss these strategies, develop their toolboxes, and discuss articles and books with colleagues, guided by a literacy leadership team that promotes “diverse reading for every student in every class every day.”

• **Finding the best books for kids** – Teachers might each read a book from the International Literacy Association’s award-winning selection of children’s books and share their recommendations in faculty meetings.

• **Classroom libraries** – Lent was saddened to visit a school that had poured its literacy budget into test prep and textbooks and had lackluster reading material in classrooms. She strongly recommends finding money (through grants or fundraising) to beef up classroom collections and give students daily access to a wide variety of reading material.

• **Whole-school reads** – Having all students and staff read a single nonfiction article, blog, or commentary once a week can get everyone thinking and talking about a specific issue in the news. Possible sources: *DOGOnews*, *Smithsonian’s Tween Tribune*, and *National Geographic Kids*.

• **Summer reading** – Students need encouragement to keep reading for fun during the lazy months. Schools might have each student choose a “top ten” book to take home for the summer and share and exchange reviews upon returning.

• **Resist incentives** – “We want children to find joy in the act of reading, not simply to read for a grade or other extrinsic prizes,” says Lent. “Children of all grades are eager to read and can become absolutely addicted if they are encouraged by teachers and peers.”

“Reading Across and Within the Curriculum” by ReLeah Cossett Lent in *Principal*, November/December 2017 (Vol. 97, #2, p. 8-11), no e-link available

Building Students’ Executive Functioning Skills

(Originally titled “Helping Anxious Students Move Forward”)



In this article in *Educational Leadership*, Jessica Minahan says that in her work as a behavioral analyst and consultant, she hears lots of stories about students avoiding work – a first grader staring at the wall during a reading lesson; a high-school basketball star who *still* won’t do his homework even when he’s in danger of being kicked off the team for not doing it. These students all seem to lack motivation, but that’s not what’s going on, says Minahan. It’s one or more of these aspects of executive functioning:

- **Accurate thinking** – Assessing how difficult a task is, how long it will take, and one’s ability to do it;
- **Initiation** – Organizing one’s thoughts and getting started;
- **Persistence** – Sustaining effort in the face of errors and difficulty;





- **Help-seeking – Knowing when to ask for support.**

“Penalties and incentives don’t teach these skills and are unlikely to improve students’ behavior,” says Minahan. Instead, students feel misunderstood and rejected.

Minahan’s analogy is training wheels when children are first learning to ride a bike – accommodations as they learn how to think accurately about challenges, get going, persist, and ask for help. “If we remove the supports before students are ready,” she says, “they’ll crash.” Her suggestions:

- **Accurate thinking** – Anxious students tend to



think all-or-nothing (*I hate math*) or engage in catastrophic thinking (*I’ll probably flunk sixth grade*). One strategy is having students rate the difficulty of an assignment beforehand (*very difficult*) and afterward (*not that bad*); comparing the two may help reset the student’s mindset. Another approach is breaking a task into parts and rating each one – *I like it. It’s okay. I don’t like it*. Looking over these after making a catastrophic statement can help isolate the problem.

- **Initiation** – Don’t ask students prone to negative thinking to work independently at first; instead, provide helpful support within 30 seconds of giving an assignment and then have them continue solo. Or go over the assignment beforehand: *This is the math sheet we’ll be doing later. Let’s start the first and second problems together*. Or chunk assignments and take one piece at a time. Or give the student a math sheet with all but the last two problems completed and ask the student to finish. Working with an erasable whiteboard is also helpful for students who are risk-averse and perfectionistic.

- **Persistence** – Some students need a dose of Carol Dweck: “Every time you push out of your comfort zone to learn hard things, your brain grows new connections and you get smarter.” It also helps to

reward increments and get students monitoring themselves on persistence rather than the final product: *Did I attempt more problems today than on my last quiz? Did I correct an answer?*

- **Help-seeking** – “Students with anxiety or depression may lack the initiative to ask for help when they’re stuck or overwhelmed by a task,” says Minahan. Or they may be too embarrassed to ask.



