

FLA JOURNAL
WINTER 2023

THE POWER OF PERSEVERANCE AND LITERACY:

Inquiry During Unprecedented
Times



Message from FLA President, Jennifer Bacchiochi

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to introduce the next edition of the *Florida Literacy Journal*! The *Journal* is an important avenue for helping the Florida Literacy Association fulfill its mission to *promote quality literacy instruction, clarify educational issues for decision makers, support research in literacy, and advocate life-long reading*. We know that as you explore the articles in the *Journal* you will find those that relate to each facet of the mission. We are extremely grateful to those who contributed to this edition and to our editors, Dr. Elsie L. Olan and Dr. Rebecca Powell who organized this edition into the valuable resource that it is for educators.

FLA is a thriving organization and I would personally like to thank all of the dedicated volunteers who serve on our board, cabinet, and committees. We recently wrapped up our 58th annual conference, which served as our first face-to-face learning event since 2019. With over five-hundred attendees, it was a SUNsational event, chaired by Dr. Laurie Lee, and full of learning, laughter, and love of literacy. Over thirty future teachers were also in attendance at the conference; representing hope for our profession and inspiration for the future of literacy in our state.

As the 2022-2023 president of FLA I would like to personally invite you to continue your journey as an FLA member. Please continue to take advantage of our virtual Power Hour sessions. The professional learning committee continues to round up an incredible line up. Stay informed and follow us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram (@FLAReads) for the most current Power Hour information. When the time comes, FLA hopes you will renew your membership for the 2023-2024 year via www.flareads.org and stay tuned for information about our 59th annual conference!

As we round third on yet another school year, please know that you are appreciated for the work you do. We represent a variety of roles and I know we are collectively committed to bringing positive and powerful energy into our students' literacy landscapes. Continue to respect your dedication to the work and the students you serve. As you explore the pages of this journal, let yourself connect to the ideas and find opportunities to reflect on your practice as a literacy educator.

Enjoy and thanks for all that you do!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Bacchiochi
2022-2023 FLA President

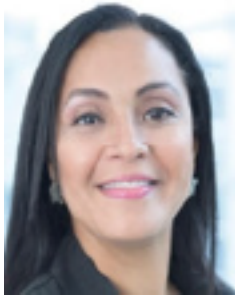


Message from FLJ Editors

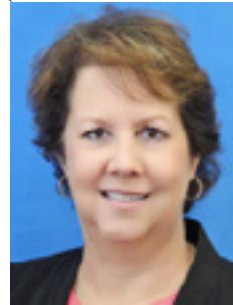
As we continue to venture during these unprecedented times, we examine critical issues in this edition of the *Florida Literacy Journal*. Articles in this issue explore teaching and race, using culturally relevant texts, transdisciplinary literacy, Florida's B.E.S.T. standards, exploring critical issues in children's literature, critical thinking instructional strategies, and literacy instruction and intervention across the curriculum. As we envision the future, it is time for us to share transformative classroom practices and for teachers to have a voice in educational research and decision-making. As you explore these articles, we hope that you will ponder how, if at all, these initiatives and trends influence, affect, or alter your classroom practices. As Editors of the *FLJ*, we take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to authors who have chosen *FLJ* to disseminate their research and practice. Further, we would like to thank Joyce Warner, our vice-chair and publications chair, reviewers, and other supporting staff for the success of this journal. We are more than happy to receive contributions for our next issue from teachers, doctoral candidates, teacher-educator researchers, advocates of teaching and learning, and scholars to ensure the consistency and the success of the *Florida Literacy Journal*.

Wishing health and safety to all,

Elsie Lindy Olan
(University of Central Florida)



Rebecca Lovering Powell
(Florida Southern College)





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Call for Manuscripts:

The editors invite submissions of manuscripts for *The Florida Literacy Journal*, the refereed journal of the Florida Literacy Association. We invite submissions geared toward improving literacy instruction and innovation at all levels with a firm grounding in current theory and research. Suggested topics include literacy project descriptions, research or theoretical pieces with pedagogical implications, or issue-centered pieces addressing timely literacy topics of local, state or national interest. Preference is given to articles that most directly impact Florida learners. While theoretical and research articles are invited, please keep in mind that this is a journal primarily for FLA members, who are predominantly practicing teachers and literacy specialists. We encourage articles from PK-12 and adult-level practitioners, literacy researchers and doctoral students, as well as articles written by other experts in the field.

The *Florida Literacy Journal's* audience is largely composed of PK-12 practitioners in the state of Florida. The FLJ editors are interested in exploring topics of interest to Florida educators and valuable in their daily literacy practices. We welcome submissions from researchers as well as PK-12 teachers. The thematic calls listed below are not intended to be exhaustive, but merely meant to be helpful to authors as they consider topics for publication. Please review the submission guidelines before submitting a manuscript.

Submission Guidelines are online at: <http://flareads.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FLJ-CallForSubmissions2020.pdf>

APA 7th edition in the Call for Manuscript Guidelines https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html.

Ongoing Annual Theme: Florida Standards in Action

FLJ has an ongoing interest in submissions related to the implementation of the Florida's B.E.S.T. Standards. Manuscripts that highlight how individual teachers have adapted their instruction to integrate the arts, technology, and the content areas are of particular interest. We also have interest in articles that discuss how districts have addressed the challenges and lessons learned related to the implementation of Florida's B.E.S.T. Standards

Ongoing Call for Book Reviews

FLJ has an ongoing interest in reviews of professional texts related to teaching and the themed calls for 2022-23. Reviews should be between 750-1000 words and should offer an overview of the book, not a detailed synopsis or an in-depth essay. Examples of published book reviews can be found in previous editions of FLJ.

**Florida's Backyards: Using Trade Books to Develop Elementary Students' Environmental
Literacy**

Melissa Parks, PhD

Stetson University.

Abstract

This article provides classroom teachers a list of eleven award winning trade books intended to introduce and strengthen elementary students' environmental literacy. The aim of the piece is to inspire classroom teachers to refresh their classroom library, spend some time reading with their class, and explore how small actions can make an impact on the natural world.

Keywords: trade books, environmental literacy

In the fall of 2021, the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP 26) brought together 120 world leaders and over 40,000 registered participants, including party delegates, observers and media representatives and produced the Glasgow Climate Pact (United Nations, 2021). In 2022, United Nations Climate Change Conference in Sharm El Sheikh (COP 27) brought together 100 heads of state and approximately 35,000 delegates (United Nations, 2022). While multiple outcomes of the conference have been noted, two of the most pressing were the need to recognize the emergency of climate change and accelerate action. The call was clear- everyone can do something. For educators, that meant sharing information, building an appreciation of, and creating opportunities to take action for the natural world. Florida's educators have the opportunity to teach about the natural world, both aquatic and terrestrial, that in our backyards. While there is no substitution for a *being-there* experience, those opportunities are not always possible. When that is the case, trade books can bring the outside into the classroom.

Quality trade books can serve as a springboard to introduce and develop environmental literacy. Under the broad umbrella of environmental education, teachers can apply content literacy instruction and build a foundation for environmental literacy by engaging students with award winning nonfiction and picture books focused on environmental issues in Florida's backyard. By framing all readings and activities under the term of environmental education, teachers can elevate discussions and lead activities that may, but not exclusively, boost academic learning and build the knowledge, skills, and intentions to adopt pro-environmental behaviors (Ardoin et al., 2020; Kuo *et al.*, 2019). Applying content literacy instruction can be useful in developing content specific vocabulary and domain knowledge for elementary students (Kim *et al.*, 2021). Threading science content and process with environmental literacy may help students develop an understanding of environmental issues and buttress that understanding with strategies to act in pro-environmental ways to develop their personal environmental stewardship.

While all reading is rewarding, not all books are created equally. Sifting through the vast assortment of environmentally themed trade books available can be time consuming and daunting. The process for vetting trade books for both their science content and literary quality can be arduous and intimidating (Mahzoon-Hagheghi, 2018). Careful, intentional selection of trade books is an important step when determining which books to use as a classroom tool to promote environmental literacy. By using award-winning texts from the Outstanding Science Trade Books, Orbis Pictus, and International Literacy Association's Teachers' Choices to promote environmental awareness for students, teachers select quality books that can be used to support the development of environmental literacy with their students. The book selections

suggested below offer an entry point for classroom teachers to broaden students' environmental literacy.

High quality resources can ignite curiosity, spark conversation and open the door to exploration and concept development. High quality trade books can be a tool to practice critical thinking skills, use content-based vocabulary, and engage in meaningful discussions, and, in some cases, actions (International Literacy Association, 2019). Purposefully exposing students to intentionally selected texts, allows students to see themselves in the book and enables teachers to facilitate multi-layered discussions of the selected text (International Literacy Association, Power and Promise, 2018). Activities and texts presented here are designed to develop students' critical thinking skills, integrate literacy and science content and process skills, and promote meaningful, content-based conversations about the natural world. Books and activities are intentionally selected and designed to promote pro-environmental attitudes and instill environmental stewardship both of which can inform students' developing environmental literacy. Texts suggested are optimistic and hopeful, intentionally avoiding presenting environmental issues in dramatic or overwhelming ways to avoid prompting feelings of helpless and fear which could result in eco-phobia (Strife, 2012).

Framing the Books and Activities

Environmental literacy includes the abilities to define, learn about, evaluate, and act on environmental issues (K–12 Environmental Education: Guidelines for Excellence | Executive Summary, 2019). The activities suggested below are based on the North American Association of Environmental Education's *Guidelines for Excellence: Best Practices in Environmental*

Education framework for developing environmental literacy and the Next Generation Science Standards.

Table 1
Best Practices in Environmental Education

Strand	Descriptor
Strand 1. Questioning, Analysis, and Interpretation Skills	Environmental literacy relies on individual's ability to ask questions, speculate, and hypothesize about the world and seek information and develop answers questions.
Strand 2. Environmental Processes and Systems	Environmental literacy requires an understanding of the processes and systems that comprise the environment
Strand 3. Skills for Understanding and Addressing Environmental Issues	Environmental literacy calls for skills to define, learn about, evaluate, and act on environmental issues.
Strand 4. Personal and Civic Responsibilities	Environmental literacy depends on one's willingness and ability to act on their own conclusions about what should be done to ensure environmental quality.

The *Guidelines for Excellence: Best Practices in Environmental Education* framework for developing environmental literacy uses four strands for developing effective environmental education opportunities.

The Next Generation Science Standards share what students should know and be able to do in grades K-12. Within those standards, fundamental ideas to be taught over multiple grade levels and at various levels of complexity are expressed as Disciplinary Core Ideas. Books selected for this guide can support the content expressed in Core Idea ESS3: Earth and Human Activity which has subsections including, but not limited to, natural resources and human impacts on Earth systems (National Research Council Dimension 3, Disciplinary Core Ideas- Earth and Space Science, 2012).

According to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) (2013) and the Florida's B.E.S.T. ELA Standards (2022), there are multiple overlapping areas between science and ELA standards, including, but not limited to; making inferences, thinking critically, posing questions, comparing and contrasting, providing explanations from evidence, and determining cause and effect. Using an interdisciplinary approach, where content in one domain (reading) is used to support learning in another domain (science), facilitates meaningful, content-rich learning experiences.

Integrating literacy and the content area instruction (science) offers great potential for maximizing students' understanding of specific content-related concepts while engaging them as readers and writers (Atkinson *et al.*, 2009). Further, instilling a sense of wonder and enthusiasm for science and creating opportunities for students to learn about issues personally relevant to them leads to a well-informed person, citizenry and ultimately, society (National Science Teaching Association, 2019). Literacy integration allows students to make intertextual connections within texts, experiences, and discussions and those connections help develop their understanding of science concepts (Fang & Wei, 2010). An internationally selected trade book can deepen students' reading comprehension skills, enhance vocabulary development and spark enthusiasm for reading and content (Wallace & Coffey, 2016).

The Books

Books and activities are arranged first by title, author, type of book and award received. Recommended grade levels, a brief summary, and suggested activity that pairs science content in the book with a complimentary extended learning experience follow. Activities outlined challenge students to think about the science and environmental implications while applying

B.E.S.T. (2022), ELA skills of reading informational text and communicating information about that text. The 21st Century skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009) of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity are practiced with the completion of the activities. Activities use multimodal expressions of concepts, including drawing, making models, oral and written representation to help students solidify and express their understanding of content while allowing teachers to address misconceptions and differentiate as needed.

