# The Oklahoma Reader

**Paper Collage by Lilia - 4th Grade Student at Roy Clark Elementary,**

**Tulsa, Oklahoma (Union District)**
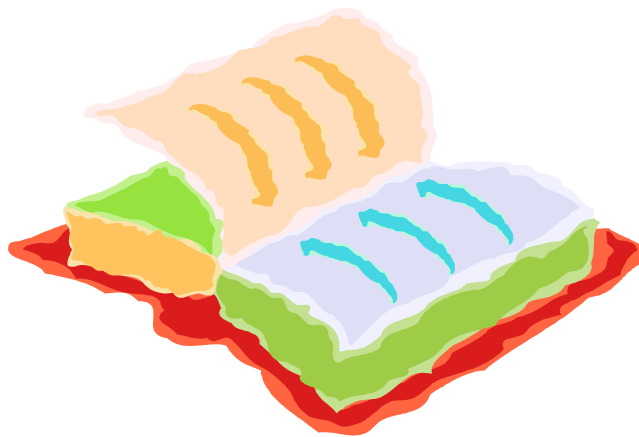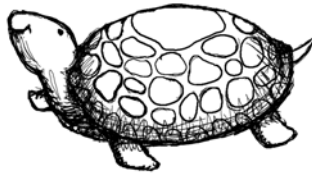
Submit children's art related to literacy, reading, writing, or learning for the cover of the next issue. Please include a release from the child's parent or guardian. Send original art (no copies) on 8.5" by 11" paper to The Oklahoma Reader, ATTN:  Dr. Stephan E. Sargent, Editor, Northeastern State University, 3100 East New Orleans, C-129; Broken Arrow, OK  74014. Deadline for Fall/Winter 2012 issue: October 15, 2012.

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# The Oklahoma Reader

**The journal of the Oklahoma Reading Association, an affiliate of the International Reading Association**

The Oklahoma Reading Association (an affiliate of the International Reading Association) publishes *The Oklahoma Reader* two times a year. Members of the Oklahoma Reading Association will receive *The Oklahoma Reader* as a part of their membership. *The Oklahoma Reader* is available to libraries and schools on the Oklahoma Reading Association website at http://www.oklahomareadingassociation.org/.

*The Oklahoma Reader* is published for members of the Oklahoma Reading Association and all others concerned with reading. Because *The Oklahoma Reader* serves as an open forum, its contents do not necessarily reflect or imply endorsement of the ORA, its officers, or its members.

## Invitation to Authors

*The Oklahoma Reader* invites teachers, graduate students, college and university instructors, and other reading professionals to submit original articles related to all areas of reading and literacy education. *The Oklahoma Reader* has a large readership of classroom teachers and teacher educators. The editorial board encourages articles about classroom practice and current issues related to literacy education. *The Oklahoma Reader* also publishes research syntheses and reviews, original research, and reviews of professional materials related to literacy.

Specific instructions for authors are described on page 32.

# The Oklahoma Reader

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# The Oklahoma Reader

**Volume 47 No 2    Spring/Summer 2012**

## Letter from the Editor

Schools are nearly dismissed for the year as this spring issue goes to press. Many of us are still completing the final few tasks before check-out is complete at school. However, learning never ceases – especially when it comes to reading and literacy. Before we know it, summer workshops and then back-to-school activities will begin!  Hopefully, this issue will add some valuable resources to your repertoire of reading methods for the upcoming school year.

Dr. Timothy Rasinski, a favorite reading expert of Oklahoma teachers, shares a wonderful manuscript describing how reading fluency shares much in common with the performing arts. This offers many practical ideas for the teacher of reading. Dr. Kevin Costley shares ideas on instilling character traits in children using high quality children's literature. Complimenting this piece, the research column discusses the proper use of leveled readers in classrooms already saturated with assessments. Dr. Julie Collins again has updated readers on the latest policy decisions impacting reading teachers. Finally, the technology column sheds light on the development and implementation of "webquests" to enhance reading instruction.

This issue also brings some changes to the staff of *The Oklahoma Reader*. We say goodbye to editorial assistant Mrs. Vickie Caudle. She has successfully completed her graduate work (as of this summer) at Northeastern State University. Our new editorial assistant is Mr. Christopher D. Snodgress, a graduate student at NSU from Kiefer, Oklahoma. Mr. Snodgress is also a classroom teacher in Oklahoma. Please help me welcome Mr. Snodgress as our new editorial assistant.

I hope you find something useful from this issue of *The Reader.* I encourage you to submit your teacher tips, professional resource reviews, classroom research or articles about what you are doing in your classroom or learning in your own study. Stay cool this summer and I hope to hear from you soon.

*Dr. Stephan E. Sargent*

*Timothy Rasinski*

# Reading Fluency as a Performing Art
## By
## James Nageldinger
## Timothy Rasinski
## Kent State University

Timothy Rasinski is a professor of literacy education at Kent State University. He has written over 150 articles and has authored, co-authored or edited over 15 books or curriculum programs on reading education. He is co-author of the award winning fluency program called Fluency First, published by the Wright Group. His scholarly interests include reading fluency and word study, reading in the elementary and middle grades, and readers who struggle. His research on reading has been cited by the National Reading Panel and has been published in journals such as *Reading Research Quarterly*, *The Reading Teacher*, *Reading Psychology*, and the *Journal of Educational Research*.

Did you know that Hollywood is filled with actors who had reading difficulties? Henry Winkler, Tom Cruise, Whoopi Goldberg and Jay Leno all admit to having been struggling readers. Similarly, dyslexia challenged the ability to learn to read of such notable actors as Harry Belafonte, George Burns, Tracey Gold, Edward James Olmos, Loretta Young, Fred Astaire, Harry Anderson, Danny Glover, Cher, Tom Smothers, Lindsay Wagner, Orlando Bloom, and world famous tenor, Enrico Caruso ("Famous People who are Dyslexic or had Dyslexia", 2008).

Is there a connection between their choice of professions and overcoming their reading problems? This is an intriguing question for which we think the answer may be "yes!" Consciously or not, these struggling readers found themselves in a discipline which, by its nature, employed one of the most powerful strategies for developing fluency and comprehension: repeated reading.

It is a Thursday afternoon in late autumn. We are in the Performing Arts Center of a medium-sized university in the Midwest. As we make our way through the building, we find ourselves surrounded by the rich cacophony spilling out into the hallway. In some rooms musicians are working on pieces of music, in others actors are rehearsing lines, and around the corner we can hear singers preparing for choral, ensemble or solo, recitals. From a bench we overhear a discussion between two poets making arrangements to read their poems for each other before a poetry slam later that evening. What do all these burgeoning artists have in common? They are doing repeated reading. They are reading musical notes, theater scripts, and poetry over and over again so that they will sound their best in an upcoming performance.

Struggling readers, unfortunately, often only get a chance to perform when they are asked to read aloud for a teacher holding a stop watch, usually without the benefit of rehearsal. To the performing artists we heard on that November afternoon, the thought of speed and accuracy being the primary measure of a good recital would seem ludicrous. Yet this is what is happening in many reading fluency programs. Students have come to believe that their 'performance' is judged on how many words they can read correctly in a minute on a grade level passage. While speed and accuracy are important, if a musician were to hit every note at breakneck speed ignoring rests, crescendos, and ritards, we would say that they did not understand the piece they were playing. But too often this is the very thing we

reward our students for when using traditional measures of reading fluency. Once considered the neglected reading goal (Allington, 1983), fluency has come into the forefront of reading education in the last two decades. But of its three recognized composite parts: rate, accuracy, and expressive reading or *prosody*, (National Reading Panel, 2000) prosody still suffers neglect.

Ever since early studies of reading rate (e.g. Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp & Jenkins, 2001) demonstrated a significant correlation between oral rate reading and compre-hension, oral reading fluency has been measured (and defined) primarily by rate and accuracy. Teachers have found the one-minute measures of oral reading fluency time efficient and informative. Students however, have discovered something else: reading fast is what matters. Consequently, we have produced oral speed-readers often oblivious to punctuation, who skip unknown words in order to satisfy a rate criterion. Think of the musician playing at breakneck speed. Imagine if we gave an award to the pianist who could get through a piece by Chopin the fastest with the fewest number of mistakes. Lack of prosody in reading is often indicative of non-comprehension of the text (Dowhower, 1991). Studies linking comprehension to prosody suggest that students who read with expression better understand what they have read (Benjamin & Schwanenflugel, 2010; Miller & Schwanenflugel, 2006; Rasinski, 1994).