Agreeing on a silent signal may be the answer: *Put a pencil behind your ear when you need help*. Next get students thinking about how to reduce dependency: *What do you need help with and why?* The idea is for students to realize that they can solve some problems by themselves. *Great! You didn’t need my help! I’m glad you figured it out*. These students need to learn how to self-monitor, assess their needs, and find strategies to get help without depending on the teacher.

The key is seeing where the student is at. Jeremy seemed unable to do research on the computer in his history class and answer two open-ended questions. Instead, he scrolled through social media and encouraged classmates to join him. Eventually the teacher kicked him out of the room. When Jeremy’s teachers were asked how often he completed open-ended assignments, they said, “Never!” They were “overshooting the method of output,” says Minahan. He wouldn’t engage in reading when there were more than two paragraphs on the page. The solution was simple: limit texts to one or two paragraphs and give Jeremy multiple-choice questions. Within five weeks, he was completing work and moving toward reading one page of text in a book and answering fill-in-the-blank questions. “It’s like I’m a student,” said Jeremy. “I hand in work and get graded.” History was the one class he passed that term.

“Helping Anxious Students Move Forward” by Jessica





Minahan in *Educational Leadership*, December 2017/January 2018 (Vol. 75, #4, p. 44-50), available to ASCD members and for purchase at <http://bit.ly/2nsrN1b>

Note-Taking 101



In this article in *Edutopia*,

John Rich (Delaware State University) says that when students take notes and study them in specific ways, they think about class content at a more conceptual, metacognitive level and retention improves. He suggests six strategies for taking notes and making the best use of them after class:

➤ **Organize the blank page.** Students should draw a vertical line about a third of the way across each sheet and take notes in the wider column, leaving the narrower one blank. After class, they use the left-hand column to create questions to quiz themselves on the class notes. Questions shouldn't be merely factual but apply the content or link it to other resources.

➤ **Pen beats laptop.** Research has shown that taking notes in longhand involves deeper processing than computer note-taking. "Typing on a device tends to be mere transcription," says Rich, "while longhand involves summarizing and interpreting."

➤ **Use abbreviations for speed.** Shortcuts for frequently used words – b/c for because and chem for chemistry – save writing time and allow students to capture more of the content as it's delivered.

➤ **Make use of the margins.** If students have comments or questions during instruction, they should jot them on the edges of their note-taking pages so they can save working memory for what's being said in class, and then come back to their queries later.

➤ **Link class content to the textbook and outside reading.** The more connections

students make between what's presented and discussed in class and material they're reading outside class, the better their recall and understanding will be.

➤ **Put in the time.** There's a big payoff in reviewing notes after class and answering the questions in the left-hand column.

In an aside, Rich describes a study by William Balch in which students in two sections of the same college course were given different messages about an upcoming exam. One section was told that the exam would be all multiple-choice, the other that it would consist of short-answer and essay questions. In the end, both sections were given a multiple-choice exam, but students who thought they were going to have to write out their answers outperformed those who prepared for a multiple-choice test. Students preparing for a multiple-choice test worked on memorizing facts and terms, while those preparing for written answers studied to understand and process content at a higher, more conceptual level. Intriguingly, those who studied for a higher purpose were able to do better on a less cognitively demanding test.

"6 Strategies for Taking High-Quality Notes" by John Rich in *Edutopia*, October 2, 2017, <https://www.edutopia.org/article/6-strategies-taking-high-quality-notes>; Rich can be reached at jrich@desu.edu.

Orchestrating Productive Struggle in Middle-School Math Classes

In this article in *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School*, Sararose Lynch (Westminster College), Jessica Hunt (North Carolina State University), and Katherine Lewis (University of Washington) use this mathematics problem to discuss the challenge of differentiating instruction in a diverse classroom:





Aunt Martha has 5 trays of cupcakes. Here is how they are arranged: There are 100 total cupcakes on the trays. The first and second trays have 52 cupcakes, the second and third trays have 43 cupcakes, the third and fourth trays have 34 cupcakes, and the fourth and fifth trays have 30 cupcakes. How many cupcakes are on each tray?