The Importance of Oceans (four books).

This collection shares information about life below the waves.

<u>If Sharks Disappeared</u> . Lily Williams.	
Picture book. Nonfiction (40 pgs.)	
2018 Recommended Orbis Pictus Book	
Grades	K-5
Summary	This book shares the interconnected implications for numerous species, including humans, if sharks disappeared and oceans are not protected.
Science Big Idea	Interdependence of species
Environmental Focus	Conservation
Activity	Explore the trophic level of the marine food chain in this activity food chain photo
Educator Resource	<u>PBS offers a collection of video simulations (younger students) and several activities (full lesson plans) that explore the importance of sharks in the ocean ecosystem</u> https://www.pbs.org/kqed/oceanadventures/educators/sharks/

The Brilliant Deep. Kate Messner.

Picture book.
Nonfiction (48 pgs.)

2019 Outstanding Science Trade Book

Grades K-5

Summary This book shares the story of Ken Nedimyer, the founder of the Coral Restoration Foundation. The book describes his hope, and action, to repopulate staghorn coral in the Atlantic, off the coast of the Florida Keys

Science Big Idea Interdependence of species

Environmental Focus Conservation & Action

Activity Zoom with the Coral Restoration Foundation for an interactive, live session, in your classroom: <https://www.coralrestoration.org/education>

Educator Resource [Learn more about the importance of coral in the ocean ecosystem: https://coral.org/en/coral-reefs-101/why-care-about-reefs/](https://coral.org/en/coral-reefs-101/why-care-about-reefs/)
For life experience- check out Coral Camp offered in Key West: <https://www.reefrelief.org/coral-camp-2022/>

The Coral Kingdom. Laura Knowles.

Picture book.
Nonfiction (32 pgs.)

2019 Outstanding Science Trade Book

Grades K-5

Summary Using rhyme, this book shares the life cycle, diversity of and threats to coral reefs.

Science Big Idea Interdependence of species

Environmental Focus Conservation

Activity	<p>Make an infomercial to share on the morning announcements describing the importance of healthy coral reefs. Students synthesize information from <i>The Coral Kingdom</i>, <i>The Brilliant Deep</i> and the Coral Restoration site.</p> <p>For those living near the coast, the Coral Reef Alliance shares direction on how to build a rain garden to help reduce run-off from entering the ocean (adult help required). https://coral.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CORAL_SafeguardCoralReefs_RainGardens.pdf</p> <p>Students make models of healthy and disturbed coral reefs and explain the harms contributing to declining coral health.</p>
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<u>Plasticus Maritimus: An Invasive Species.</u> Ana Pêgo.	
Nonfiction (171 pgs.)	
2021 Outstanding Science Trade Book	
Grades	4 & up
Summary	Biologist Ana Pêgo shares her life’s work finding, tracking, and trying to reduce ocean plastics. The book traces how plastic ends up in rivers, lakes, and oceans and shares solutions for its reduction and removal. The book also includes a field guide to help readers understand all the assorted types of plastic found in our waterways.
Science Big Idea	Ocean Ecosystem
Environmental Focus	Plastic Pollution
Activity	Conduct a Plastic Scavenger hunt on the school campus. Brainstorm ways in which the single use plastics can be reduced.
Educator Resource	Participate in a beach, river, or lake clean-up- https://oceanconservancy.org/trash-free-seas/international-coastal-cleanup/cleanswell/

Bees, Bugs & Birds in the Backyard (five books)

This collection offer entry points into discussions about the importance of pollinators and shares how adaptations help survival.

<u>Moth: An Evolution Story. Isabel Thomas.</u>	
Nonfiction (48 pgs.)	
2019 Outstanding Science Trade Book	
Grades	2-5
Summary	Sharing the story of the peppered moth, this book highlights the connections between the human and natural world as the peppered moth adapts to its surroundings during the Industrial Revolution.
Science Big Idea	Adaption
Environmental Focus	Human Impact
Activity	<p>Vi Virtual Peppered Moth Simulation- https://askabiologist.asu.edu/peppered-moths-game/play.html. Discussion questions to support simulation & associated readings: https://www.biologycorner.com//worksheets/pepperedmoth.html</p> <p>Students can diagram two peppered moths, with different coloration, in a setting of their choosing. Students explain how the coloration helped, or hurt, the moth's survival.</p>

Honeybee: The Busy Life of Apis Melliera. Candace Fleming.

Picture book
Nonfiction (40 pgs.)

2019 Orbis Pictus Honor Book

Grades K-5

Summary Sharing both the life cycle and plight of the honeybee, this text compliments the story of the honeybee with beautiful illustrations.

Science Big Idea Pollination

Environmental Focus Conversation

Activity Build Bee Hotel- <https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/gardening-with-wildlife/pollinator-hotels.html>

Educator Resource Learn more about planting a bee friendly garden: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN1255>

The Bee Book. Charlotte Milner.

Picture book
Nonfiction (48 pgs.)

2019 Outstanding Science Trade Book

Grades K-3

Summary Large illustrations share foundational information about bees, their lifecycles and their role as pollinators.

Science Big Idea Pollination

Environmental Focus Conversation

Activity Plant a Pollinator Garden- Students research plant species native to their area and collaborate to build a school, or home, pollinator garden. Local horticulturalists and nursery owners can visit as guest speakers.

Educator Resource	Learn more about planting a pollinator friendly garden: https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/pollinators/gardening.shtml Bees, butterflies and birds all benefit.
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Belle’s Journey: An Osprey Takes Flight. Rob Bierregaard

Nonfiction (112 pgs.)	
2019 Outstanding Science Trade Book	
Grades	4 & up
Summary	After being tagged as a chick, scientists track Belle’s journey from Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts, to Brazil as she learns the ups & down of Osprey life.
Science Big Idea	Life Cycle
Environmental Focus	Conversation
Activity	Watch an osprey hatch from its egg with the Cornell Lab Bird Cam: https://youtu.be/yGPxT98vGjI Create a backyard or school bird watching tally sheet. Share information to make a community collective graph representing how may local birds were observed in a given period.
Educator Resource	The Audubon Society offers outreach program (local dependent). https://cbop.audubon.org/programs/education

Audubon Birding Adventure for Kids: Activities and Ideas for Watching and Housing Our Feathered Friends. Elissa Wolfson and Margaret Baker.

Picture book Nonfiction (96 pgs.)	
2021 Outstanding Science Trade Book	
Grades	K-5
Summary	Using maps and information chunked into small tidbits, this book gives tips on bird observations, habitats, food, and shelter.
Science Big Idea	Pollination

Environmental Focus	Conversation
Activity	<u>Take a bird walk and tally what is seen. Compare birds observed at home or school to birds observed at a local park or natural area.</u>
Educator Resource	Apps from the Audubon Bird Guide or Merlin Bird Identification by Cornell Lab are helpful for identifying species.

Taking Action (two books)

Environmental literary begins with increasing understanding of the natural world and discovering one’s place in it. These final two suggestions offer readers a peek at people who took action- some as children.

<u>Marjory Saves the Everglades: The Story of Marjory Stoneman Douglas.</u> Sandra Neil Wallace.	
Picture book (56 pgs.)	
2020 Outstanding Science Trade Book	
Grades	K-5
Summary	This book documents how one woman, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, saw the beginning of the destruction of the Everglades and took action.
Science Big Idea	Human Impact
Environmental Focus	Preservation
Activity	Take a virtual tour of Everglades National Park https://www.nps.gov/ever/learn/kidsyouth/learning-about-the-everglades.htm <u>Identify a personality trait exemplified by Stoneman-Douglas and explain how that trait enabled her to act as an environmental steward. Use information from the text to support the claim.</u>
Educator Resource	Student friendly information on the Everglades can be found: https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/nature/article/everglades

Old Enough to Save the Planet. Loll Kirby.

Picture book (32 pgs.)	
2021 Outstanding Science Trade Book	
Grades	K-5
Summary	This book shares the stories of twelve young environmental activists who identified local environmental concerns in their neighborhoods and created solutions to the issues.
Science Big Idea	Human Impact
Environmental Focus	Human Impact
Activity	In small groups, brainstorm any local environmental issues students feel are in need of attention. Brainstorm what action, if any, students can do to given attention to the issue.
Educator Resource	<p><u>These sites offer a collection of print and electronic resources and games introducing elementary-aged students to climate change.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids Against Climate Change. https://kidsagainstclimatechange.co/start-learning/. • National Geographic Changing Climate Teachers Guide (grades 3-8): https://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/changing-climate/ • Climate Reality Project & National Geographic small poster https://www.climaterealityproject.org/sites/default/files/APR%2018%20NGK-Climate%20Change%20tips_0.pdf • American Museum of Natural History- What can children do? https://www.amnh.org/explore/ology/biodiversity/how-to-help-biodiversity2

Conclusion

Books are powerful tools. When paired with robust classroom discussions, hands-on collaborative multimodal activities, students can apply their understanding as they develop their environmental literacy. As students learn about the natural world and their place in it, they may also develop a sense of environment stewardship and behaviors (Monroe, *et al.*, 2019). Further experiences in environmental education may lead to improving academic growth, enhancing

critical thinking skills and developing personal skills such as autonomy, confidence and leadership (Ardoin, 2018).

Reading about and interacting with the natural world may help support students' academic achievement by helping them retain subject matter content, develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and increase their environmental stewardship, including their personal connection to nature, and stronger pro-environmental behaviors (Kuo, et al., 2019). The possibilities are endless. Let's pick up a book, talk about it and go outside to do something for Florida's backyards.

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Author’s Biography

Melissa Parks, PhD, is an associate professor of education in the Stetson University Department of Education. Dr. Parks believes there is no substitute for being outside and is passionate about supporting students as they learn about the natural world and develop their environmental identity and personal stewardship. Dr. Parks served on the National Science Teaching Association Outstanding Science Trade book award committee, the National Science Teaching Association Preschool and Elementary Teaching Committee and is an Area Director for the Florida Association of Science Teachers. She can be reached at mparks@stetson.edu.

Did you get the Wordle today?: Playing a Viral Internet Game to Build Word Knowledge

Jenifer Jasinski Schneider, Ph.D

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Abstract

How can a 5x6 grid of empty boxes turn into a spelling lesson of the day? It's Wordle—a simple, five-letter guessing game that creates opportunities for word study. In this article, I demonstrate how teachers can adapt Wordle to meet the needs of different students. Specifically, Wordle provides a daily mystery word and the structure for a guessing game; however, teachers can make the game more systematic to support orthography or phonics instruction. Playing word games might be new to some students; and teachers can build in opportunities for success for all.

Keywords: word games, orthography, phonics

Did you get the Wordle today?: Playing a Viral Internet Game to Build Word Knowledge

When little collections of green, gold, and gray boxes started appearing across social media sites, they were mysterious. What is a Wordle? What do the boxes mean? What do the colors and the numbers indicate? I first read about Wordle in the New York Times, and I've played with my family, my mom, and my students ever since (Figure 1).

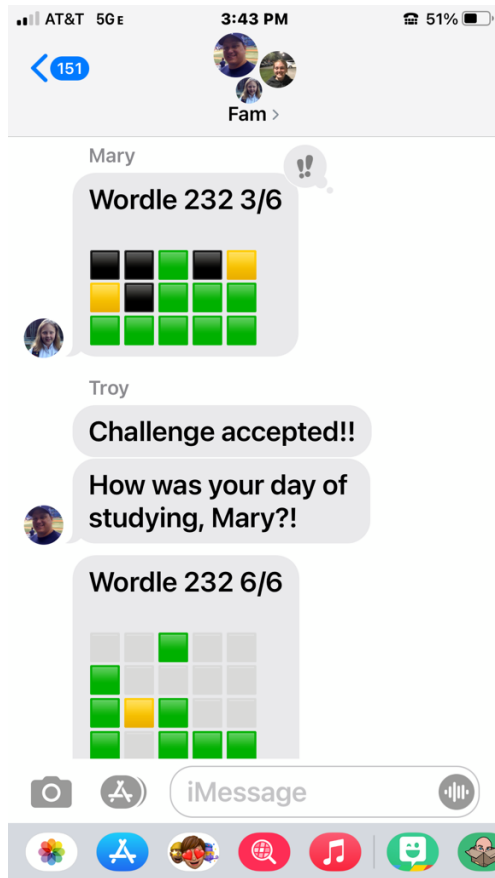


Figure 1. Family text chat.