So what about in the real world? What about those famous people we mentioned at the start? According to Alice Spivak (2008) a New York-based actor, teacher, and coach, "There's an old adage: 'I don't know what I mean until I hear what I'm saying'…" Actors mouth the words. They play with the sounds and explore the full range of possible meanings. Non-actors do this as well. Many of us, including myself, when presented with a difficult academic text, slow down and sub-vocalize in an effort to put a voice to the words. It may take several iterations depending on the complexity of the particular sentence. But once done, and the text is

broken down into speakable parts, the meaning has a much better chance of emerging. Sub-vocalizing and creating audio imagery helps us to hear a person behind everything we read, and, people tend to speak like—well--people. The people we hear speak every day give us a plethora of expressive oral clues. It is the expressive nature of language, or prosody, which serves as an intermediary between reading and knowing. Just as the actors claim not to know what a line means until they read it aloud, we too are able to take advantage of understanding what we read when we employ the same audio imagery reading silently that actors use when reading aloud.

It stands to reason that rehearsal in reading scripts bolsters the ability to make meaning of text. Writing instruction often speaks of "voice." Reading instruction rarely does. Yet it is this very "voice" that conveys much of the subtle or inferred meaning of the text. Practice in oral interpretations of text can lead to greater comprehension.

**Rehearsal for Performance: An Authentic Form of Repeated Reading**

One actor we know said that although he was not a hesitant reader before getting involved with the theater, he often had difficulty understanding what he read. He credits two aspects of his drama training with helping mediate that problem. The first was being instructed to sum up the entire play in a sentence starting "The meaning of the play lies in…." But the real epiphany came when it dawned on him that all things written, not just plays, were written by someone with a voice. His actor's training was teaching him to find the voice of a given character. By extension, he began to find the voice in other literature as well. Suddenly, reading became akin to having a conversation. In his words, "All the world literally became a stage for me."

In my own theater training I (James) discovered that reading a script over and over in an effort to learn my lines made other reading easier. Even at read-throughs, I found that I had to pay attention when other parts were being read so that I would know when to come in. Thinking back on it, hearing lines

read as I was reading them helped me learn how to pronounce some words I didn't know and think about them in ways I hadn't thought before. But mostly I practiced scripts before read-throughs so that I wouldn't sound 'dumb'."

### Getting Inside Rehearsal

There are several approaches actors take to interpreting a script. First, like all good readers, they utilize background knowledge. It may be as simple as having already seen or heard the part performed. When this is not the case, the actors seek to gain meaning in other ways. What clues has the playwright given? Is there any reason to think the play is a comedy rather than a drama? It may say as much on the script cover. Finally the context: where the play is set, the time frame, and the circumstances the characters find themselves in are investigations that help the actor understand the script.

The actor begins reading the script. They consciously read thinking, "what is this character saying, and why?" This is part of the magic of theatre—the making of meaning. Famed writer and stage and screen director, Mike Nichols, during the first cast read-through for the filming of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* is said to have remarked once everyone was settled with scripts in hand, "Ok…lets see what this play is all about." Through successive readings an interpretation evolved. While we are not privy to all that transpired during the rehearsal process, we understand that in order for the actors to be effective, they had to understand what the characters were saying and why.

Struggling readers often read word for word, oblivious of punctuation. Language is a thing of music. Pitch modulation and cadence, or prosody, give the spoken word its expressive nature. Without effective implementation, at best, speech loses our interest (think of those boring monotonic lectures we've endured) and, at worst, perverts the meaning. For example, the simple sentence, *The old man the boat,* could easily be misread even by more experienced readers who mistake *man* for the subject rather than the verb. Who mans the boats?

The *old* man the boats. Without our inner voices, or audio imagery, making sense of the words, we are likely to miss the meaning.

Readers benefit from the exercise of reading scripts and working towards performance in two ways: first, they reap the research-proven advantages of repeated reading (Dowhower, 1987; Samuels, 1979) and second, they are using auditory imagery or prosody to make sense of what they read (Chafe, 1988)**.**

When students learn that all expression comes from an attitude or point of view, then



**Cindy - Student at Roy Clark Elementary, Tulsa, Oklahoma (Union District)**

they learn how to discern that point of view and fashion their oral speaking to reflect it. Author Eudora Welty (1983) confessed that when she wrote, she heard an inner voice. Playwrights, by necessity, hear many voices in the characters they create. Occasionally in the theatrical rehearsal process, the playwright may be present to help interpret the script, but for the better part of the time, the actors and directors are on their own to make sense of what is written. When children are made aware of how many ways there are to say a sentence by simply changing the emphasis of a word, and how that connects with varying intent and emotion, the palette of inner voices is multiplied and meaning is more easily made.

Hearing what makes sense inside helps make sense of the greater whole outside. Actors are told once they understand the character, the ascribed lines will make sense. But this is very much a two way street—actors come to understand their characters through

the lines they speak and the situation or context in which they appear. For this reason, plays sometimes present themselves as more difficult texts for readers when they are read for the first time. The usual inner voice of first or third person we find in traditional narrative is missing, sometimes replaced with scant stage directions, such as indication of an accompanying physical action ("…storming across the room…" or "pacing nervously") and sometimes not. Readers of all sorts gain from the advantage Spivak alluded to earlier of hearing either aloud or sub-vocally what is being said.

**Can Fluency as a Performing Art Work in Real Classrooms?**

A growing body of scholarly writing (Worthy & Broaddus, 2000) indicates it does. Classroom-based research is demonstrating that when students engage in authentic rehearsal of texts meant to be performed, improvements in reading fluency and overall reading performance follows. Martinez, Roser, and Strecker (2000) report that second grade students engaged in a weekly readers theater instructional routine for twelve weeks made over a year's growth in reading. Lorraine Griffith (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004) found that having her fourth grade students rehearse and perform poetry and scripts (readers theater) on a weekly basis had a profound effect on her students' reading achievement. Griffith found that her students made more than two years of growth in reading in the one year they were assigned to her classroom (We might add that the actual testing of students was done by a third party). More recently, Vasinda and McLeod (2011) used technology to enhance the rehearsal and performance experience. After having rehearsed their assigned scripts, students would perform them by recording them as a podcast. The performance podcasts were then uploaded to the classroom website so that family members, friends, and classmates can listen to the performance at home. Since only the audio portion of the performances was recorded, students had to rehearse to ensure that their expressiveness carried the meaning of the text. In a ten week implementation, 35

struggling second and third grade students made, on average, over a year's growth in reading comprehension.

Whether working with primary or intermediate grade students, the authentic rehearsal embedded in fluency as a performing art appears to lead to significant and substantial gains in comprehension as well as fluency. Moreover, the impact of fluency as a performing art seems particularly potent with students who struggle in reading.

**Implementing Fluency as a Performing Art**

Although there is no one specific way to implement the approach to fluency instruction that we advocate in this article, we offer some general guidelines for making fluency a performing art in your classroom.

- Make fluency instruction a daily event in your classroom. Have the fluent and meaningful performance of a script, poem, or other performance text as the goal for every student. Provide time on the last day of each week for students to perform the texts that they rehearsed throughout the week.
- Divide your class up into groups of 4-5 students. At the beginning of each week, assign a different script to each group. Scripts can be found by searching online. Try to keep the scripts relatively short – maximum, 3-4 pages. You can also work with your students to write their own scripts based on materials they have read in your classroom. Alternatively, you might assign a different poem to individual, pairs, or trios of students.
- On the first day of the week provide background to the materials that students will be rehearsing. Also, model read the texts to students while students follow along silently. This will give students an opportunity to hear affluent reading of the text and how a particular text might be interpreted orally.
- During the middle days of the week provide time each day (15-20 minutes) for students to rehearse in their

groups or on their own. Your job is to monitor students' rehearsal and provide modeling, support, coaching, and encouragement. Note that students should also be encouraged to rehearse on their own during school hours and at home.

- On the last day of the week, have students perform their assigned or chosen texts in a poetry coffeehouse or readers theater festival. Try to make the experience as authentic as possible by inviting parents and other guests to your classroom. Decorate your room appropriately (bar stools are a great way to set the scene) and ask parents to provide refreshments. Students perform their texts one after another – their goal is to provide the audience with a meaningful oral interpretation of the text.
- Repeat this routine in each week. Either rotate the various scripts and poems from one group to another or find new materials for students to rehearse and perform each week.

Teaching reading is both an art and a science. The challenge for teachers is to help students develop competency in the various components of reading identified through science in ways that are artful. Fluency has been identified by science as a critical element for reading success (National Reading Panel, 2000). By treating fluency and fluency as a performing art, teachers have an opportunity to blend science and art in a manner that is effective, authentic, and engaging.