Lynch, Hunt, and Lewis say there are several common mistakes when teachers try to differentiate this kind of problem:

- Providing hints that remove the cognitive demand;
- When helping a student, focusing only on the procedure without giving the overall context;
- Providing formulas to solve the task without giving students the chance to engage with the math content;
- Considering only the characteristics of struggling students and not those of students working above grade level.

Lynch, Hunt, and Lewis suggest that teachers ask themselves the following questions as they strive to maintain mathematical rigor and get all students involved in productive struggle:

- What is the underlying mathematical concept the activity is designed to build? How can we differentiate the task and still address the underlying concepts?
- What are the prerequisite skills needed to complete this task, and how can I incorporate those into the lesson launch?
- How much time is sufficient to enable all students to engage with the math substance?
- What are the barriers a particular student might experience engaging with the problem?
- How can the student engage with the math goal in a way that builds on and extends prior knowledge?

- What feedback should I provide? What supporting or extending questions should I ask?
- What structures or discussions should I use to help support students' understanding?

"Productive Struggle for All: Differentiated Instruction" by Sararose Lynch, Jessica Hunt, and Katherine Lewis in *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School*, January/February 2018 (Vol. 23, #4, p. 194-201), <http://bit.ly/2DLGeki>; the authors are at lynchsd@westminster.edu, jhunt5@ncsu.edu, and kelewis2@uw.edu.

"Text Sets" That Improve Teens' Reading Proficiency

In this *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* article, Sarah Lupo (James Madison University), John Strong, William Lewis, and Sharon Walpole (University of Delaware/Newark), and Michael McKenna (University of Virginia/Charlottesville) list four key variables in adolescents' reading development:

- The volume of material they read (ideally 2-4 hours of literacy content learning a day);
- Text difficulty (ideally students read a variety of levels, including some challenging texts, with support, to stretch proficiency);
- Background knowledge (a crucial element in comprehension);
- Motivation (hooking students' interest is helpful, as is experiencing success).

One way to enhance all four and accelerate adolescents' reading proficiency and confidence is the use of text sets – carefully chosen groups of material that complement each other, provide different perspectives and reading levels, build students' interest and confidence, and deepen the reading experience. What text sets have in common, say the





authors, “is their focus on providing students the chance to look across texts and build both general and disciplinary knowledge.”

Text sets typically include four reading experiences. The combination is designed to increase text volume, build background knowledge, embrace complexity, and spark motivation:

- A target text that is challenging in terms of the language and knowledge required;
- A visual or video text;
- An informational text;
- An accessible text from young adult fiction, popular culture, or a nonfiction article.

The sequence in which students experience the texts is important. The authors have found that starting with a motivating text and interspersing supporting texts between chunks of the target text works best. For example, in a curriculum unit on World War I, students viewed video clips about gassing and trench warfare; read the website *The Long, Long Trail: The British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918*; read Wilfred Owen’s poem “Dulce et Decorum Est”; read “Gas Attack, 1916” on the *EyeWitness to History* website; then reread the Owen poem to analyze how his word choices communicate the horror of gas attacks.

Of course it’s important for teachers to build vocabulary and background knowledge before reading, use paired reading and disciplinary literacy strategies during reading, and get students involved in discussions and writing after reading.

The authors suggest several text sets in different subject areas, starting with an ELA unit on *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee:

- Visual text: Video segments from the PBS series *Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.*;

- Informational text: Excerpts from *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow* by Richard Wormser;
- Target text: *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Part 1);
- Accessible text: Excerpts from *The Trial of the Scottsboro Boys* by David Aretha;
- Target text: *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Part 2).