Wordle is a word guessing game, invented by Josh Wardle as a pandemic gift for his partner, Palak Shah (Victor, 2022). Wordle gives a player six chances to guess a five-letter mystery word of the day. With each guess, Wordle provides clues about the correctness of each letter.

If you play Wordle, then you are familiar with the strategies players use to win. In this article, I outline those strategies and sort them into routines that teachers can use with students of any age and in a variety of settings-- whole group, small group, individual play. I also provide suggestions for word solving and transdisciplinary playing across digital and analog spaces.

Integrated English Orthography

Wordle, as a puzzle game, requires knowledge of English orthography combined with the problem-solving skills necessary to engage in a process of elimination. Wordle is a game in which context clues *do not* help, but patterns and derivational relations are essential for solving the word. Therefore, teachers can use Wordle to build knowledge of letters and letter patterns and adapt game play to widen instructional choices to focus on phonics, syllables, affixes, and derivational relations (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2020).

Rule 1: Use Real Words

Each guess must be a real word. According to Victor (2022), Josh Wardle identified about 12,000 five-letter words in the English language. He then asked his partner, Ms. Shah, to sort the words and remove the ones she did not know. She whittled the list down to 2,500 words, and those selected words form the Wordle bank. If a player uses a fake word or accidentally misspells a word, creating a non-word, then Wordle will reject the attempt. Players do not lose a turn, which is a great feature of the game.

Rule 2: Repeated Letters are Allowed

Wordle allows for repeated letters in the same word (e.g., BOOTH). Players need to keep this in mind when they are solving each attempt.

Rule 3: Only One Game Per Day, Be Strategic

Players can use a variety of strategies to solve the mystery word. Wordle is partly a game of frequency prediction, spelling strategies, and word knowledge. (More on the math benefits later.) With each guess, Wordle gives the player feedback on every letter.

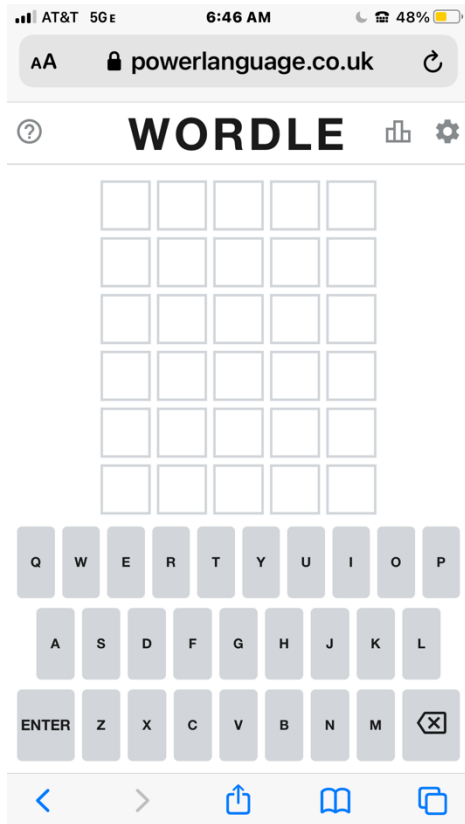


Figure 2. Wordle opens with blank boxes.

Using Clues to Support Orthographic Knowledge

Wordle opens as a matrix of blank boxes (Figure 2). Players type a word and hit enter (Note: *Enter* is located on the left side of the alphabet tray, preventing accidental submissions). With each guess, Wordle gives the player feedback using one of three color clues (green, gold, gray) for each box (5 letters = 5 boxes = 5 clues). Players win when all letters are green (Figure 3).

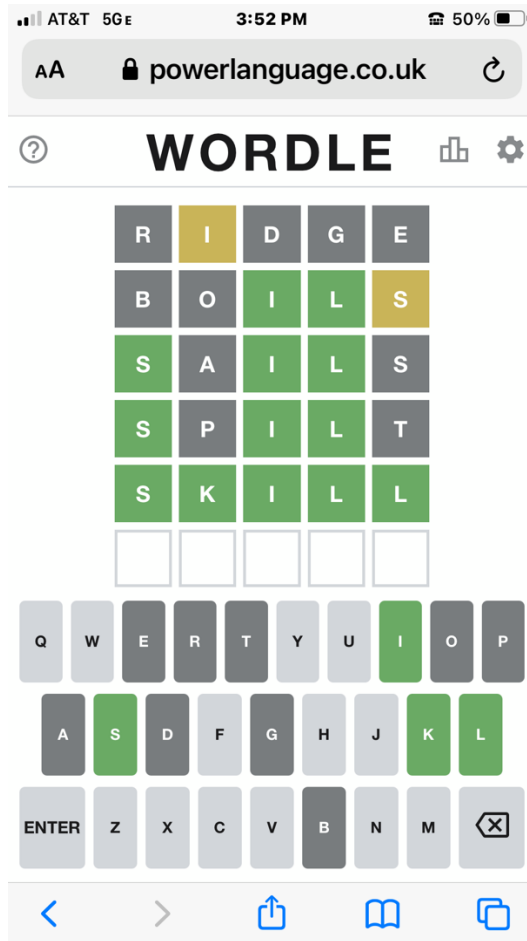


Figure 3. Sample of winning wordle and color cues.

Green Letters

If a letter is green, the letter is part of the mystery word, and it is positioned in the correct place. Perfect! Leave that letter alone. If the player retains the green letter in the same place for subsequent guesses, Wordle calls this “hard” mode because it is harder to make meaningful and connected guesses based on the evidence rather than trying another random word as an attempt to eliminate other letters of the alphabet.

Golden Letters

If a letter is golden, the letter is located in the mystery word, but it's in the wrong place. Use the letter again, but in a different place in the word. Here's where word patterns come in handy. There are certain patterns that work together at the beginning and ending of words. For example, if the second letter is R, then the first letter is likely to blend with R (BR, DR, CR, etc.).

Dark Gray Letters

If a letter is dark gray, the letter is not in the word. Don't use this letter again. If you follow this rule, the game is more challenging. And, more importantly, focusing on green and gold letters turns the game into an opportunity for learning.

The Alphabet Tray

The alphabet is listed at the bottom of Wordle, arranged like a keyboard. The letters change colors to correspond to the correctness of match each guess, providing clues to indicate how each letter has been used.

Game Play

Starting Options

To focus on word knowledge, there are three ways to start a Wordle.

Same word each day. Choose the same 5-letter word every day. This strategy is for the odds makers and the mathematicians in the crowd. Players who start with the same word are focused on the process of elimination and frequencies of letters (See Sidhu, 2022). This works for math lessons. But to build spelling and word knowledge, and to add interest, I like to choose different ways to start.

Strategic word. Players may pick a random 5-letter word to begin. Any 5-letter word can start a Wordle, but it's best to choose a word that does not have repeating letters. For example, I would choose shout rather than shoot because I want five clues, one for each letter. As a player I do not waste clues on repeating letters. And although the mystery word can have the same letter more than once, at the beginning of the game, I want five different clues. Your starting word provides a lot of information.

- Heavy consonant words: SLANT (find out if your word has 4 common consonants)
- Heavy vowel words: OCEAN (with this word, I will receive clues for three vowels)
- Predictable Patterns: BRING (a word like bring, lets me know about a common blend and rhyme pattern)

Topical word. Choose a word that connects to the curriculum. This is an opportunity to think about vocabulary or a current event in addition to spelling. Then follow the same choice for heavy vowels, consonants, or predictable patterns.

First Guess

WATER. My first guess is WATER because this word has a balance of vowels and consonants. It also includes ER, a common suffix (Figure 4). I type the word and hit enter—on the left.

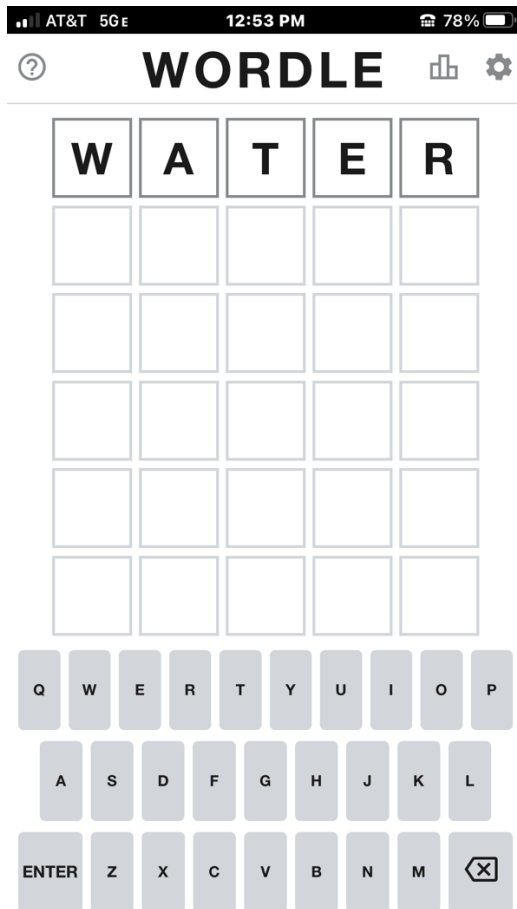


Figure 4. First guess—water.

Second Guess

I examine the Wordle clues and determine possible answers (Figure 5). In my guess, I know that T is in the word, but it is not in the correct place. Now, I have choices.

- TABLE—no, the A is wrong.
- TEETH—no, I don't want to repeat a letter at this point. I think about a blend or a word that ends with T.
- PLOTS—OK, plots might work. I check the alphabet and my previous guess. I haven't used any of these letters. PL is a good option. I also like using S in my early guesses. I'll

go with PLOTS. Notice how the keyboard colors changed to match the correctness of the letters I used.

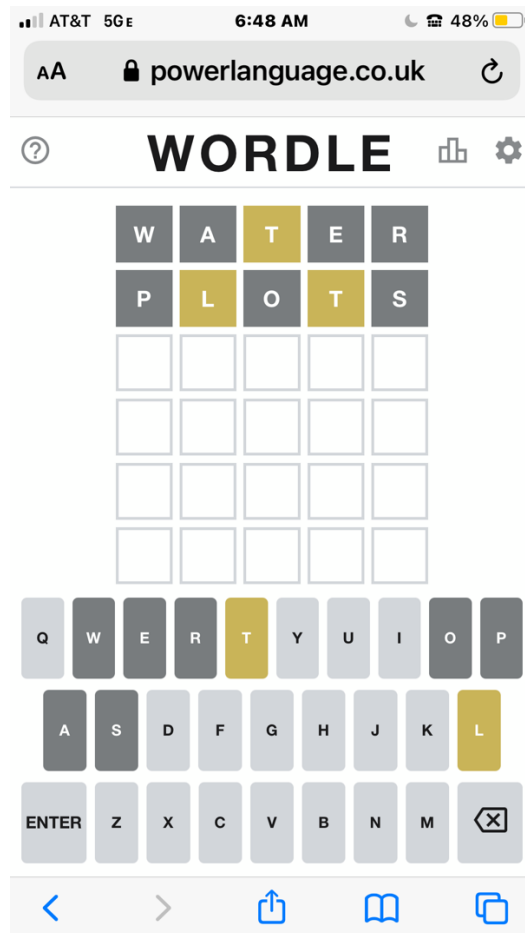


Figure 5. Second guess- plots.

Third Guess

Great! I got another correct letter (golden) and now I can eliminate L blends because L must be moved to a different position. I also know the word does not have an A or an O. So now I have to think of words that have the remaining vowels and the two known consonants (e.g., I-L-T or E-L-T or U-L-T).