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# Moving Reading into the Digital Age

## Rhonda Morris, Assistant Professor
## Oklahoma Christian University

*Students of ELEM4543*
*Allison Becker, Tori Cates, Haley Efird, Holly Guthrie, Kimberly Harper, Katelyn Johnson, Amanda Nichols, Kathryn Sherman, Kimberly Sherry, Lindsay Stephens, Mary Watson*

Walking into the education building at a local university, one does not observe a typical classroom setting. Instead of seeing professors standing and lecturing to their sleepy college students, pre-service teachers are actively involved in tutoring elementary students who struggle with reading. Resources do not include basal readers and flash cards; the use of hands on activities, computer based technologies, and digital technologies become the primary sources used to motivate and engage students.

Pre-service teachers are fully aware that the students they will be teaching are members of the post-modern generation. Post-modern students are considered digital natives (Prensky, 2001); they are comfortable with using laptops, iPods, tablets, smart phones, and gaming devices. Students are daily surrounded with digital technology, giving them a great deal of knowledge as they enter school. When students enter a school where digital technology is not prevalent, they often experience confusion due to the difference between technology used in the home and technology used in school (Davidson, 2009). According to Davidson, technology in school is merely used as an add-on rather than an essential and integrative part of instruction (Davidson, 2009). Hobbs (2011) stated, "Although investments in technology have increased significantly in recent years, … simply providing  children and young people with access to digital technology will [not] automatically enhance learning" (p. 15). In other words, teachers' lessons are often taught without the use of technology.

Allowing students to use the Internet to select books to read is one way to put technology into the classroom (Leu, Castek, Henry, Coiro, and McMullan, 2004). Leu, et al. (2004) recommend having less proficient students learn from New Literacies who can then teach other students in the classroom. This allows the student to have a leading position in the classroom rather than that of the struggling student. Although pre-service teacher candidates may have been born in the 20th century, they are keenly aware of the need to present material in ways and media that appeal to the students' interests through the use of digital technology.

The final literacy class required of elementary education majors at Oklahoma Christian University focuses on assessment and diagnosis of reading difficulties. Pre-service teachers are required to tutor a struggling reader for 22-24 hours during the semester. The first four sessions consist of giving various assessments to determine the readers' strengths and instructional levels. Motivation and interest surveys, the Bear Spelling Inventory, and the Johns Basic Reading Inventory are conducted with each student. Information is gathered from the assessments to design lessons intended to strengthen areas of identified weaknesses. Practicum hours previously occurred during the child's school day. This has become more difficult with the pressing need for students to

be in their classroom for their teachers to give the required interventions if on a Response to Intervention plan. From this conflict, the idea for starting a reading clinic on campus was conceived. One of the goals of the reading clinic is to use digital technology as a means to engage struggling readers.

Partnering with the University's Information Technology Department, an iPad was loaned to the class for the semester. During each class session, a pre-service teacher was selected and encouraged to discover iPad applications (apps) that could be implemented during the next tutoring session. After each tutoring session, the pre-service teacher shared the apps used during tutoring with classmates and discussed whether the apps met the needs of the student. As more apps were discovered, the class determined that a compilation of the apps, as well as a description of each, would benefit other educators in the field. Each app was sorted into one of the following categories: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, writing, spelling, and comprehension (See Table 1). All apps are free to download on the iPad.

E-story books were utilized for familiar, shared, and guided reading during tutoring sessions as recommended by Leu, et al. (2004). Both narrative and informational e-story books were used during tutoring. Using apps such as Touchy Books (iPad app) and MeeGenius (iPad app), students were able to follow along with an audio reading or choose to read the story independently. Some of the e-story books offered interactive illustrations and highlighted words. E-story books offer the necessary scaffolding for students to be successful readers. With functions such as highlighting, repeated readings, and animation to support comprehension, students had the ability to choose features that would aid them in comprehension (Moody, 2010).

Studies show positive results when a teacher simply reads an e-story book to the class; however, e-story books improved engagement, vocabulary, and comprehension when adults were available to offer assistance to help the students build background knowledge (Moody, 2010; Vygotsky, 1986).

Tutoring sessions focused on areas deemed necessary for literacy development: alphabet knowledge, print awareness, phonological awareness, use and understanding of language, comprehension, and reading engagement. E-story books supported each of these areas through their functions, such as letter pronunciation, and highlighted words (Moody, 2010).

A recent study concerning teachers' implementation of literacy-focused technology in the classroom showed that students benefit from this type of instruction. Students' literacy achievement, as well as attitude toward literacy instruction, experienced improvement (Blachowicz, Bates, Berne, Bridgman, Chaney & Perney, 2009). Furthermore, students who interact with digital literacy are more immersed in the activities and develop a stronger sense of self in their reading abilities (O'Brien, Beach, & Scharber, 2007). Through the use of computer based technology and digital technology, the pre-service teachers observed and noted through anecdotal records results comparable with this research.

The pre-service teachers found their students to be more excited and enthusiastic

Table 1. (*See appendix for description of the above apps)

| Compre-hension | Fluency | Phoneme Awareness | Phonics | Vocabulary | Writing | Spelling |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Monster Town 1 | Sight Word Flashcards | Sound Sorting | ABC Phonics | Sight Word Flashcards | Story Buddy Lite | Build a Word |
| Books for Kids | Timed Reading | BUGbrainED Phonics Awareness | Phonics Genius Flashcards | Memory Magic | Dictionary | Memory Magic |
| | MeeGenius | Zap Phonics | Zap Phonics | Bluster! | Word Sizzler | Word Warp Xtreme |
| | Little Reader | Build A Word | Pocket Phonics | MeeGenius | ABC Spelling Check | Hangman |
| | Rock and Learn Sight Words | Pocket Phonics | Reading Pal | Little Reader | A-Z ABC Writing | Word Sizzler |
| | Tongue Twisters | Reading Pal | | Word Warp Xtreme | ABC Writing | Magic Words |
| | Photo Sight Touch Words | | | Build A Word | Magic Sentences | Word Jewels |
| | Blue Fire Recording | | | Rock n Learn Sight Words | Toontastic | ABC Spelling Check |
| | eFlash Play Sight Words | | | Photo Sight Touch Words | | |
| | Story Mouse | | | Hangman | | |
| | Bob Books Magic Lite | | | Word Sizzler | | |
| | Fry Words | | | Sight Words 1.1 | | |
| | I Like Reading | | | eFlash Play Sight Words | | |
| | Touchy Books | | | Magic Words | | |
| | Dragon Dictation | | | Weird Words | | |
| | | | | Fry Words | | |
| | | | | Word Jewels XL | | |
| | | | | Kitty Words | | |
| | | | | Sight Words ds Lite | | |
| | | | | Treasure Hunt | | |
| | | | | Futaba | | |

on the days the iPad or laptops were utilized

as compared to sessions that used no type of technology. Challenging, appropriate, interactive activities gave immediate feedback to the students. Comments heard from the students during sessions that included the use of previously mentioned technologies included "I love playing with the iPad" and "This is so much fun." Another student was overheard saying, "Wow, that was fast. I feel like I haven't been here very long." Anecdotal records showed that all the students began to look forward to coming to their tutoring sessions. By using technology during tutoring, the pre-service teachers found that their students were more engaged and enjoyed learning. The students seemed to be more focused during sessions. Skills needing work became more of a game instead of a chore. Apps were used that increased phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, handwriting, and spelling.

At the end of the semester, the pre-service teachers conducted the same motivation/ attitude survey with their students that they conducted at the beginning of tutoring. It appeared that the students answered the questions with more thought and honesty than at the beginning of the semester. One student who struggled with a speech problem was reluctant to read out loud at the beginning of tutoring; afterwards, he was willing to read not only during tutoring but when called upon in his class at school. The pre-service teachers saw increased confidence, motivation, enthusiasm, and changes in attitude. The students who seemed less than enthused at the beginning of the semester suddenly could not wait to arrive for their session.

Readers who struggle have many obstacles to overcome. By providing one-on-one tutoring, giving choices in reading materials, and using digital technology, the pre-service teachers involved in Oklahoma Christian University's Reading Clinic have had a part in removing some of those obstacles.

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## Appendix
All the apps listed below can be found at the app store on the iPad for free of charge.