Here is a suggested text set for a high-school biology unit on genetics:

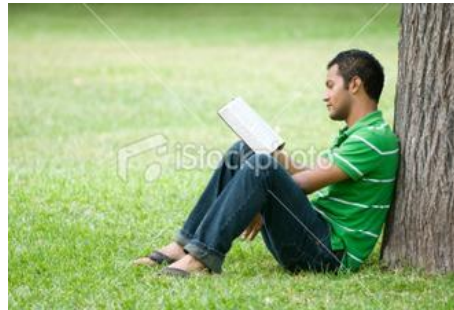
- Visual text: “How Mendel’s Pea Plants Helped Us Understand Genetics” by Hortensia Jimenez Diaz on the TED-Ed website;
 - Informational text: “Mendel’s Pea Plants” on the CK-12 website;
 - Accessible text: “Opinion: Scientists Discuss When ‘Gene Editing’ Technology Should Be Used” by *Scientific American*, adapted by NewsELA staff

- Visual text: “Sickle Cell Disease: Theresa’s Story” on the Kids Health website;
- Target text: “Sickle Cell Disease” on the TeensHealth website, reviewed by Robin Miller, MD.

And here is a text set for a social studies unit on the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution:

- Visual text: “The Bill of Rights: The First Amendment” by Keith Hughes (YouTube);
- Informational text: “Citizenship and the Internet” in *Civics Today* (textbook chapter);
- Accessible text: “Donald Trump Threatens to Sue *The Times* Over Article on Unwanted Advances” by Alan Rappeport in *The New York Times*;
- Target text: Case study based on the *Tinker v. Des Moines School District* (1969) case on high-school students wearing armbands to protest the Vietnam War.

In the full article (see link below) the authors suggest 12 additional units in ELA, science, and social





studies.

Lupo, Strong, Lewis, Walpole, and McKenna have piloted text sets in several schools and report very positive reactions: teachers say their students are reading more, absorb more background knowledge, are more confident reading difficult texts, and get better at identifying themes in target texts. Teachers also report that they have changed how they think about incorporating challenging texts in their curriculum, especially for struggling readers. On the negative side, teachers said it was difficult to find easier texts appropriate for their students, and the process of compiling a good text set was time-consuming, making it important for teacher teams to share the work with colleagues and reach out to teachers in other schools doing similar work.

“Building Background Knowledge Through Reading: Rethinking Text Sets” by Sarah Lupo, John Strong, William Lewis, Sharon Walpole, and Michael McKenna in *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, January/February 2018 (Vol. 61, #4, p. 433-444), <http://bit.ly/2CTnQsQ>; the authors can be reached at luposm@jmu.edu, jzstrong@udel.edu, wlewis@udel.edu, and swalpole@udel.edu.

Children’s Books That Respectfully Portray People with Disabilities

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Ashley Pennell and David Koppenhaver (Appalachian State University) and Barbara Wollak (University of St. Thomas/St. Paul) say that well-chosen children’s books can act as *mirrors* (reflecting kids’ own thoughts, feelings, and experiences), *windows* (opening new worlds through characters’ experiences and responses), and *doors* (transporting them into adventure, fantasy, and mystery). “It is vitally important,” say Pennell, Wollak, and Koppenhaver, “to

consider who is represented, who is underrepresented, who is misrepresented, and who is ignored in literature. When books painting diverse and accurate portraits of the incredible range of ability and disability are not available to students, we must question what we are teaching them about who is valued and what is important.”

The authors did a systematic search for picture books that depict people with disabilities in a respectful way, using these criteria:

- ✓ **Easy to read – third-grade readability or below, accessible to students in upper elementary grades who are reading below grade level;**
- ✓ **Not overly didactic – the character with a disability is not pitied or patronized;**
- ✓ **Respectful language portraying characters with disabilities as rich and complex individuals who are defined by more than their disability;**
- ✓ **An interesting and engaging story line involving characters with depth;**
- ✓ **Readily available from booksellers and public libraries.**



The authors’ initial search identified 700 fiction and 1,100 nonfiction books, which they narrowed down to a much smaller number. Below is a sampling of the best they found. “Each book,” say the authors, “has the potential to transcend the disability category and could be enjoyed, and learned from, by all students.”