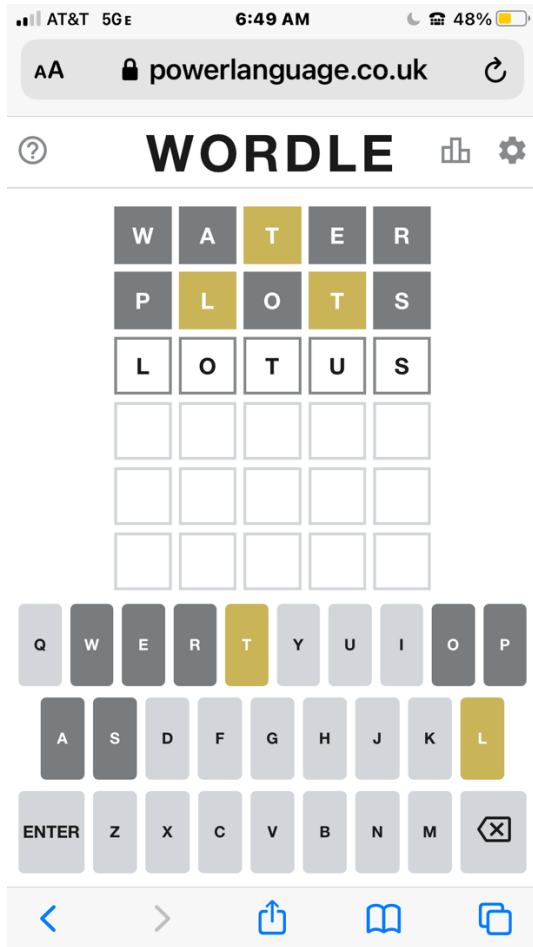


Figure 6. Trying different words.

In the boxes, I try out my words (Figure 6). I use the boxes, even when I know the word is wrong (Figure 7) because spelling is a visual process and seeing the letters helps me solve the puzzle.

- LOTUS
- TILT
- LIFT
- CULT

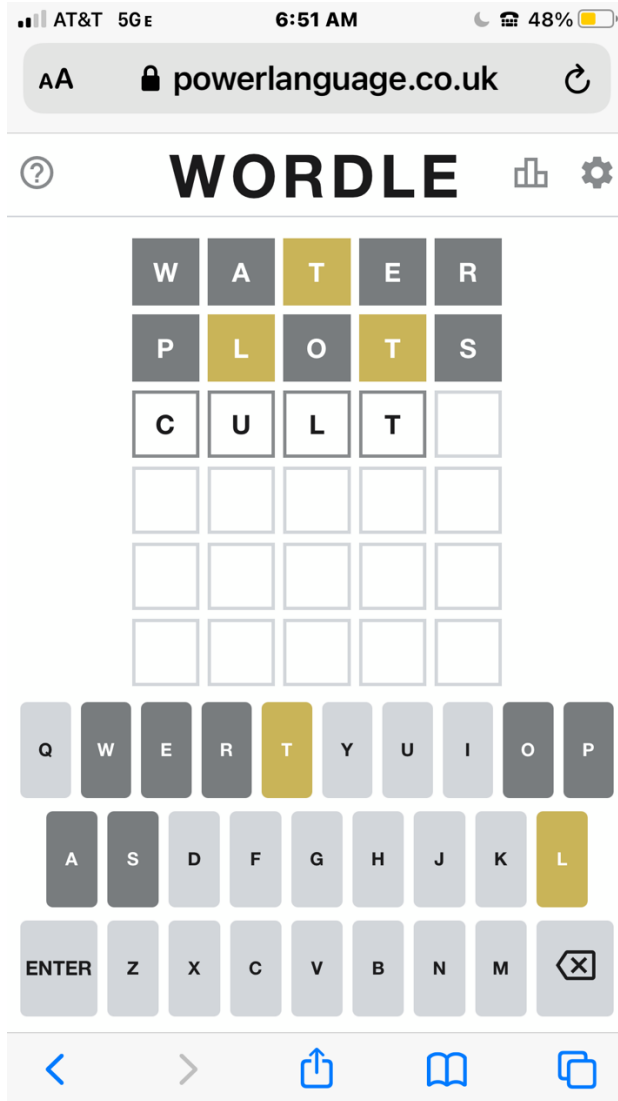


Figure 7. Trying other patterns.

Of course, I can use the letters in different order, but I put them together, and I think about the sounds.

Hey! ULT reminds me of BUILT. I can try built. I feel very confident that BUILT is the mystery word. First, I know T is correct. Second, I moved the L into a new position. Third, I moved the I into a new position. And I have 5 letters that make a real word (Figure 8).

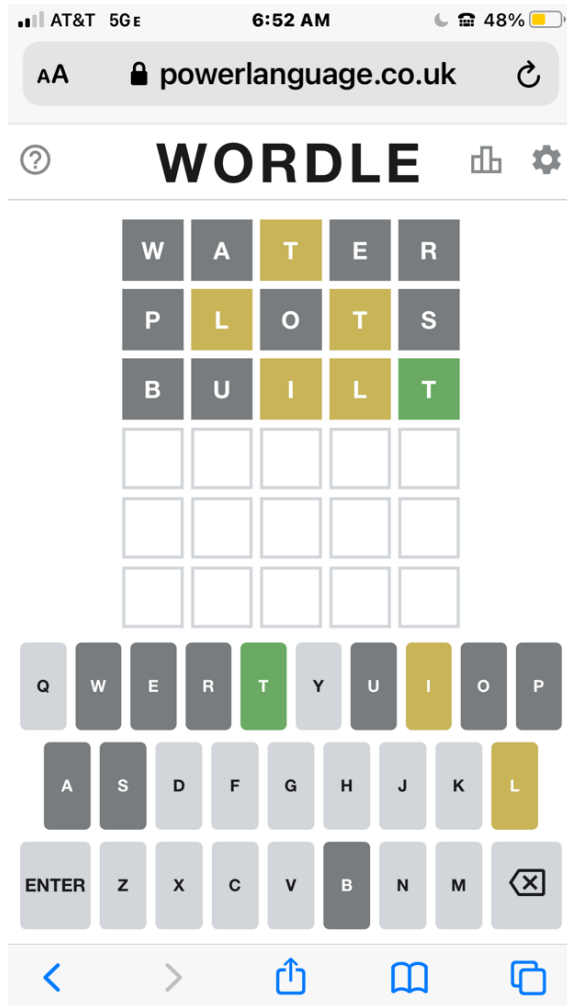


Figure 8. Third guess- built.

Fourth Guess

My guess was wrong. But now I know more information. The word doesn't have a *U*. I'm thinking the mystery word is a single syllable word. I am also confident the word doesn't include a *Y* because I can't think of any *Y* word with this combination of letters.

I know that *L* is located in first or third position. In addition, the *I* can move to one of two spots. I can't think of any words that begin with *I*. So my next move is to determine the final placement of *L* and *I*. I try to think of a word with these letters and I can only think of *UNLIT*.

I use the boxes to type UNLIT. When I type it out, I can see the process of elimination more clearly. I trace down the columns and make sure that I haven't used the L or I in the same place.

I don't want to use UNLIT because I already know that U is wrong. But I decide that UNLIT provides me with the information I need to guess the word (Figure 9).

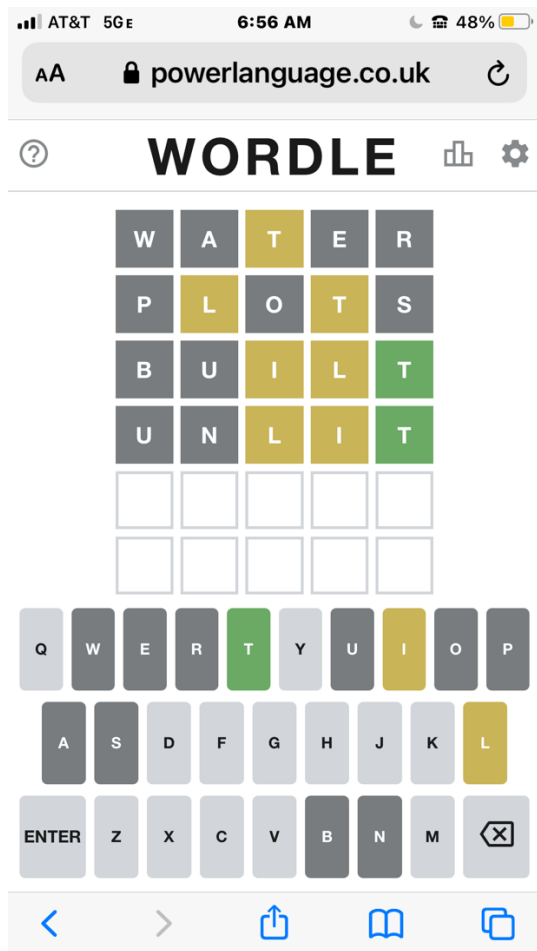


Figure 9. Fourth guess- unlit.

Fifth Guess

Well, there you go! I didn't get any green letters and now I know that my word begins with L and the second letter is I

- LI__T

For a second, I'm stumped. I look at the available letters in the alphabet tray while I say my word out loud L-I----T

- LIGHT

That's my word. I'm positive. But just to make sure, I look through the rest of the letters and try some alternative choices. What are some other word endings that combine with T? Are there any other digraphs. I can't think of any words that end with those letters, so I make my guess (Figure 10).

- LIGHT. I did it!

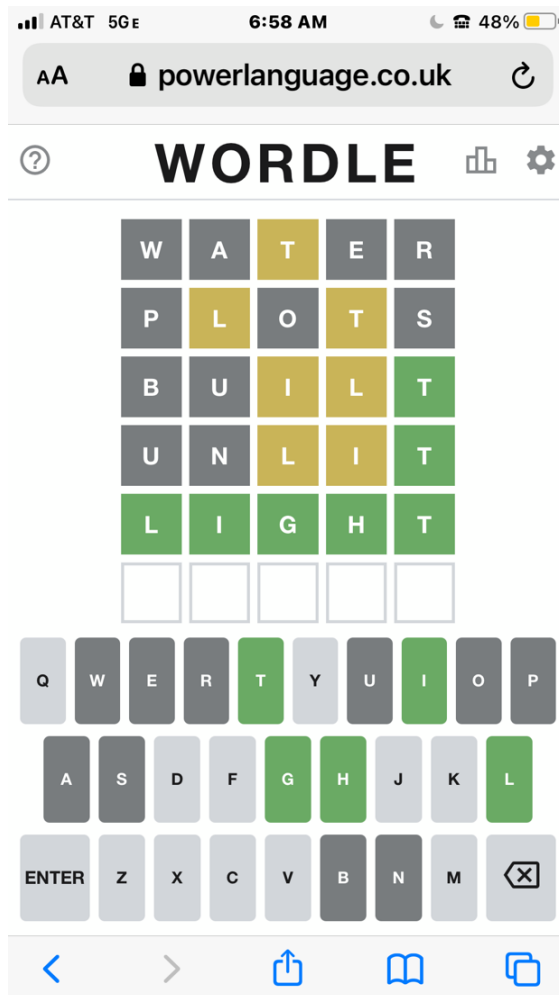


Figure 10. Fifth guess- light.

Digital Devices and Other Formats

Wordle is a digital game built for the Internet. Players can use a web browser on a phone or computer. Also, each device can access one Wordle game each day. Wordle began as an open-source, free game, but it was purchased by the *New York Times*, with a guarantee that nothing would change. Now, teachers have the concept, thanks to John Wardle, and they have options for playing.

Digital Options

In classrooms, where every student has a computer or a phone, teachers can ask students to complete the Wordle individually, in small teams, or whole class. Then set a time to share and compare responses. Teachers can play along too.

Analog

In classrooms, where devices or the Internet are limited, teachers can use white boards, print-outs, paper, or sticky notes to play Wordle. Letter tiles or keyboard graphic organizers will work well too. One person will need to know the mystery word to provide the clues. In this instance, the teacher or the students can take the lead in sharing clues. The leader can solve the Wordle to know the clues, or the teacher can create their own word bank of options.