**Comprehension**
> **Books for Kids -** targets emergent readers; highlights words as read; provides questions for comprehension; coloring pages available
> **Monster Town 1 -** targets grades K-5; aids in comprehension, word, and sentence structures

**Fluency**
> **Blue Fire Recording** – Students can record themselves reading to practice their fluency
> **Bob Books Lite -** Read a few pages of a Bob Book that focuses on a specific skill

**Dragon Dictation -** Students can record themselves reading and immediately play it back

**eFlash Play Sight Words and Photo Sight Touch Words** – Students work on recognition of words

**Fry Words –** lists of Fry's sight words

**I Like Reading –** An E-book that discusses the different ways that reading can be fun; may read independently or listen; words are highlighted

**Little Reader -** Students can record themselves reading or listen to a recording

**MeeGenius -** highlights words for students as it is read

**Rock and Learn Sight Words** – targets K-1st grade sight words

**Sight Word Flashcards -** Dolch sight words divided by grade levels

**Story Mouse -** Selection of stories to listen to or read

**Time Reading -** 25 short stories for K-4 students

**Tongue Twisters** – Uses alliteration

**Touchy Books –** Stories have colorful and interactive illustrations to read or listen to

## Phonemic Awareness

**BUGbrainED Phonics Awareness** – Teaches phonemic awareness through segmentation, blending, and vowel sounds

**Build A Word** – Great way to practice spelling through segmentation or letter sounds

**Pocket Phonics** – Students work on letter-sound correspondence; letters are shown in cursive or print; allows students practice in writing the letter

**Reading Pal** – Works on letter-sound correspondence; teachers can make tests and
record words created

**Sound Sorting** – Students match pictures to letter sounds

**Zap Phonics** – Teaches students sounds of letters

## Phonics

**ABC Phonics –** Students are given a word, trace it, and then say the word aloud

**Phonics Genius Flashcards** – More than 220 categories of flashcards divided up by different vowel sounds, blends, digraphs, endings, r-controlled letters, etc.

## Vocabulary

**Bluster!** – Depending on grade level (2-4), students practice words with prefixes, synonyms, rhyming words, homophones, root words, and adjectives.

**Futaba -** Students see a picture in the middle of the screen and then race other players to select the corresponding word

**Hangman** – based on the classic game of hangman; students are given a category clue and the number of letters in the word

**Kitty Words –** For emergent readers or English Language Learners; students connect words to pictures and develop simple vocabulary such as cow, sky, grass, and bird

**Magic Words -** Students unscramble letters to create as many words as possible before time runs out

**Memory Magic** – Students upload pictures for a matching game; can use with spelling and/or sight words

**Sight Words 1.1 -** A sight word app for beginner readers; focuses on opposites; flashcards pronounce words for self-checking purposes; two videos of songs that use the words

**Sight Words ds Lite –** Students read through different sets of sight words and mark which ones are familiar to them

**Treasure Hunt -** A fun, interactive treasure map where students complete phonics and vocabulary activities to find the hidden treasure

**Weird Words -** Students can broaden their vocabulary with the weird words that are defined in this app

**Word Jewels XL -** Students use letter jewels to create the longest words possible on each level

**Word Sizzler -** Students must unscramble letters to make a word that matches the definition; can select grade and difficulty level

**Word Warp Xtreme** – Students play individually or in pairs; seven letters are given to create as many words as possible.

Writing

**ABC Spelling Check -** Students work with this writing resource to check their spelling of words. Students simply type in how they think it might be spelled. The program then offers them suggestions. Students can click on a word to view its definition to verify it is the word they want to use.

**A-Z ABC Writing -** Students trace letters found in word families

**ABC Writing -** Students trace single letters or words

**Dictionary -** This provides an excellent writing resource. Words can be looked up as single words or in phrases; provides an English word of the day as well as a Spanish word of the day.

**Sentence Magic –** Students build simple two or three word sentences; also incorporates word blending

**Story Buddy Lite -** Students can create and illustrate a story of their own

**Toontastic -** Students are guided through the writing process by selecting settings and characters for their own story

# Instilling Character Traits in Young Children Through Fiction Books
## By
## Kevin C. Costley, Ph.D.

*Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education, Arkansas Tech University, Russellville, Arkansas, kcostley@atu.edu*

A goal of educators is to inculcate healthy, moral values. Children are capable of making wise choices when parents and teachers take the time to explain why appropriate choices pay off positively. Character is not inborn; character is instilled in children. Children model what they see; they imitate role models. Marion (2007) states that children need to develop their own moral compass. By doing so, they learn to evaluate situations around them resulting in making appropriate choices. Children are capable beings; they can make right choices.

Children are drawn to fiction books of all kinds, including animal and real people stories. The way to introduce and reinforce good character traits is through the use of children's literature (Norton, 2011; Tassel-Baska V., J.; Norton, D.).

This article recommends several newer and older children's books that would be useful for instruction with two audiences: classroom teachers and parents. A synopsis of each book is given. The character trait will be identified with comments and suggestions concerning how to use each book in classrooms. The books below are developmentally appropriate for both first and second grade students. The following books focus on character traits: *facing one's fears, giving and self-sacrifice, helpfulness and kindness, being you, honesty, and being a good friend.*

*There's A Nightmare in My Closet*, by Mayer, tells a story about a boy who tells about his nightmare that lives in his closet. At first, the boy is very afraid of the nightmare. He hides under his blanket until falling asleep. One night he decides to face his fear and tries to get that nightmare out of his closet. The nightmare reveals who he is. The boy then shoots the nightmare. Then, the nightmare begins to cry and the boy does not want the nightmare to wake up his parents who are sleeping. The nightmare ends up tucked into bed with the boy.

**Winter Chalk Scene by Lauren - 5th Grade Student at Roy Clark Elementary, Tulsa, Oklahoma (Union District)**

Character trait: *facing one's fears.* Classroom teachers could use this book during a lesson of facing fears. Young children are often afraid of monsters in their closets and under their beds. This would allow students to see a humorous plot and an unexpected ending. An activity could be children drawing pictures of their fears, in addition to writing several sentences about their fears. The teacher could then assure the children that their fears will not come true.

*The Giving Tree,* by Silverstien, is another story about a little boy and a tree. They are best friends. The book tells of their relationship from the early days to when the little boy is an elderly man. The little boy is always taking something from the tree. He may take the tree's leaves, branches. He eventually takes the entire tree except the trunk. Even though the little boy takes so much from the tree, the tree still loves the little boy.

Character traits: *giving and self-sacrifice.* This book could be used in the classroom to teach the emotion of love. The message has to do with love that feeds into another person's happiness. The tree loved the little boy so much she sacrificed herself to make the boy happy. And adding to someone's happiness often takes sacrificial giving. In this book, children will realize that giving is loving. It is more gratifying to give than receive.

*Chicken Chickens,* by Gorbachev, is a book about a Mother Hen. She takes her two little chickens to the playground for the very first time. The chickens are excited to see all of the people and all of the equipment to play on. But, they are very scared. Different animals ask if the chickens want to join them. The chickens see the tree and the mice convince them they can play on the slide. Then, the chickens go to the top of the slide. They become scared to slide down the slide. So, thoughtfully, Beaver lets them slide down on his tail and the chickens overcome their fears.

Character traits: *helpfulness and kindness.* Beaver was both helpful and kind when he allowed the chickens to ride down the slide on his tail. This book could be read in any classroom to encourage students to be kind and helpful toward their peers and other people. An effective teaching strategy would be one of the teacher questioning students after reading this book about how they can be kind and helpful.

*Elmer,* by McKee, is a book about E Elmer, the elephant. Elmer looks different than most elephants. Elmer has patchwork consisting of yellow, orange, red, pink, purple, blue, green, black, and white covering his body. Elmer was considered to be the humorous and lively elephant that everyone liked. However, one day, Elmer was tired of being different. He found some elephant colored berries and rolled in the berries to look more normal. When Elmer returned home, he discovered he was just another elephant. When his friends saw what he had done, they were surprised. Then Elmer realized he did not need to change at all; his other elephant friends liked him just the way he was.

Character trait: *being just you.* In this story, children can learn that each person is special and unique. Children should not change their uniqueness just to fit in with other people and conform to all norms. This book also speaks to tolerance of differences in people. Some differences are good and healthy. In this book, the other animals loved Elmer just the way he was. People come in different sizes, shapes and colors. This book can make a powerful impact on children's character.

*Ruthie and the Not So Teeny Tiny Lie,* by Rankin is a delightful book. Ruthie liked teeny tiny things. One day, she found a teeny tiny camera on the playground. Martin said it was his camera and told the teacher. But Ruthie lied and said the camera was hers!  She felt really bad the rest of the day. Ruthie couldn't remember the answer of a math problem and didn't listen to story time. After school, the bus ride seemed to go on forever and she didn't eat when she got home. By bed time, Ruthie was crying and she told her parents about what happened at school. The next day, Ruthie told her teacher and Martin the truth. She felt much better then. As a result, Ruthie could then eat, listen to the story, and the ride home was shorter than the ride after she lied.