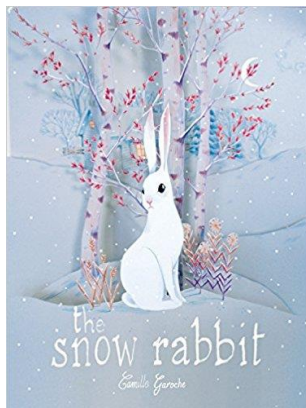
- ❖ ***King for a Day*** by Rukhsana Khan (2014) – *Malik, a boy in Pakistan who uses a wheelchair, struggles with a bully and hopes to become the best kite fighter in Lahore.*
- ❖ ***Emmanuel’s Dream: The True Story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah*** by Laurie Ann Thompson





(2015) – A boy in Ghana is born with a physical disability but hops the two miles to and from school, learns to play soccer, and eventually bicycles 400 miles across Ghana.

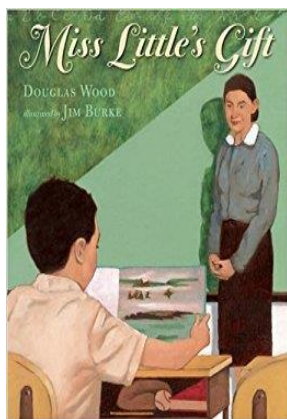
- ❖ **The Snow Rabbit** by Camille Garoche (2015) – In this wordless book, two sisters, one using a wheelchair, watch snow falling outside their window; one goes out and makes a



snow rabbit, brings the snow sculpture inside, and when it starts to melt, they go outside and play and the magic begins.

- ❖ **El Deafo** by Cece Bell (2014) – This autobiographical graphic novel tells how the author lost her hearing at age 4, struggled to read lips and decipher sounds through her hearing aid, sought friendship, and imagined herself as El Deafo, a superhero who was able to hear everything.

- ❖ **Miss Little's Gift** by Douglas Wood (2009) – An autobiographical picture book about a boy with ADHD who

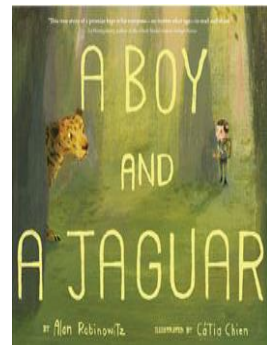


has difficulty learning to read. With the help of a caring teacher, Douglas finds a book that interests him and discovers the joy of reading.

- ❖ **Kami and the Yaks** by Andrea Stenn Stryer (2007) – A young Sherpa boy, who is deaf and unable to speak, races a big storm in the Himalayas to rescue a group of yaks who strayed from their owners.
- ❖ **A Boy and a Jaguar** by Alan Rabinowitz (2014) – A true story of a boy who spent his school years in a special classroom because of his

stuttering. His teachers believe he's incompetent, but he finds his voice through imaginary conversations with animals and becomes a strong advocate for wildlife conservation.

- ❖ **I'm Here** by Peter Reynolds (2011) – A boy with autism is isolated but fully aware of his surroundings. Sitting in a playground, he makes a paper airplane and launches it into flight, and the plane is returned by a girl who may become a new friend.



- ❖ **Skateboard Sonar** by Eric Stevens (2010) – A graphic novel about a skateboard competition in which Matty, who is blind, wins the competition against several bullies, showing that “seeing isn't everything.”



- ❖ **My Three Best Friends and Me**, Zulay by Cari Best (2015) – Zulay is a blind girl who is included in a regular education classroom. She and three of her best friends debate which field day events to take part in, and Zulay ends up running a race with the help of her friends.
- ❖ **Zoom** by Robert Munsch (2003) – Lauretta needs a new wheelchair and chooses a 92-speed dirt-bike model and takes it home for a trial run despite her mother's misgivings. Then the real adventures begin.

“Respectful Representations of Disability in Picture Books” by Ashley Pennell, Barbara Wollak, and David Koppenhaver in *The Reading Teacher*, January/February 2018 (Vol. 71, #4, p 411-419), <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/trtr.1632/abstract>; the authors can be reached at mcclainae@appstate.edu, bawollak@gmail.com, and koppenhaverd@appstate.edu.