Word Banks

Teachers can use online word generators to control the parameters of the mystery word: (e.g., <https://wordgenerator.org/5-letter-words> and <https://randomwordgenerator.com/>). Teachers can also choose words from literacy resources to support a particular concept or orthographic

feature (See these resources for word lists: Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2020; Honig, Diamond, Gutlohn, 2018)

Adjusting for Age and Class Size

Teachers can adjust Wordle to match the needs and word-solving strategies of their students.

Developing Orthographic Knowledge and Letter Formation

Teachers can integrate Wordle into systematic approaches to teaching word analysis. Rather than using the supplied random Wordle, the teacher can carefully select the mystery word. A daily mystery word can build on the specific teaching points in connection to systematic phonics instruction, vocabulary learning (Hadley & Mendez, 2021), disciplinary concepts, etc.

For emergent writers, or for students with disabilities, blank Wordle organizers can provide teachers with an opportunity to discuss, model, and practice letter formation, alphabet knowledge, or one-to-one matching. For those who are still learning letters and letter forms, letter tiles will allow the students to focus on sounds and orthography rather than the act of transcription. Instead of a keyboard arrangement, the students can use an alphabet strip to reinforce alphabetical order.

Strategic Grouping: Speed vs. Number of Attempts

To play Wordle, all kinds of group formations will work—pairs, triads, table partners, left/right, whole class. Similar to regular small-group discussions, the teacher must teach the routine and then monitor for cross-group sharing.

The teacher can set a timer or use music to signal the time for each team to make their guess (e.g., final Jeopardy theme song). The students can reveal their guesses at the same time and the teacher/leader can provide specific clues for each guesser. The teacher can increase or decrease the level of difficulty if teams look at each other's guesses and the resulting clues. The teacher can also emphasize speed (eliminating quickly) or accuracy (best guessing).

Rather than speed and competition, I attempt to solve the puzzle with correct letter placement instead of choosing words that eliminate the most letters on the keyboard. However, speed and competition are typically part of game play and students can be encouraged to improve their chances through strategy. For this reason, keep the groups fluid, allowing groups to work together for a week or two before switching to mix experts and novices as well as vocal and quiet students.

Transdisciplinary Connections

Statistics and probability. For those who want to simultaneously build mathematical thinking, teachers can adapt Wordle to focus on the frequency of letters in a word and the likelihood of letters in certain positions. Sidhu (2022) identified the best first guess for Wordle based on the frequency of 26 letters in five-letter English words. He also charted the frequencies of letters by position. According to Sidhu, if players start with AROSE or SOARE (a hawk), they are using words that are most likely to share letters with the mystery word.

In addition to guessing statistics, Wordle provides cumulative game play statistics that teachers can turn into whole class math lessons (Figure 11). Teachers can chart class averages, winning percentages, guess distributions, and create all kinds of equations and predictions from Wordle data. The statistics page even tracks time until the next Wordle.

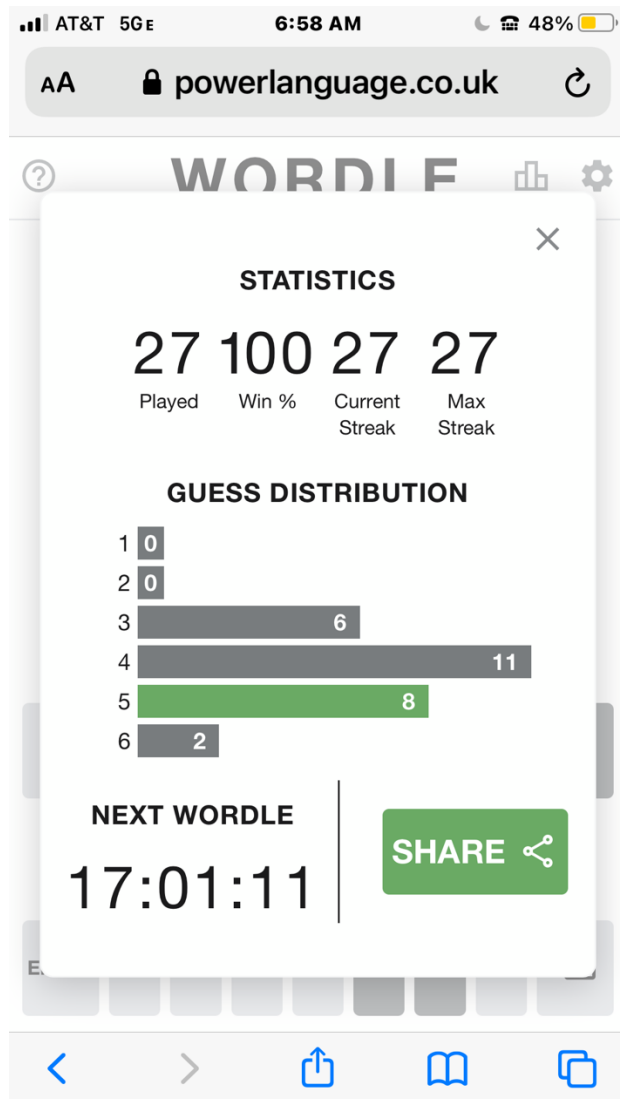


Figure 11. Wordle statistics.

Word history and derivations. Although many teachers would reserve discussions of derivational relations for experienced students, in Wordle, teachers can focus on roots and stems, origins of words (etymology), and the information provided in dictionary and thesaurus entries for students of any age. Teachers can begin using the language of word origins, break apart words into onset and rhyme, and discuss differences in word spellings (f, ph, gh). As students

play Wordle, they can engage in parallel or embedded word games such as word ladders or 20 Questions (Padak & Rasinski, 2008; Rasinski, 2012).

Modeling Collaborative Game Play and Social Media Use

Integral to the whole process, is a teacher who enjoys playing games, who can model curiosity and problem solving, and who values interaction with and among students. Teachers can also use Wordle as an opportunity to show students how to play games online, how to read for clues, and how to improve their game play (Kozdras, Joseph, & Schneider, 2015). In addition, teachers can use Wordle results to show students how to play with others across digital platforms. Teachers can play against teachers in the same school or across town. Students can help their teacher solve the Wordle in a whole group setting and the teacher can show students how to send the box receipt through social media in safe, school-sanctioned sites. Have fun!

Adapting Instruction for Different Students

- Determine if your students can play Wordle randomly or if you need to use the time to reinforce other instruction. This decision will determine if you can use the online platform and word bank or if you need to create your own.
- Create initial groups for your class based on your students' literacy experience, collaboration style, and level of independence. All kinds of group formations will work—pairs, triads, table partners, left/right, whole class.
- Model game play and show students how you solve a Wordle. Do this in front of students and think aloud. Then move into a shared Wordle where students offer suggestions and you can build consensus or go your own way. Emphasize the word solving and game strategy.

- Play Wordle as often as the students enjoy it. Use the structure to play quickly (e.g., timers, break-out groups without cross team sharing) or systematically (e.g., blowing up games with analysis, integrating transdisciplinary thinking, group strategy sharing).
 - Teachers can use online word generators to find their own word banks and control the parameters of the mystery word.
 - <https://wordgenerator.org/5-letter-words>
 - <https://randomwordgenerator.com/>

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Author's Biography

Jenifer Jasinski Schneider, Ph.D. is a Professor of Literacy Studies in the College of Education at the University of South Florida. Dr. Schneider's research focuses on children's composing processes including print-based writing development and multimodal composition in digital and embodied spaces. Specifically, she examines youth filmmaking, drawing, and their creation of visual, print, and performance texts. Underlying her work in composition is a focus on arts-based approaches to literacy education including process drama and children's literature.

Standards & Scripts: One High School Teacher's Journey To Adapt An American Literature Curriculum To Foster Students' Writing Identity

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Abstract

This study explores how the intentional pairing of reading and writing activities in a secondary classroom fosters the development of students' writing identities. Using a case study method, I explored how the pairing of reading content and writing tasks in an American Literature course was a catalyst for students developing their own writing voice and over the course of two years were able to evolve their writer's identity. As reading and writing are both skills separately taught, it is useful to explore the outcomes when pairing them together. This article will discuss the pairing of reading content with writing instruction giving practical suggestions for teacher planning along with showing how developing students' writing practice alongside reading content fostered their identities as writers.

Keywords: pairing reading and writing, writing identities, case study

Reading and writing instruction are the twin pillars that support the English Language Arts curriculum. Often, these two essential skills are taught in isolation. In the middle and early high school grades, reading has focused on informational texts and writing has been focused on building the foundations needed to support state testing. With the implementation of the B.E.S.T. standards for ELA in Florida, effort has been made to bridge the gap between the two disciplines and to try and align them within the same unit.

These pairings were used during the 2020-2021 school year which was a hybrid year of learning following the fourth quarter shut down due to COVID-19 in the spring. When students came back in the fall the landscape of the classroom was changed—more than two thirds of the students were at home, watching remotely from Microsoft Teams, and barely interacting over video, voice, or chat. The rest were scattered around the room at a crude attempt at social distancing.

Even amongst the fractured classroom setting of scattered students, it was paramount to find ways of engaging students in reading and writing activities in order to keep even a semblance of school and learning during these unprecedented times but also to maintain the sociocultural flow of the classroom. Writing and reading are not often solitary activities in the ELA classroom; students do not read in isolation but participate in Socratic Seminars and class discussions daily in order to process the reading input. Thus, when it comes time to write students engage with both teachers and peers in order to co-construct meaning which leads to their writing output (Prior, 2008).

This sociocultural writing process, where students and teachers co-created writing identities (Discourse identities) through discussion and revision, proved to be a successful catalyst for the development of students' writing identity that began in my classroom and continued into my students' senior year (Gee, 2000). Students who had been too shy to fully express their ideas in my class had grown into writers who returned to my classroom to continue the conversation about their writing. Teachers often do not get the chance to see or understand the impact that they have on a students' learning and growth but in the case study I conducted I was able to see the impact after a semester post junior year (Fall 2021) and then even deeper

understanding was developed during my response session in early 2022 as the students were about to graduate.

First Pairing: *The Crucible* & Argumentative Writing

The argumentative essay is always the first longform piece of writing that I tackle with my students. The essay follows a unit on *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller paired with other Puritan texts such as Jonathan Edwards' *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* and a modern media piece, a TED Talk by Paul Bloom *Can Prejudice Ever Be a Good Thing?* as examples of persuasive texts. Students get to see the effects of persuasion and upholding beliefs at all costs and the practical application of persuasive rhetoric. Armed with these examples and themes of *The Crucible* they then have to contemplate what is important to uphold in their own lives.

The opportunity to argue on a topic that interests the students elicits excited chatter from them. They revel in this freedom after years of canned prompts and “boring” articles on topics that they do not care about. For the first time, they realize that they are being asked for their opinion and must now learn to express that opinion academically and intelligently to their teachers and peers. This is a swift departure from ninth and tenth grade where they have been drilled with formulaic writing so that they may pass their state tests.

Once the pressure of state tests and graduation requirements begins to dissipate in the upper grades then teachers have a bit more freedom to adjust the curriculum to suit students' needs. My school has a traditional American Literature focus for eleventh graders which is aligned with the state's Curriculum Resource Materials (CRMs) and previous state standards. Even though the state has now adopted the B.E.S.T. standards (2022) the idea of embedding

writing instruction into reading content need not change--students benefit from the intentional tweaks that teachers make even to scripted curriculum.

“I like it because you get both sides and I get to decide which side I am [on].”

“If it is argumentative writing then it is easier than it is to do a college essay...It is difficult to write about yourself but in arguments you have a point to make and all you need is your evidence.”

One way to accomplish the difficult task of bridging reading and writing together even within the district’s chosen curriculum is to allow students more freedom in their assignments. Student choice factors heavily into the argumentative essay, as Alex states. This choice begins the unit then I transition into teaching students how to research and let their inquiries guide them towards a meaningful argument. Prompting students with questions like “what do you want to change about the world?” or urging them to take a position on a pertinent issue are ways that I direct students who need a jumping off point.

In this way, teachers offer students two important aspects of sociocultural writing: one, a variety of reading input full of ideas and two, an opportunity to dissect and digest them during class discussions and structured group work so that students can begin to produce writing output (Prior, 2008). Allowing for this collaboration between teacher and student, fosters a trust which is foundational for all future writings—if students believe that you, the teacher, care about their opinion then they will begin to open up and will share more of themselves throughout the year.