Character trait:  *telling the truth.* Lying is wrong and never pays off. The teacher could ask students if they have ever told a lie. The question could be asked: "How did you feel when you told a lie?"  Another question could be asked:  "Tell a story about when you told the truth."  Some students may even want to volunteer what happened to them when they told a lie. This book conveys that truthfulness is always best in every situation.

*Crazy Hair Day,* by Barney Saltzberg, is a story about a character called Stanley. At the beginning of the story, Stanley was excited. His school was having a Crazy Hair Day. His mom helped turn his hair into crazy hair. They put his hair up in rubber bands and sprayed it bright orange and blue. To Stanley's dismay, when he arrived at school, he discovered he had gotten the day wrong. Crazy Hair Day was scheduled for the next Friday. Stanley's friend, Larry made fun of his hair in front of the entire class. Stanley then went and hid in the restroom. The teacher sent Larry to talk to Stanley. Larry told Stanley that today was class picture day. So, because of that news, Stanley decided to stay in the bathroom all day long. Larry convinced Stanley that the class picture would not be the same without him. When Stanley went to the class for pictures, all of his classmates had crazy hair and crazy hats just to make Stanley feel comfortable and not out of place.

Character trait: *being a good friend.* At first, Larry made fun of Stanley's hair. Larry hurt Stanley's feelings. Larry then became a good friend and came to talk to Stanley to make him feel better. In the classroom, teachers can discuss how to be a good friend and how to build new and old friendships.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, children's literature books are a rich resource to instill character traits in young children. Children are influenced positively by animal books. In turn, they see modeling in books where the characters are adults or children. At the first and second grade level, children see these types of character education books as *bigger than life stories.* In the classroom, discussions and other extension activities reinforce the appropriate ways for children to act and react in positive ways. These books basically ascribe to the Golden Rule:  "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

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# Policy Updates for all Teachers
## By
## Julie Collins

**Literacy Research Panel**

The International Reading Association has formed a new panel to advance the quality of literacy instruction. The goal of the Literacy Research Panel is an initiative proposed by immediate Past President, Victoria Risko, to address the need for strong responses to literacy issues in the media. The Literacy Research Panel is chaired by P. David Pearson and features acclaimed researchers, Peter Afflerbach, Amy Correa, Nell Duke, Peter Freebody, Virginia Goatley, John Guthrie, Kris Gutierrez, Kenji Hakuta, Peter Johnston, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Nonie Leseaux, Elizabeth Moje, Annemarie Sullivan Palincsar, Linda Phillips, Timothy Shanahan, Catherine Snow, Karen Wixson, and Victoria Risko (*ex officio*) as members. The leadership of this group is intended to guide policymakers, administrators, teacher educators, teachers, parents, and the public's view of critical literacy issues. The group is expected to work together for several years, but is not expected to be a permanent fixture of our organization. The panel was featured in a session at the 57th International Reading Association Convention in Chicago, and attracted a standing room only crowd to hear about the mission statement and vision of the group.

The panel has begun discussions of topics that need to be addressed, and so far four topics have arisen: the achievement gap, motivation and engagement, standards and assessment, and teacher education. These four topics have risen to the top of the agenda in helping the International Reading Association work toward its goal of ensuring that the next generation is well prepared to lead fulfilling personal, civic, and work lives. The realization is that students entering school today will face increasingly complex literacy tasks. Working to improve teacher education and guide professional development for in-service teachers to create teachers who are

well versed in curriculum, instruction, and appropriate use of classroom assessments to guide instruction will benefit the next generation of students. Advising state and district leaders as well as teachers on the implementation of Common Core State Standards will help ensure that the implementation be focused on the integration of literacy and content and happen as smoothly as possible.

The Literacy Research Panel has a vision statement, which can be found online at http://www.reading.org/General/Publications/blog/BlogSinglePost/12-04-30/ Literacy_ Research_ Panel_Vision_Statement.aspx. The leadership of the International Reading Association invites you to send comments on the vision statement of the Literacy Research Panel. Comments can be sent to research@reading.org . The e-mail will be monitored by Dr. Goatley, IRA Research Director. One of the missions of the panel will be to develop response statements within a short period of time when asked to respond to important issues. Members of the panel will work with the editors of *Reading Research Quarterly* and IRA's Research Director, as well as support the association's advocacy efforts. Watch *Reading Today* and www.reading.org for updates on the work of the Literacy Research Panel.

**Adolescent Literacy**

The International Reading Association has recently updated its Position Statement on Adolescent Literacy. The revised position statement can be accessed at this web address: http://www.reading.org/Libraries/Resources/ps1079_adolescentliteracy_rev2012.pdf. The position statement has been updated by the IRA Adolescent Literacy Committee and Adolescent Literacy Task Force. These groups found the increasing demands on adolescents to be proficient with a variety of literacy tasks with both print and nonprint texts to be worthy of updating the position statement to highlight the need for outstanding instruction for these students as they are preparing to become productive citizens.

The position statement is organized around the following statements of what adolescent literacy learners deserve:

1. Adolescents deserve content area teachers who provide instruction in the multiple literacy strategies needed to meet the demands of the specific discipline.
2. Adolescents deserve a culture of literacy in their schools with a systematic and comprehensive programmatic approach to increasing literacy achievement for all.
3. Adolescents deserve access to and instruction with multimodal, multiple texts.
4. Adolescents deserve differentiated literacy instruction specific to their individual needs.
5. Adolescents deserve opportunities to participate in oral communication when they engage in literacy activities.
6. Adolescents deserve opportunities to use literacy in the pursuit of civic engagement.
7. Adolescents deserve assessments that highlight their strengths and challenges.
8. Adolescents deserve access to a wide variety of print and nonprint materials.

The statement also includes an appendix with information about, and links to, additional resources in the areas of access to text, assessment, content area instruction, multimodality, civic engagement, differentiation of instruction, leadership and oral language. I encourage you to access the position statement and share it with your colleagues, administrators, and policy makers, as appropriate, in showing support for focusing on the literacy needs of adolescents.

**Oklahoma Legislative Updates**
Oklahoma's annual legislative session will be drawing to a close at the end of May. Some proposed legislation will not be resolved until later in the month, but as this column goes to the editor in mid-May, I offer you the following updates.

House Bill 2511, authored by Representative Coody, authorized changes to the required assessments used for the implementation of the Reading Sufficiency Act. This bill was approved by Governor Fallin on May 15th. It changes the requirement for assessments by removing the requirement that there will be no more than three approved screening assessments for use in Oklahoma schools for screening at the beginning of the year, progress monitoring through the year, and at the end of the year. This new law also removes the requirement that one of the approved assessments be approved by the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Education. Further revisions require that at least one of the approved assessments assess phonological awareness, phonics, reading fluency, and comprehension; be useful for special education students as well as limited English proficient students, and be able to be used for diagnosis and progress monitoring purposes. Furthermore, this assessment will need to be able to provide a data management system that provides student profiles of reading achievement and instructional point of need at the class, grade level, and school levels.

House Bill 2516, authored by Representative Kern, made changes to the Reading Sufficiency Act by including kindergarten students in the requirement for screening assessment at the beginning of each school year. The bill also removes the READ requirement that school personnel could suggest health evaluations for children without being liable for the cost. The bill also clarifies the procedure to request a good cause exemption from the mandatory retention in third grade based on end of year criterion referenced tests. This bill was signed by Governor Fallin on May 1st.

Senate Bill 1565, authored by Senator Paddack, has passed both houses of the legislature and was signed by Governor Fallin on May 10th. This bill directs the Oklahoma Regents for Higher Education to begin a pilot program for dyslexia education. The pilot program will be undertaken at not more than two institutions of higher education. The program will be directed by a non-profit education center to train the faculty members of the participating institutions to teach

multisensory structured reading instruction, with the intent of all early childhood, elementary and special education teacher candidates being trained in the program. The goal of the program is to "evaluate the effectiveness of having trained teachers who can provide early reading assistance programs for children with risk factors for dyslexia and to evaluate whether the early assistance programs can reduce future special education costs." If it is found to be effective, the program can be replicated at other institutions. Included in the bill is the following definition of dyslexia: As used in this section, "dyslexia" means a specific learning disorder that is neurological in origin and that is characterized by unexpected difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities not consistent with the intelligence, motivation and sensory capabilities of the person, which difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language. This legislation requires that the education center secure grant funding for the project. The Payne Education Center in Oklahoma City has recently secured a grant for $100,000 for this project from the Inasmuch Foundation, as reported May 5th in *The Oklahoman*.