“Feedback and breathing time on writing helps so that you don’t feel like you’re doing it for a grade instead of for understanding and for us we were giving an opinion and not being graded on it.”

One way to create the environment needed to open up is to give timely feedback and breathing time for the writing as Riley commented. During my case study, I followed up with those high school juniors who I taught in English III, and who were seniors, as to their writing practices and identities. In one response validation session, Riley commented above on my teaching practices surrounding writing. Students express frequently, every school year, that writing instruction feels rushed and being scheduled right before state tests means they do not have enough time to practice the skills they need. This pressure to perform on a singular test also decreases the retention of instruction. Since the preparation for the test is a quick “one-and-done” approach students end up “dumping” the information after the big test and then struggle to relearn effective writing habits when they encounter the next writing task. Through this testing blitz students do not value reading and writing as life-long skills that are personally rewarding but as painful processes to endure.

Second Pairing: *How it Feels to Be Colored Me* & Personal Essays

During the third quarter I teach texts from the Harlem Renaissance. Within the unit, we read *How it Feels to be Colored Me* by Zora Neale Hurston which is paired with a personal narrative where students are tasked with using Hurston’s essay as a mentor text as they fill in their own blank where they switch “colored” with an adjective that describes part of their identity. Within the B.E.S.T standards narrative writing makes a comeback. However, time will

tell if it will become a tested standard thus driving how much time and attention it will get in a teacher's lesson plans or the CRMs.

“Just in general I haven't been much of a school writer--I like writing based on stuff that I like, interests, but that art stuff was pretty deep when I wrote that essay [based on How it Feels to Be Colored Me] and I do think that is important to do every now and then to go over your own self and your identity. And identify if this is me and come to peace with that. And that was what that was and it lets you recognize how much that you have grown in a sense. I feel like assignments that have to do with reflecting on yourself are good because you get to compare where you've been with where you are now.”

“Growing into this year I have become more open. I shied away from it [personal narrative] and I opened up more now that I am coming into the end of senior year.”

“Teachers can affect the mood and if they are not open or if they show bias then you don't want to share too much with them. But right now, as a writer I feel more open so I do not shy away from writing because it makes your writing to be open, you don't have to fake things and you can share what you feel.”

An adjustment in teaching the standards turning a narrative into a personal narrative still allows students to play with characterization, dialogue and pacing. As students become more comfortable over the course of the year, they begin to see writing not as a painful process that a teacher foists upon them to torture them, but as a way of developing skills--and thus, *themselves*. The difference between Haiven's first two comments above show the growth that students make once they leave the classroom. She acknowledged the growth that assignments could showcase

and continued to expand on that impact during her validation session as evidenced by the second comment. She noted how she was only willing to go so far in her writing while she was my student, however, during her senior year she revisited the same paper and topic for a college essay. She ended up meeting with me multiple times to continue the conversation about where she could develop the essay.

When students return to ask teachers for help as shown in Haiven's third comment, it highlights the importance of the classroom environment that teachers create for students to share. In these increasingly polarizing times, teachers have to find a way to embrace all students, to create a space so that they can share their true feelings as that is what will propel them forward as learners and as writers.

Third Pairing: *The Catcher in the Rye* & College Essays

The hybrid year stretched students in many ways both academic and mentally. When it came time to choose my fourth quarter novel I knew that I wanted one that would foster conversations that would be relevant to my students. I chose *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger so that I could talk about mental health--the pressure my Honors students feel to succeed academically both for themselves and for their parents, the grief they may be feeling due to COVID (although Holden's grief is geared towards his brother's death), and the perpetual struggle that all teenagers feel to fit in and find their place in the world.

"Something like Catcher in the Rye is an example of an important book--the themes and the subject matter of the book are relevant for a lot of kids even though it was written a while ago

from the modern era. I think there are a lot of things in books that we can still relate to. Those things are important to read because it's kind of good to relate to fiction."

"Sometimes I could relate and other times...like for Catcher in the Rye it was a long time ago (was Boone a bad place back then?) I would be reading this and I would think, "This kid is an asshole." But then, "I'm this kid." It's weird finding yourself relating to someone who is not the best."

The conversations that I had with students during my case study proved that *The Catcher in the Rye* was the right choice for these students at that time as shown by Connor and Nick's comments, respectively, given above. I have not taught Salinger's short novel since the hybrid year ended. By going back to school in person, I lost COVID's cultural immediacy and staying consistent with my colleagues became more important. However, while I was teaching this novel it served as a touchstone for students to look inward. Nick, in the second comment, spoke of the disconcerting nature of relating to a character that one finds a bit repugnant--representation in literature and relating does not always equal positive comparisons but becoming more introspective about oneself was a positive.

Questioning oneself also led to questioning one's environment as Salinger's novel was set around the same time period as Boone High School came into existence so students not only compared themselves to the teenagers in the novel but compare their school experience with the one in the novel as well. The fiction of the story allowed students to make the parallels between Holden's life and theirs but also gave them a space to consider relevant topics behind the safe facade of a fictitious character.

“And then the college essay, I feel it is important to include in the curriculum, and I can’t remember if I finished or not, but I do like how that was included because oftentimes some teachers don’t or aren’t involved.”

“A lot more experience in writing. It had been a year since I had done any writing. It gave me opportunities to write and in different ways with the college essay and personal writing. College essay was more formal but not based on a problem or an assignment. I feel like I just got better.”

Following the introspection and conversations that *The Catcher in the Rye* stirred up, the last writing assignment of the year was a college essay. The college essay was the culminating task of the Technical Writing Unit from Orange County’s CRMs. This is one of the most relevant writing assignments as the students are given the option of choosing their own prompt from those dictated by Common App which colleges use nationwide. This relevance is highlighted in Haiven and Riley’s comments, respectively, who both saw the college essay as a chance to improve their writing skills and showcase what they had learned from their previous work.

While Haiven joked about not being able to remember if she had finished the paper, she had indeed finished it her junior year. Although she had completed the assignment, it was not until her senior year that her writing developed as she came to me to tweak the essay for various schools and scholarship opportunities. The comment that she made during the study proved the importance of sustained teacher involvement. Students often return or email asking for advice on papers the next year knowing that I am in their corner and I want them to continuously work to improve. The same for Riley, who had spoken of writing throughout his childhood and well

cultivated writing identity, still found the exercise helpful and the chance to write a more personal account satisfying. With teacher involvement all students can develop their skills further, growing more confident in who they are and their stories.

Through these stories, student choice, interaction with others and intentional feedback were able to come together seamlessly as the assignment allowed a space for each one. Building in opportunities for students to share with their teacher and peers had to be intentional as was the pairing of reading input of mentor texts and sample essays. During the brainstorming phase of the college essay, students were given a space to share their stories through participating in a “speed dating” activity asking questions related to the Common App prompts. Students made quick rounds sharing personal anecdotes which fostered their Discourse identities as James Paul Gee (2000) states as “interact[ions] as a certain kind of person,” which allowed them to try out parts of themselves that their peers may not have seen during the rest of the school year. This assignment makes me wish I did it sooner every year as I see a different side of my students I had not seen before but I remember that it is throughout the year that the trust is built so that they feel comfortable enough to share.

Conclusion

In these often polarizing times, when more and more pressure is being put on teachers to close learning gaps caused by the pandemic, it is important to hold steady to best practices: offer students choice, offer meaningful grades and feedback, and offer opportunities to interact with each other. Teachers need to be intentional about pairing reading and writing activities as they are a natural extension of each other and can be used to bolster the others’ skill sets. Choosing relevant literature, even within curricular boundaries, can be done and building writing

assignments that complement the reading allows students to extend their learning and buy-in as to the relevance and consistency of the curriculum. Thoughtful pairings build student engagement and help foster their writing identity thus building their resilience which in these school years following COVID, will become more vital than ever before to insure student learning.

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Meaningful PD for ELA Teachers using the lens of Interpretative Phenomenology

Duaa Khalid Lutfi, Ed. D.

Abstract

This article focuses on designing and facilitating a meaningful professional development for teachers. Using Interpretative Phenomenological analysis (IPA) to capture the meaning teachers attribute after each PD design will result in how valuable the teachers found the PD. Further research into teacher PD and IPA across other disciplines are also presented and discussed. Results suggested the flexibility of IPA and its application to current PD practices of teachers' experiences and meaning.

Keywords: professional development, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Introduction

Teacher professional development (PD) is defined as a training or series of trainings that are designed to refine or improve instructional practice for teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Osman & Warner, 2020). The need for high-quality, meaningful, and effective professional development (PD) is necessary and "...should be made available to all teachers" (Borko, 2004, p. 3). The purpose of this practical paper is to emphasize the criticality in acknowledging the meaning teachers attribute to a PD experience, specifically a PD in English Language Arts (ELA). This meaning facilitates the design and implementation of ELA PD and the how meaningful it was for the participants (Guskey & Sparks, 1991; Liu & Phelps, 2019). Considering an ELA teacher's experience and meaning during and after a PD, may be critical when considering the effectiveness of a PD for the teachers and impacts how they transfer the content back into their classrooms.

Farmer et al. (2011), vividly describes teachers as the invisible hand within our nation and society overall. Effective teachers are able to shape societal cultural constructs through student interactions, learning, and relationships as the students progress beyond school settings (Farmer *et al.*, 2011). With effective teaching models and practice in place, teachers will positively impact students preparing them for future employment and developing their stance in society (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Emmer, 2001). The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) for English Language Arts education (2012) provided the following visions for ELA instruction should give students "...opportunities and resources to develop the language skills...", "...emerging literacy abilities...", and promote "...literacy growth..." (p. 2). The context of this paper defines secondary ELA as providing students with foundational skills for reading informational and literary text, writing, speaking and listening, and language.

The general definition for effective PD models for ELA teachers is similar to what effective PD models include. These features entail: content focused, active learning strategies, collaboration among teachers, use of models and/or modeling, coaching, feedback and reflection opportunities, and sustained duration of learning experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 4). Effective PD will yield well-informed teachers, which will aid in developing productive, high-achieving learners (Borko, 2004). In a technical report on professional learning in the U.S., Wei and colleagues (2009) synthesized standards for professional learning based on their thorough review of research-based literature on professional development. All standards, context, process, and content, were constructed with the idea to improve learning for all students (Wei et al., 2009). Effective PD is directly linked to student learning (Desimone, 2009; Whitworth & Chiu,

2015). PD in ELA should generally involve teachers in active learning experiences, content that relates back to the classroom and student learning, and coherent.

Significance of Effective Teacher PD

Effective PD includes a change in a teacher's current classroom practices that are directly correlated to student learning and success (Odden *et al.*, 2002). Strategies and instructional practices offered in PDs need to be evidence-based (Farmer *et al.*, 2011) and relevant to the content taught in the classroom. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2001), only 27% of general education teachers in the nation felt very well prepared to meet the demands of teaching. These teachers were also reported to have participated in more than 8 hours of professional development opportunities throughout the school year. In recent events, after the effects of Covid-19 Pandemic, the National Center for Education Statistics (2022) released a decline in students' reading scores compared to the year before the pandemic. In order to address this decline in reading and writing, ELA teachers should be well-equipped to have relevant PD opportunities that target the needs of an ELA classroom and curriculum (William, 2010)

Promoting Effective PD through Interpretative Phenomenological Practices

Research and literature focusing on PD in ELA has revealed the two main reasons for the need of PDs. These include expanding teachers' learning and enhancing their teaching skills (Darling Hammond *et al.* 2017, Guskey, 2014), and influencing students' learning and achievement (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Eun, 2018; Opengart, 2007). When ELA teachers have options in regard to the design of PDs, they are more involved and more active in the experience (Badri *et al.*, 2016). ELA teachers need to be able to customize their experience and need to be "...meaningfully involved". (Badri *et al.*, 2016, p. 11). Additionally, teachers who

find PD content to be coherent with their own expectations will most likely be willing to change or refine their pedagogical skills (Fishman et al., 2011; Lindvall & Ryve, 2019). This specific variable may be critical when considering the effectiveness of a PD for teachers.

Bringing more awareness to the meaning ELA teachers' attribute to a PD experience promotes teachers' acceptance of PD initiatives and help teachers establish a relationship with PD goals (Penuel *et al.*, 2007). This is where using the lens of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and its practices play an integral role in designing an effective PD in an ELA classroom setting. IPA encourages participants to "...make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (Smith & Osborne, 2015, p. 53). An Interpretative Phenomenology includes the lived authentic experiences of participants to be heard without encouraging pre-conceptions or theoretical concepts to describe these experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

IPA determines or defines meaning as five complex levels starting with literal, textual, experiential (life/world), existential (identity), and existential (life purpose) (Smith, 2019). To contextualize, questions for each level included:

1. *What does that mean? (literal)*
2. *What does that actually mean? (textual)*
3. *What does it mean to my life? (experiential/life or world)*
4. *What does that mean for my identity? (existential/identity)*
5. *What does my life mean? What is the purpose of my life? (existential/life purpose)*

These questions were adapted from Smith (2019), as he attempted to define the word 'meaning' as it relates to IPA analysis.

Understanding the meaning ELA teachers attribute to a PD experience is also linked to their narratives and could be the missing piece in PD designs (Conle, 2000). Narratives include stories like retellings of specific lived experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Conle, 2000; Sanders 2003). Narrative inquiry describes how individuals experience the world around them (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Using the five questions in the five levels of meaning, can be used in a PD design to contextualize teachers' narratives in ELA. This is also an example of using writing to communicate ideas and thoughts that can transfer into an ELA classroom. This practice will strengthen a teacher's instruction of writing skills (Graham, 2019).

Teacher narratives also acknowledge the role teachers should play in PD designs and how teachers should be responsible for their own learning and learning content (Adey, 2004; Desimone, 2011). Describing ELA teachers' experiences in regard to PDs will create a PD design that is more closely aligned to the teaching and learning of teachers (Desimone, 2011). Exploring this in practice will help PD facilitators and designers within the ELA realm to understand teachers' experiences after an initial foundational PD session in hopes to further aid in making the PD series meaningful and effective for the teachers in ELA classrooms, contexts, and settings (Desimone & Garet, 2015). Additionally, the direction using IPA may assess if the district is providing teacher participants with effective PD models after exploring teachers' meaning of a PD experience. If school contexts continue to engage in ineffective PD models, this may affect teachers' learning and teaching and in return affect student learning in reading and writing (Smith & Gillespie, 2007).

Conclusion

Using IPA to represent the participants' meaning making invokes a new perspective that will help craft a PD experience that each teacher in sixth grade ELA can thrive in. IPA has made an impact in the medical fields and is slowly transgressing over into the social science and education fields. Teachers' lived experiences and meaning making in the design of a PD series could improve teachers' overall satisfaction with a PD experience. Teachers will begin to explore new ways to expand upon their thinking, as they will have control and power over their learning process. This in return will support building a curriculum that aligns with student learning.

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Are There Age-Related Declines in Reading Comprehension Skills for Older Adults?

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Abstract

This article reviews the literature concerning the question of whether older adults experience age-related declines in reading comprehension skills. Results of the research suggests that there is an age-related decline in literacy comprehension skills regardless of country of origin. However, research suggests that older adults make compensation for the decline by drawing on other skills.

Keywords: older adults, reading comprehension skills, literacy comprehension

The Census Bureau, as quoted by United Health Foundations, (2021) indicate that more than 54 million adults ages 65 and older live in the United States (U.S.) today. These numbers vary according to the location with Maine having the largest number and Utah having the lowest. The growth in the senior citizen population is not limited to the U.S. “All societies in the world are in the midst of this longevity revolution...in which the chance of surviving to age 65 rises from less than 50 per cent to more than 90 per cent at present in countries with the highest life expectancy (United Nations, 2019). At the same time, there are growing numbers of older adults who are parenting their grandchildren. Gaille indicated that there are “13 million children living in homes with their grandparents” (para. 1). These numbers suggest 2.5 million grandparents every day are taking on the responsibilities required to raise these children. AARP (2019) reports the average age of grandparents is 50 years. Aging is believed to be associated with a decline in most cognitive activities. These numbers and prevalence rates suggest a need

to examine the literacy skills of older adults concerning their comprehension of written texts. Without literacy, individuals cannot fully participate in the social and political life of their communities. Schools should consider any age-related reading comprehension issues as they communicate in writing with grandparents who are parenting their grandchildren. The purpose of this paper is to examine whether there are age-related declines in the reading comprehension skills of older adults and the implications for school personnel.

The skill of reading is an outgrowth of reading development, including understanding what is read and leads to a continuous advantage in literacy skills. Reading comprehension is the process of extracting and constructing meaning from written texts. “Comprehension involves the reader, the text, and the activity or related task” (Honig, Diamond & Gutlohn, 2018, p. 10). Duke and Martin (2019) assert that skilled comprehension is strategic, genre-specific, situated, and developmental. Reading comprehension is a complex ability with aspects becoming increasingly complex. Barrett and Riddell (2019) indicate that fluid intelligence (e.g., processing speed, attention capacity, spatial ability, reasoning, and working memory) begin to decline with age. These are skills associated with comprehension of written text. The extent to which aging impact the reading comprehension skills of older adults is the question.

Fitzhugh, Braden, Sabbagh, Rogalsky, and Baxter (2019) believe that “reading comprehension requires more than just understanding single words and sentences” (p. 569). Comprehension also involves “constructing and understanding the representation of language at its phonological, semantic, syntactic, and thematic levels” (p. 569). The authors conducted a study to examine “cortical atrophy and brain activity in a large age range of individuals” (p.

570). Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) was used with 65 adults while they read a passive narrative reading paradigm. The reading consisted of “alternating blocks of sentences that formed stories and blocks or repeated letter strings” (p. 571). The authors predicted the recruitment of classic frontotemporal language networks across ages. Further, they predicted older adults would use additional frontal lobe networks to support language comprehension. Results proved their prediction to be accurate. The authors argue the findings support the Scaffolding Theory of Aging and Cognition (STAC). Accordingly, older adults are still able “to engage frontotemporal language networks similar to young adults in a passive reading fMRI paradigm” (p. 574). However, older adults must also use additional brain networks associated with guiding and focusing attention while reading.

Margolin (2018) studied the impact of negated text on cognitively active older adults’ comprehension and metacomprehension. The negated text contains words such as no, not, and never. Research has found that comprehension of negated text is difficult for readers to process, understand, and remember. Margolin, quoting a study by Margolin and Abrams, found in comparison to younger adults’ comprehension of negated and nonnegated text, older adults’ comprehension is poorer. That study found that working memory, rather than age, predicted comprehension accuracy. In the current study, participants included 64 young adults between 19 to 24 years and 42 older adults between 60 and 87 years. Material for the study consisted of excerpts from National Geographic Magazine. Participants completed the Metacomprehension Scale which is a self-report questionnaire to measure aspects of metacomprehension. Participants read passages, evaluated their comprehension, and answered questions about what they read. Results indicated that both younger and older adult readers had difficulty with

negation. Older adults had better overall comprehension. Findings indicated that remaining cognitively active may have contributed to the older adults' comprehension skills.

The role of working memory and metacomprehension in younger and older adults was also the focus of attention in an older article (Beni, Borella, & Carretti, 2007). There were three age groups of participants. Young participants were between the ages of 18-30 years. While the young old participants were between the ages of 65-74 years and the old old participants were between 75-85 years. The study was conducted to understand which factors are involved with reading comprehension considering working memory and metacomprehension. The authors used both narrative and expository texts and predicted that the complexity of informational text would require more working memory. Participants were native speakers of Italian as the study was conducted in Northern Italy. Reading comprehension was measured by "administering two reading comprehension texts taken from a standardized battery normed on high school students" (p. 194). Working memory was evaluated by an Italian version of a listening span test. Metacomprehension was measured using an Italian standardized Metacomprehension Questionnaire.

Results indicated that the performance of older adults "is within the range of an adequate performance for everyday living for both types of text" (p. 202). In other words, aging did not harm reading comprehension. For expository texts, results showed an age-related decline as older adults differed significantly from younger adults. Age-related differences were also found in the working memory capacity measure. The authors believe that in their study, age-related differences in reading comprehension "was mainly due to a decline in cognitive

processes such as working memory and metacognitive flexibility” (p. 205). Older adults compensated for the decline by using other strategic comprehension skills.

Krawietz, Tamplin, and Radvansky (2012) studied aging and mind wandering during text comprehension. Mind wandering, according to the authors, “refers to a lapse in attentional awareness or a decoupling of attention away from one’s primary or external task, and toward more internally generated thoughts and ideas” (p. 951). Research on mind wandering and older adults yields mixed results. The authors investigated how aging impacts the tendency to mind wander during reading. There are two views of how working memory (WM) might impact mind wandering. The first view connects mind wandering to the degree of attentional or executive control. Decoupling is the term associated with the second view. Accordingly, people with greater working memory capacity (WMC) may find themselves involved more with mind wandering. The authors conducted a study to learn how mind wandering is affected by aging. Two experiments were conducted.

Experiment 1 tested the accuracy of the two WM accounts “by comparing mind wandering in reading between younger and older adults” (p. 952). The study population consisted of 76 young adults, ranging in age from 18-22 years, and 26 older adults ranging in age from 58-87 years. The study was conducted on a computer requiring participants to read through the text complete a brief survey and two cognitive ability measures. Periodically, probes were conducted to determine whether or not mind wandering was occurring. With a report of mind wandering, participants were given two follow-up questions to determine the subject of their mind wandering and how long mind wandering occurred. Older adults reported a significantly lower rate of mind wandering than younger adults. Another finding was that

older adults read more slowly than younger adults. With a control for responses to the text interest survey question, the age groups no longer differed in their mind-wandering rates. Comprehension was at comparable levels between the two adult groups.

Experiment 2 was used to control for reading speed. The authors felt that older adults read more carefully and slowly which may have limited their amount of mind wandering. Experiment 2 was similar to Experiment 1 except for requiring the reading of a brief text before assessing individual reading speed. The study population consisted of 65 women, between the ages of 17-22 years, and 23 participants between the ages of 62-86 years. Results indicated that after controlling for reading speed, older adults reported less mind wandering than younger adults. Consistent with the decoupling theory, older adults had a lower level of mind wandering than younger adults.

The effects of age on processing and storage in working memory span tasks and reading comprehension were examined in a study by Schroeder (2014). Eighty-four participants between the ages of 18 and 73 years completed four memory span tasks and a measure of reading comprehension. Results indicated that age effects were reliable for both simple and complex span task performance. Second, results indicated that placing a limit on encoding time exacerbated age differences in simple span performance. Lastly, encoding conditions and age affected the relationship between the span measures and the relationship between span and reading comprehension. The author concluded that declines in storage and processing abilities contributed to age differences.

Steen-Baker, Ng, Payne, Anderson, Federmeier, and Stine-Morrow (2017) examined the way adults in midlife “facilitate comprehension through context when contributions of

knowledge and experience are highly developed, but effects of cognitive decline are less pronounced” (p. 463). Importantly, cognitive decline still characterizes this age group but may not be as evident as during older ages. Participants varied in age from 16-64 years and in literacy skills. Eye movement was measured as participants read a series of 60 simple sentences varying in contextual constraint and expectancy. The authors did not find evidence for slowing in reading processes. Middle-aged readers in the study did not spend less time rereading. The study found that the impact of context on regression patterns increased with age and that there was no evidence for an age-related increase in skipping or regression. The authors believe that lifelong engagement buffers the effect of cognitive decline in word recognition processes.

Are the findings describing the comprehension skills of older adults the same in other countries? What causes gains and losses in literacy transcends national boundaries. Barrett and Riddell (2019) examined the relationship between age and literacy skills in developed countries. Data is taken from representative samples of the population using the IALS, ALL and PIAAC surveys that measure vocabulary, language proficiency, and comprehension. PIAAC defines literacy as “understanding, evaluating, using and engaging with written texts to participate in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” (Kyrolainen & Kuperman, 2021, para. 1). Participants were residents of four countries including the United States (U.S). Findings from the study reported that literacy skills declined with age. Green and Riddell (2013) also looked at data from the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey. The tool measures prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving with a focus on three countries including the U.S. Again, findings indicate that literacy declines with age.