Senate Bill 1797, authored by Senator Jolley, was approved by Governor Fallin on May 8th. This bill created the Commission for Educational Quality and Accountability, effective January 1, 2013. The bill outlines the members of the commission, as well as the duties, which include making recommendations to the Governor and Legislature on methods to achieve an aligned, seamless system from preschool through postsecondary education. Additional duties include setting performance levels and corresponding cut scores for assessments under the Oklahoma School Testing Program Act, overseeing the approval and accreditation of teacher education programs in the state, and overseeing the assessment of teacher candidates. The Commission for Educational Quality and Accountability will assume the responsibility for the Office of Educational

Quality and Accountability on July 1, 2013, and those duties formerly assigned to the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation (OCTP) on July 1, 2014. The merging of these offices is expected to show a savings of fifteen percent. The bill also requires collaboration between the State Board of Education and the Commission for Educational Quality and Accountability.

*You can find more information about these bills, and others under consideration, at http://www.oklegislature.gov. I urge you to research issues that are of interest to you, and contact your senator and representative to express your opinions.*

*Dr. Julie Collins, Assistant Professor, Reading Education University of Central Oklahoma College of Education and Professional Studies, Edmond, Oklahoma*

## Research Summary
### Linda McElroy, Ph.D.
### Column Editor

***Editor's note**: This column discusses the challenges that teachers face in balancing many factors as they provide reading instruction. The featured research is from:*

*Reading Leveled Books in Assessment-Saturated Classrooms: A Close Examination of Unmarked Processes of Assessment, by Stavroula Kontovourki, in Reading Research Quarterly, 47 (2), pp. 153-171, 2012.*

Teachers in Oklahoma classrooms, and across the nation, find themselves in situations where they are constantly juggling many factors and requirements. In this "balancing act," they must consider mandates at the district, state, and national levels, along with their professional knowledge of best practices in teaching. In addition, teachers consider many factors about the individual children who are their students.

The featured research for this column analyzed some of the considerations that teachers in typical classrooms are juggling, as they incorporate leveled reading materials in a setting that the researcher described as "assessment-saturated" classrooms.

This study was a yearlong, ethnographic case study in a third-grade classroom in a large metropolitan United States city. The children were ethnically diverse (five African-American girls, seven African American boys, three girls who had migrated to the United States from West Africa, two Latina girls, one Latino boy, and one boy from the Caribbean). Three received English as a Second Language services, and nine were on IEPs, so the class qualified for a Collaborative Team Teaching program which placed two teachers in the same classroom to support the education of students with disabilities. This article discusses a set of data that was collected as part of a larger research study. Throughout the school year, the researcher observed in the classroom two or three days each week, for at least two hours each time. Data for the study included descriptive and reflective field notes, audio and/or video tapes, and interviews with the two teachers and with six focal children, one of whom became the focus child for this article's discussion.

Literacy instruction was in a workshop model of a balanced literacy approach that was mandated in all schools in this city. This structure of balanced literacy instruction included reading, writing, and word work as the three pillars literacy instruction, so that the elements of reading mandated by No Child Left Behind were combined with holistic experiences like reading literature and authentic texts. Reading included read-alouds, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading, during which students read books at their reading level. Writing included modeled writing, shared and guided writing, and independent writing, during which students write, revise, and publish their own stories.

Both reading and writing were organized in units of study. The daily literacy block included a 15-minute minilesson, where the teacher modeled a strategy or skill, followed by 25 to 35 minutes of independent reading, where students primarily worked independently on leveled texts, then a five-minute sharing time when the children were asked to talk about what they did as readers and writers.

Teachers held individual conferences to support and encourage children, as well as to assess children's reading using a variety of assessment techniques. Some were standardized measures (Early Childhood Literary Assessment System 2, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), while other assessments were modifications of miscue analysis and running records. Additional student data came from the state's ELA standardized exam, two ELA predictive tests, ELA practice tests, quick-write assessments, word quizzes, and other types of diagnostic assessments. The mandated standardized test was considered "marked", as it was widely recognized for its consequences on teaching and learning. The assessment of reading levels and the practice of requiring children to read books at their assessed level, on the other hand, was a more naturalized way of doing literacy in schools so that the consequences were less recognized and was, therefore, described as "unmarked".

The students' reading levels were expressed in alphabet letters, using a leveling system established school-wide. Both of the teachers, as well as the students, used the reading level in descriptions of readers in the classroom. For example, the children knew that they needed to be on level O by the end of the year.

The teachers stressed to the children that they needed to think about what good readers and writers do. For the final sharing time of each day's workshop, the children were encouraged to report strategies they had used that day that would be used by good readers and writers. Nevertheless, reading levels were often mentioned by students and by teachers, instead of the more holistic descriptions of strategies. Children might say that they were "on a good level" or that they "passed" or had "made it" to a higher level. Sometimes, the children simply said, "I am an M".

This set of research data focused on interactions during the independent reading block of time, when each child was expected to read silently the books that had been placed in their "book baggies", chosen according to level of difficulty. Teachers

monitored the books in the book baggies to be sure they contained leveled books at the student's identified reading level. In addition to knowing their reading level, children were taught to monitor the appropriateness of their books by recognizing the number of words they did not know and always choosing just-right books. Many of the children resisted the limitations to only read a specified level of book, especially if they were reading below grade level. They complained that their books were boring and did not make sense. Some children even were observed to sneak out books beyond their reading level and read from those books when not monitored by the teachers during independent reading time.

The focus child in the study was Bill, an African American boy served on an IEP for disabilities and described by one of the teachers as hyperactive. The researcher saw Bill as an enthusiastic learner who described himself as a future college student. Bill was fascinated with the leveling process and often listened while the teachers assessed other children's reading levels. He often asked the teachers or the students if the child had "passed". The teachers reminded him that was private information, but the placement of leveled stickers on the covers of the books made the information public. Bill noticed when other students were reading books that appeared beyond their assessed level, commenting that the other child had stolen the book he was reading. He also noticed when other children moved to a new level and were allowed to select new books for their book baggies. Sometimes, he offered a high five in celebration.

The researcher pointed out that the data raises questions about "the effects of practices that are normalized and naturalized in literacy classrooms." (p. 168) The on-going assessments contributed to the perception of reading as being measureable, where testing permeated reading instruction. The students used levels and leveled books to describe who they were and what they did as readers. To summarize, the researcher argues that "no assessment is no-stakes and that even unmarked processes of assessment actually have stakes for readers and reading in assessment-saturated classrooms." (p. 170).

So…what are teachers to do in this balancing/juggling act of mandates and testing and leveling? My own observation in an Oklahoma third-grade classroom recently helped me to personalize this question. I watched while a group of third-graders worked in collaborative pairs to complete research at the end of a unit on animal habitats. They used a science textbook, other printed information provided by the teacher, and online sources from the classroom computers. They were excited and engaged as they transferred their new-found information to Venn diagrams and added drawings of various habitats. When they had finished, they had some time to read library books. I watched as one boy, who had been fascinated by the research assignment, sighed and flipped through pages of his assigned book. The teacher encouraged him to read, but he continued to flip pages. She then asked him to choose a "one-point" book instead of the "two-point" book he already had. He wandered to the class collection of books, and said they were all boring. She then allowed him to go to the school library, with the instructions to find a good "one-point" book. When he returned, with a big grin, he showed her his new book. It was a popular chapter book, clearly much more difficult than the book he had avoided reading earlier. Noting the small amount of time remaining in the class period, she simply told him to make sure he was reading. He smiled again, flipped through the new thick book and showed it to the other children at his table, and settled down to read diligently for more than ten minutes before the class left for lunch. In the very real balancing act of helping this child define himself as a reader, this thoughtful teacher had recognized that his motivation and engagement with the text did not depend strictly on the leveling system. Instead, he was eager to deal with a more challenging text that helped him view himself as a successful reader. Teachers will probably always deal with tension between policy mandates, testing and leveling procedures, and the very real feelings of the children. Certainly, choosing appropriate texts for

children will always be a part of that balancing act. However, this research study and my own observations both demonstrate that a close examination of our practices and of their implications for children's perceptions of themselves as readers will continue to be important.

*About the author/editor: Dr. Linda McElroy is an associate professor at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma. She previously taught in Oklahoma schools as a classroom teacher and reading specialist.*

# Technology

## Jiening Ruan, Ph.D.
## Column Editor

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## Developing & Implementing a WebQuest
### By
### Staci L. Vollmer, Jodie Cook, and Wen-Po Hsiao
### University of Oklahoma

**Editor's Note:** *Staci L. Vollmer, Jodie Cook, and Wen-Po Hsiao are master's students in the Reading/Literacy College of Education, The University of Oklahoma, at Norman, Oklahoma.*

### What is a WebQuest?

According to Bernie Dodge (2007), one of the creators of WebQuest, "a WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the internet." In the mid 1990s, Bernie Dodge and Tom Marsh started to develop WebQuests to help students focus on using information and encourage critical thinking without them having to spend vast amounts of time looking for and narrowing down appropriate information on a topic. WebQuests help learners use their time well and support higher level thinking skills such as analysis,

synthesis, and evaluation. They are grounded in constructivism and universal design for learning theories.

Common components of a WebQuest include but are not limited to the following: introduction, task, process, resources, evaluation, and conclusion. The "introduction" page serves the same purposes of an opening in a traditional lesson plan where students are given a preview of what they will learn. The introduction also serves as what many would call a "hook" in a traditional lesson plan. The introduction should stimulate the interest of students and have information that is relevant to and outlines a purpose for students. It should also be visually interesting and fun. The "task" page provides a description of what students are expected to have completed at the end of the WebQuest. It is important to provide students with choices and allow them to have input in developing the projects and assignments to be placed on the "task" page. This is also the place where WebQuest designers should consider differentiating instructional practices in an effort to accommodate all learners who engage in the WebQuest. The "process" page is where the teacher provides instructional input about the steps to be completed within the WebQuest. In order for students to have the greatest opportunity for success, the process should be broken down into clearly described steps. The "resources" page is a place where teachers put links to all of the preselected resources students will need to complete the projects and assignments. The "evaluation" page provides opportunity for teachers to share project rubric and other forms of evaluations for completing the projects and assignments within the WebQuest. It is important for students to understand how they will be evaluated from the beginning of the WebQuest. Finally, the "conclusion" page provides students with closure to the quest. It reminds students about what they have learned as well as possibly providing opportunities for learning that extends beyond the scope of the WebQuest.

## WebQuest Development

For a group project in the Literacy and Technology course offered at OU, we developed a WebQuest unit to enhance the literacy knowledge and skills of students with special needs in a high school English classroom. The WebQuest was designed to meet the learning needs of the students in that classroom. The teacher was getting ready to start teaching the Odyssey, a required reading for freshman English class in the school district. Therefore, the WebQuest was designed to give students an introduction to the Odyssey and Greek Mythology.

The components used for this WebQuest are as follows: home page, introduction page, 2 task pages, conclusion page, resources page, and a sitemap page. The home page serves as the title page with the name of the WebQuest and the names of the authors. On the introduction page, students are briefly introduced to Greek Mythology and the Odyssey. The two task pages feature the two assignments or "tasks" students are required to complete during the WebQuest. The first task is a scavenger hunt that leads students through various, teacher- previewed websites, in search of information about the Odyssey. The second task prompts students to create their own myth. Once students complete both tasks they are directed to the conclusion page where they are congratulated on completed the WebQuest. And finally, the last two pages, the resource page and the site map, provide a list of resources found within the WebQuest as well as a map to ensure trouble-free navigation of the WebQuest.

## WebQuest Implementation

As mentioned above, the WebQuest was designed for students with special needs in a freshman English class. There were a total of 11 students from two separate class periods that completed the WebQuest. All of the students were receiving special education services and being served in English and reading lab classes. There were ten male students and one female student. The teacher, certified in both secondary English and special education, has been teaching general education English, special education

English, and co-taught English classes for six years. She was extremely knowledge about the use of technology in the classroom and had previously used WebQuests.

Students were given two days to complete the WebQuest. In the first of the two class periods, students completed the WebQuest as a whole class working together with the guidance of the teacher. The WebQuest was displayed on the SmartBoard, and the teacher circulated the room to provide assistance as the students worked their way through each task. This instructional method worked well for this group of students because some of them would have experienced great difficulty reading, by themselves, some of the information presented on the websites during the scavenger hunt. Students from the other class period went to the school's computer lab and completed the WebQuest individually with guidance from the teacher.

## Implications for Practice

During the implementation of the WebQuest project, we found that the WebQuest was not only engaging for students but also could easily be adapted or modified to provide differentiated instruction to meet the needs of individual students. Throughout the implementation of the WebQuest, a couple teachable moments arose. The first teachable moment occurred during the discussion about myths when the teacher deviated from the WebQuest and took the time to demonstrate skills needed for effectively searching for information on the Internet and determining whether the information is creditable. The second teachable moment came when students offered to show the teacher how to get around the school's Internet filters to view the Youtube video when it was blocked by the school's Internet filtering system by chance in the second class period. The teacher declined the offer. By doing so, the teacher demonstrated to her students how important it is to follow the guidelines determined by the school. This might also have been a good time to discuss why these rules are in place and if they make sense. It could have led to students taking action to get some of the Internet usage rules in their school district updated as well.

Many WebQuests are available for teachers to use in their classrooms at WebQuest.org. This website offers a WebQuest for almost any subject imaginable for all age groups and ability levels. However, teachers can feel free to develop their own WebQuest as well to meet the needs of their instructional practices. The website has easy-to-navigate instructions for creating your own WebQuests, and you may even choose to submit your WebQuest for publication on the site. At the high school level, students could create their own WebQuest as an alternative to a written paper or a PowerPoint presentation.

### References
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## Teacher to Teacher
### By
### Marlo Lee

What do budding trees, blooming flowers, birds singing, and state testing have in common? Yes, spring, my absolute favorite time of year. I love the feeling of renewal as everything revives itself from a long winter's nap. Reflections of the school year and plans for the next consume my thoughts. Even as a young girl, I looked forward to spring, yearning for soft green grass and extended daylight.

Now as an adult and educator, my love for spring remains, but something besides the plush grass and vibrant flowers has me blooming. My Poetry Unit kicks off each year at the beginning of April. Since 1996, National Poetry Month-- celebrated each April and started by the Academy of American Poets-- celebrates poets and increases our awareness of the art of poetry.

In honor of National Poetry month, this spring edition of the Teacher to Teacher column focuses on poetry and how my colleagues and I use it in our classrooms to teach a plethora of reading, writing, and cross-curricular skills. We show how we get our students' creativity flowing and how we involve our parents in the process. Hopefully, you can take these ideas back to your classroom, put your own spin on them, and celebrate poetry with your students.

### Positively Powerful Poetry
Like most of the units I teach in my 5th grade classroom, my poetry unit consists of a compilation of resources from my favorite teacher websites, altered to suit my students' needs, kept in a binder with tabs for each lesson. Most of my favorite lessons came from the amazing educators' websites listed in the reference section of this article.

I begin my Poetry Unit by introducing the novel, *Out of the Dust,* by Karen Hesse, written in verse about the life of a girl during the Oklahoma dust bowl. Upon previewing the book, students quickly notice stanzas instead of paragraphs and the free verse style Hesse uses to portray the life of this young girl. We take two weeks to read the book as a class and respond through discussion and reader's response notebooks. Throughout the unit, students experience a wide variety of poems from favorite authors like Shel Silverstein, Bruce Lansky, Douglas Florian, and Jack Prelutsky. In no time, students demonstrate the ability to identify poems as patterned, free verse, or rhymed.

Next, a Poetry Book Rubric and parent note go home and must be signed by parents and students then returned so the parents and children know my expectations. The rubric I use is a rendition of one I found at www.mrsrenz.net. It lists the types of poems students will be writing, how many of each type they need to write, and the specific requirements concerning the final project. Students create alliteration poems, acrostic, haiku, cinquain, diamante, bio poems, concrete poems, and more. I highly recommend this website for anyone wanting to do their own poetry unit. Over the past two years, some requirements changed and different poems were added. The poetry unit on Mrs. Renz's site has a complete set of examples and directions for writing common forms of poetry.

My format introduces a new form of poetry each day or two. We read a variety of

examples (which are available at www.mrsrenz.net) and discuss them as a class. Next, we write our own poem together on an anchor chart as a shared writing experience. Students copy the poem and any notes in the poetry section of their writer's notebook where they keep their personal poetry collection until time for publishing. Finally, students work independently to create their own poems in their notebooks using our class poem and other example poems for support.

Numerous reading and writing skills are focus lessons throughout the unit. Literary devices such as similes, metaphors, idioms, personification, and hyperboles make perfect mini-lessons. More mini-lessons can focus on symbolism and imagery strengthening students' poem comprehension and improving students' overall reading and writing skills.

During all of this reading and creative writing, students busily type their poems and add illustrations using a word processor on our mobile computer lab. Poems are printed and kept in a file until their books can be assembled. When the unit is complete, their poetry books contain 20-30 original poems and include a book cover, table of contents, and critique and reflection pages.