Sorman, Ljungberg, and Ronnlund (2018) investigated the reading habits among older adults concerning level and 15-year changes in verbal fluency and episodic recall. Verbal fluency requires individuals to generate words during a set time. The episodic recall relates to remembering events from the recent past. Verbal fluency and episodic recall are each activated by reading. The authors' study flowed from a longitudinal study on memory, health, and aging in Sweden. The study population consisted of 1227 participants aged 55 years or older. Questions were asked concerning how often participants read books and magazines. Measures of episodic recall and verbal fluency were also used. Results showed that "participants who read books exhibited a higher level of performances in both verbal fluency and episodic recall" (p. 6). Interestingly, the rate of age-related decline in verbal fluency and episodic memory recall had no relationship to reading. The authors feel that "reading is compensatory of neurodegenerative changes with aging, rather than protective" (p. 7). Consequently, the authors conclude that differences between those who read more or less frequently, relates more to differences in cognitive ability rather than reading habits.

Kyrolainen and Kupermann (2021) used the Comprehensive Survey of Adult Skills to collect data from 39 countries. The data "includes direct assessments of information processing skills-literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving in the language of the country" (p. 2). Analysis was conducted with the age range of 25-65 years. Results indicated that "age was a relatively minor contributor to literacy scores when considered across all countries" (p. 9). The authors found that the effects of age may coexist in different domains of literacy skills. As an example, the authors point out that an "overall growth in vocabulary could take place next to an increasingly lesser proficiency in semantic integration of a text's content" (p. 14).

Reading, and understanding what is read, is the foundational skill in a global technological society. The size of the older population in the U.S. and the world is growing. The number and average age, of grandparents who are parenting their grandchildren, is also increasing. Reading, and understanding what is read, is an activity in which many older adults engage. Aging comes with literacy losses, an accumulation of vocabulary, as well as increased reading experiences. Studies from the United States indicate that mind wandering during reading is less likely to occur for older adults. This age group is less likely to be thwarted when encountering the use of negation in text. Unfortunately, there is an age-related decline in literacy comprehension skills regardless of country of origin. This should be taken into consideration as schools use written tools to communicate with parenting grandparents. However, research suggests that older adults make compensation for the decline by drawing on other skills. Older adults must live their life to the fullest by participating in literacy activities including reading texts and demonstrating an understanding of what is read in particular written communications from schools.

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Integrating the Florida B.E.S.T. Standards into Free Choice Reading Programs

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Abstract

This article addresses the literary interests of currently practicing K-12 classroom teachers by presenting research on the effects that free choice reading programs have on student reading levels and state assessment scores. Further, this article simultaneously presents low-maintenance ways that the B.E.S.T. standards and its included text lists, as well as school or district-required curriculums, can be adapted to suit a free choice reading program that increases student achievement and motivation in reading.

Keywords: B.E.S.T. standards, free choice reading programs

Although the new B.E.S.T. standards in ELA and math must fully be implemented in all Florida public schools for grades K-12 by the 2022-2023 school year, many school districts have moved to adapt the new standards earlier. This has created a “trial period” for the standards in many counties, which allows teachers and school administrators to determine effective teaching strategies and learning activities which will align to the new standards. Unlike the previous Florida state standards, which more frequently resembled the Common Core State Standards, the new B.E.S.T. standards for ELA focus on building foundational skills in the early grades by setting benchmarks that students will attain and continue to practice as they move into higher grade levels and more complex content. Additionally, the B.E.S.T. standards align reading and writing targets so that students are progressing in both areas of literacy using the same or similar texts for full coherency (Florida Department of Education, 2021).

Within the new B.E.S.T. standards, complex mentor texts spanning a wide variety of genres and eras are included to be taught and used in specific grade levels when working on mastery of the benchmarks. For example, first graders can expect to work with titles such as *Clifford the Big Red Dog* and *I am Helen Keller*, while tenth graders can expect to read and write about *Macbeth* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Florida Department of Education, 2021). Considering the long list of required texts for exposure for each grade level, it may seem impossible or even redundant to attempt to create a free choice reading program in your classroom that incorporates the B.E.S.T. standards. However, not only is it possible to have a strong independent reading program in your classroom - but it is also possible for the program to be standards-aligned and, simultaneously, engaging and motivating for your students.

First, let's briefly examine the research on free choice reading programs in the classroom. Allowing students free choice in their reading materials is a widely debated topic - so much so that numerous books have been written about it! In *The Book Whisperer*, author and sixth grade language arts teacher Donalyn Miller shares strategies for how she gets her students to fall in love with reading - and how doing so affects their state test scores. In a time where districts and administrators are heavily pushing for data-based decision-making and instruction, ensuring your free choice reading program is supported by data showing its effectiveness is imperative. Miller requires her students to read a minimum of 40 books per year, with a certain number of books required in each major genre. Upon initially hearing this, she says she gets a lot of pushback from her students who feel that they can barely finish one book in a month, let alone the average of four that she is requiring. But there is a method to her madness - she writes that, after implementing her free choice reading program (with her 40 book requirement) all year, 85% of

her students score in the 90th percentile on her state's reading assessment, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). (The test was discontinued in 2017.) She also states that she has not had a single student fail the TAKS in four years, as of the time she published the book. Her student base ranges from students of college professors to students of immigrant parents who struggle to understand the English language (Miller, 2009). This indicates that, when implemented properly, free choice reading programs have the potential to be effective for increasing student achievement and raising the passing rate of Florida state tests while simultaneously inspiring students to become readers by choice - not by requirement.

Innumerable formal research studies exist on the outcomes of free choice reading programs in the classroom. Although the population samples and research methods may vary, nearly all studies come to the same conclusion: children with the ability to connect with several meaningful reading materials encounter a significant achievement in their reading levels and abilities. The amount of time spent by the student reading actively can be a considerable indicator of the level of reading achievement that will be gained. When children select their preferred reading materials, they improve their vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. This significantly helps in motivating them to read, thus increasing their assessment scores and overall grades (Chamberlain *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, students are considerably more engaged in reading when they possess the opportunity to select their reading material. As their reading skills improve, students are well-prepared to transfer these skills to comprehension in other subjects and in required classroom reading materials and texts. When teachers allow students to select their own reading materials based on free choice, this plays an essential role in increasing their excitement to share what they learn. Students are motivated to share their knowledge with their

peers, thus gaining a desire to obtain more knowledge regarding the topic they select. However, the most successful free-choice reading programs have a structure in place on some level.

Teachers can have some influence over the free-choice process by selecting books for each child's level of reading and motivating children to employ different books for various genres as Miller did (Steiner *et al.*, 022).

Some teachers who have more freedom in designing their literacy block prefer to implement the Daily Five framework. The Daily Five framework has been implemented in numerous schools to allow students choice over their literacy learning activities. Within the Daily Five, students receive one or more skills-based mini-lessons from their teacher on a specific reading or writing strategy, and then choose from centers and/or activities in the five main areas of literacy to practice the skill: read to self, read to someone, listen to reading, word work, and writing (Boushey & Moser, 2014). This gives students the opportunity to have some say in how they will spend their time during a literacy block to work towards mastering standards and benchmarks. It becomes significantly more challenging to separate “will” from “skill” as children become older. Students who believe in choosing their own reading materials or literacy activity assume that they possess the ability to read the book or complete the task at hand. This creates a desire, motivation, and effort to follow through on their choice (Adlof & Hogan, 2019).

Other teachers, like Donalyn Miller, prefer to use a workshop approach to literacy instruction while incorporating student choice in reading material. Within *The Book Whisperer*, Miller lays out the five key components of an effective reader’s workshop: time (to read and look through books), choice (of reading material), response (in a natural way to the books students are reading, such as through conferences with the teacher or written entries), community (in which

all students are included in making meaningful contributions to the overall learning of the group), and structure (which should consist of the routines and procedures that support student learning and teacher effectiveness). In Miller's classroom, although free choice is encouraged, there is still an accountability piece to her students' reading. During daily roll call, students are required to give the page number they are on (to ensure they are progressing). Reading journals are used to write about their reading, and Miller responds to every single student in each. She also has one-to-one conferences with her students at least monthly to test reading skills and requires her students to convince her that they have actually read their book through meaningful conversation with her about the book, including responding to open-ended questions. Miller says it best herself: "Providing students with the opportunity to choose their own books to read empowers and encourages them. It strengthens their self-confidence, rewards their interests, and promotes a positive attitude toward reading by valuing the reader and giving him or her a level of control. Readers without power to make their own choices are unmotivated" (Miller, 2009).

You might now be convinced that a free-choice reading program could be effective in your classroom, and wondering how all of this fits into the B.E.S.T. standards or a district-required curriculum as we prepare to fully transition. It should seem obvious, but the most important place to start is by reading and familiarizing yourself with the new standards. It may also help to become familiar with the required texts for the grade level you teach. The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) has a helpful web page with resources, including a PDF version of the new standards and professional development information. This webpage can be found by visiting fldoe.org/standardsreview as of the date of publication.

As you will learn from studying the new state standards, the B.E.S.T. benchmarks are broad enough to be applicable to a variety of texts and genres. Additionally, you will notice that the required text lists do not include enough mentor texts to last the entire school year. This is intentional, as the FLDOE understands that many districts have required curriculums with built-in texts which will be the primary basis for literacy instruction in the classroom. If your school or district has a required curriculum, as most do, you may need to be more creative in finding ways to incorporate free choice reading. One example could be during the first ten minutes of class as a warm-up for a middle or high school English class, the first ten minutes of a literacy block for elementary students, or even as morning work or an end of the day routine.

If your teaching assignment is highly structured around the required texts from the B.E.S.T. standards or your school/district curriculum, consider *how* you are using those required texts and where free choice could potentially be incorporated. For example, can you teach your lesson using the required text (from the B.E.S.T. list or your required curriculum) as a mentor text, and then use a paired text strategy to expand on the skill? For example, if you are teaching the text *Rosa Parks* by Eloise Greenfield from the third grade text list and targeting the B.E.S.T. standard of “ELA.3.R.2.4: Identify an author’s claim and explain how an author uses evidence to support the claim” (Florida Department of Education, 2021), could you then give students a choice of a text to pair and study with this book? Using a structured model, you could provide books at a variety of levels on other Civil Rights leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, etc. for students to choose from. This could even be evolved into a writing activity where students compare and contrast the two leaders and the role they played in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.

Additionally, you may have flexibility on *how much* of the required text is used. Do students need to read the entire novel of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, or can portions of it be read and analyzed as students choose their own book on the moral nature of human beings to read and respond to? Of course, this question is rhetorical - the answer will depend on your school/department/administrator/district policies, and also on how much time you have in class to cover the material.

If your teaching assignment is more loose around the use of required texts, but instead is more based on skills and standards, you might consider if you can target the same skill you are teaching with a similar text. For example, can you target the theme of love and loss in fiction and the B.E.S.T. standard of “ELA.9.R.1.1: Explain how key elements enhance or add layers of meaning and/or style in a literary text” (Florida Department of Education, 2021) with John Green’s *The Fault In Our Stars*, rather than Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*? Although an appreciation for classic literature is something we want to instill in our students, a text written in Old English may ostracize and de-motivate students with learning disabilities, students who are limited English proficient, and students who are working below grade level. This is not a suggestion to eliminate the mentor texts from B.E.S.T. or classic literature - but perhaps these texts could be chunked and used as a comparison or warm-up to the more modern, high-interest text.

As you can see, there are a number of ways that you can incorporate free choice in reading for students into the new Florida B.E.S.T. standards in ELA, as well as when using school or district-required curriculum. By incorporating student choice in whatever model best suits your classroom, you are opening your students’ eyes to diversity in literature and the

endless possibilities for learning and discovery that can occur through reading materials based on personal interest. Of course, structure on some level needs to be incorporated in order for free reading time to be productive and effective in accomplishing the goals you set out for it. However, the B.E.S.T. standards need not inhibit this - in fact, with careful review of the standards, you'll likely discover that it's easier than ever before!

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