I assess students using the rubric that was created at the beginning of the unit. Two others with whom they have shared their collection also critique their work. A self-reflection is included at the back of their books. I ask students to reflect on the poetry unit and include information such as what they liked the most and least, their favorite poem, and how their attitudes towards poetry changed from the beginning to the end of the unit.

As a culminating activity and a chance to build on listening and speaking skills, the students and I invite the parents to a Beatnik style Poetry Café. Students, dressed in black and wearing black berets and sunglasses, read aloud a few of their favorite original poems. We decorate using battery operated tea candles, black tablecloths and party-ware, and serve refreshments like cookies and lemonade and coffee. Of course, instead of applauding when a student finishes, we snap

our fingers as they did in the first poetry cafes. Ideas for my "Poetry Café" presentation came from Beth Newingham in a *Top Teaching* blog on www.scholastic.com. Her blog not only gives detailed information on how to set up the poetry café, but includes outstanding printable resources like posters, banners, and literary device place cards used as decorations. Using a separate rubric, students are evaluated on their speaking and listening skills during the presentation.



## Fun with Cinquain
By Rebeka Vaughn

*Mrs. Vaughn's 4th Grade class at Ketchum Elementary also celebrates National Poetry Month in April. Here she tells how her favorite poetry lesson was created and how you can recreate the lesson with your students.*

In preparation to teach my students how to write a cinquain poem, I decided to write one about each of my three young daughters. I had no idea what effect these poems would have on my students. They went crazy over them!  One student questioned, "I wonder what my parents would write about me?" That is when the idea hit me. I decided to foster my students' enthusiasm by sending "homework" for their parents.

I typed the parents a letter asking them to write a cinquain poem about their son or daughter and return the assignment to school the next day. The instructions included one of the poems I had written and step-by-step directions for creating the very strict five- lined

poem. Students were asked to "teach" the lesson to their parents and offer support as they penned the poems.

For the rest of the period, students worked on writing a cinquain about their best friend. Since character traits was a major focus for us in reading and writing this year, it was interesting to observe my students as they assigned character traits to their friends and how they made connections between them and the characters we studied in class. This idea came from http://www.lauracandler.com/ filecabinet/literacyfiles.php.

The next day, each student returned with their parents' homework assignment completed. Students took turns sharing the cinquain poems aloud. They turned out absolutely adorable! The kids had a ball listening to what each parent said about their child. Best of all, students were excited about writing. Giving the students the role of the teacher was a great way for students to apply their knowledge of writing a cinquain poem. This will be one of my treasured lessons for years to come.

## We Can Haiku, Can You?
### By Shalon Sharpe

*Mrs. Sharpe's 1st grade class at Ketchum Elementary celebrates National Poetry Month as they study Asia as part of their study of the seven continents. Below she describes how her 1st graders master the 5-7-5 pattern of the Japanese Haiku.*

The last seven weeks of the school year I take my first graders on a trip around the world. We "visit" each continent, one continent at a time. We learn about the culture, language, and what it is like to be a child from various parts of that continent.

When we explored Asia, we learned about the Lady and the Moon festival that the children celebrate each year. One important part of this festival is children write poems to the Lady in the Moon. This is the perfect time to introduce Haiku poetry to my class, and it is just in time for National Poetry Month.

When I do this lesson with the students, I am doing so much more than teaching a type of Japanese poetry. Haiku poems have three lines that follow a 5-7-5 syllable pattern. This gives my students the opportunity to practice counting syllables in words and phrases. They are also using visualization strategies and applying the use of descriptive language. Sharing their poems with their classmates strengthens their listening and speaking skills as well.

When it is time to write the Haiku poems, the children follow the five step writing process. They brainstorm topics and choose their favorite. They write several drafts and work through the editing process. Finally, they write their Haiku on a Japanese lantern and hang them in the hall for the entire school to read. My students feel a connection to Asian first graders and become excited about culture and writing!



### References

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*Have you ever reviewed articles for a journal or newsletter?*     Yes     No

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*Circle the areas that you could review articles about. These areas should be ones on which you have expertise or special interest.*

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Comprehension strategies          Phonics/word work          Phonological awareness

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*List any publications you have or presentations that you have made.*
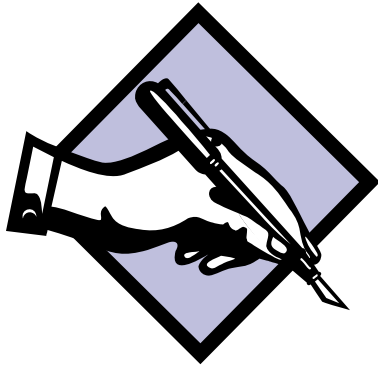
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Write about it for **The Oklahoma Reader.**

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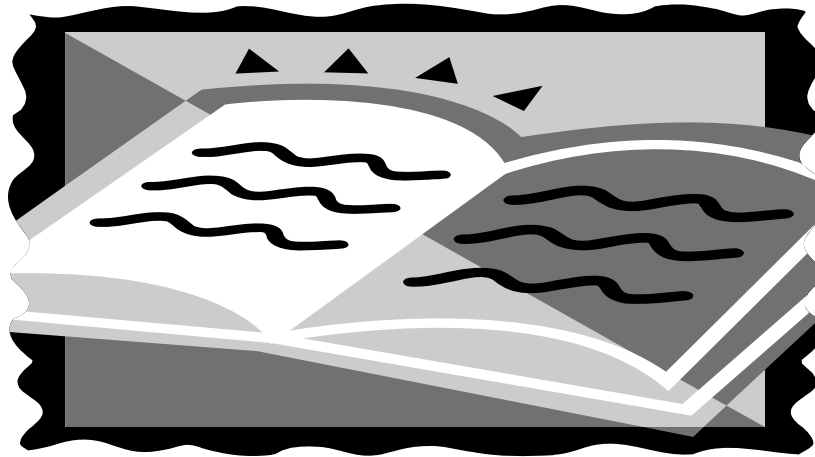
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## Guidelines for Authors

Authors are requested to submit only unpublished articles not under review by any other publication. A manuscript (1500-3500 words) should be typed in Ariel font, pt. 11, single spaced, not right justified, not hyphenated, and should follow APA, 6th Edition guidelines (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association). Tables and graphs should be used only when absolutely necessary. Include a cover page giving the article title, professional affiliation, complete address, e-mail, and phone number of the author(s). Special sections have specific requirements which are described below. The editors reserve the right to edit all copy.

Submit the manuscript electronically as either a Word or rich text file attached to an e-mail message. The e-mail message should include information about which section the manuscript is being submitted for (articles, Teacher to Teacher, Teacher Research, Research Summary, and Professional Resources), the title of the manuscript, and a brief description of the topic. All correspondence regarding the manuscript will be electronic. Send manuscripts to **Vickie Caudle, Editorial Assistant, at <u>caudlev@nsuok.edu</u>.**

*Teacher to Teacher:* Submit descriptions of teaching activities that have helped students learn an essential literacy skill, concept, strategy, or attitude. Submissions should be no longer than 1500 words, typed and double-spaced, and follow the following format:
 - Title (if adapting from another source, cite reference and provide a bibliography.
 - Purpose of activity, including the literacy skill, concept, strategy, or attitude the students will learn.
 - Description of activity with examples, questions, responses. Please provide enough detail so someone else can implement the activity.
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*Teacher Research:* Submit manuscripts that describe research or inquiry conducted in classrooms. Submissions should be 1000-2000 words, typed and double-spaced following guidelines of the APA, 6th Edition, and follow this format:
 - Description of the question or issue guiding the research/inquiry, including a short review of pertinent literature
 - Description of who participated in the study, what the sources of data were, how the data were gathered and examined.
 - Description of the findings and conclusions from the research/inquiry.

*Research Summary:* Submit manuscripts that summarize either one current published piece of research or two to three related studies. Submissions should be 1000-1500 words, typed and double-spaced following guidelines of the APA, 6th Edition, and following this format:
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 - Discuss the implications of the study or studies for classroom teachers. The implications could include a discussion of what the study told us about literacy learners and literacy learning and/or what the study implies teachers should do to support learning.

*Professional Resources:* Submit reviews of professional resources of interest to teachers or reading specialists. Resources reviewed could include books for teachers, books for children, curriculum packages, computer programs or other technology, or games for children. Reviews of technology will be forwarded to Dr. Jiening Ruan, editor of the Technology and Literacy column for her review. Submissions should be 500-1000 words, typed and double-spaced following guidelines of the APA, 6th Edition, and following this format:
 - Title, author, publisher of the resource.
 - Short description of the resource.
 - Critical review of the resource, including strengths and weaknesses.
 - Short discussion of how the resource might be useful to a teacher.