

READERS' WORKSHOP

Readers' workshop allows students to gain the benefits of reading by self-selection, self-pacing, and time spent reading and sharing books. The teacher demonstrates how to explore literature and supports student-led discussion groups. Students gain the knowledge to understand literature on multiple levels and respond to it thoughtfully.



"Tis the good reader that makes the good book."
- Emerson

Elements of Readers' Workshop

- *Time* to choose books, read, think about their reading, and interact with others over what they have read
- *Choice* about books they read, their purpose for reading a particular book, and the strategies they use to help them comprehend
- A sense of *responsibility* for their learning and their interactions with the teacher and fellow students
- A classroom *structure* that allows them opportunities to work with the teacher, each other, and independently
- A supportive *community* that fosters diversity and the development of self-confidence and self-esteem

Procedures

The following procedures promote active participation, independence, and interdependence on the part of the student.

1. Sharing Literature: The teacher reads a good book or a portion of a book to the students to promote discussion. The literature choice needs to include both fiction and nonfiction.

2. Mini-Lesson: A mini-lesson is a brief lesson conducted by the teacher. Nancie Atwell (1987) divides mini-lessons into three broad categories.

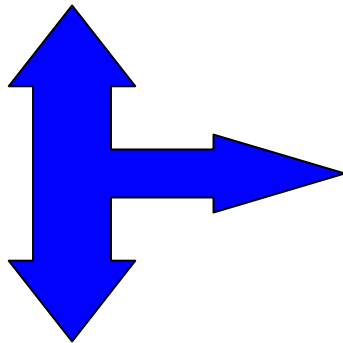
Procedural

Setting expectations/rules for the workshop
 Finding good books that appeal to readers
 Discussing literature
 Selecting a place to sit during reading time/mini-lesson
 Giving a book talk
 Being a good listener in a share session
 Maintaining appropriate noise level
 Asking questions during a sharing session
 Setting individual goals and self-evaluation
 Getting ready for a conference
 Keeping a book log
 Taking care of books

Literal / Craft

Differences between fiction and non-fiction books
 Parts of books
 Characteristics of different genres
 Poetry
 Books that show emotions
 Books written in the first, second, or third person
 Author studies
 Author's styles
 Learning from dedications
 How authors reveal characters
 How authors use quotations
 How the story setting fits the story
 Development of characters, plot, theme, mood
 How the lead hooks us
 How authors use the problem/event/solution pattern
 Titles and their meanings
 Characters' points of view
 Examples of similes and metaphors
 Examples of foreshadowing
 How authors use dialogue
 Predictable and surprise endings
 Use of descriptive words and phrases
 How illustrations enhance the story
 Secrets in books
 Voice
 Types of conflicts

Mini
Lessons



Strategy / Skills

1. **Concepts of print**
2. **Tips for reading aloud**
3. **Figuring out unknown words**
 - using context
 - substituting
 - using picture clues
 - using the sounds of blends, vowels, contractions, etc.
 - Monitoring comprehension (Does this make sense and sound right?)
 - Asking questions while reading
 - Making predictions
4. **Emergent strategies**
 - concept of story
 - concept that print carries meaning
- Connecting reading material to your own life
- Using Post-Its to make interesting parts
- Making sense
- Mapping a story
- Retelling story orally
- Looking for relationships
- Looking for important ideas
- Making inferences
- Drawing conclusions
- Summarizing story
- Distinguishing fact from opinion
5. **Emergent readers' skills**
 - directionality
 - concept of "word"

Mini-lessons are used to teach a specific skill or strategy or to give information. This form of teaching and demonstrations allow the teacher to focus on an area of student need, to give students the information they require, and to let them apply what they have been taught as they read and write.

The mini-lesson helps students connect and apply what they've learned to their own reading situations. It is helpful at the end of each lesson to say something like, "Today when you're reading I'd like you to . . ." This kind of statement helps the student to facilitate the connection of the lesson taught.



3. Activity Time

Reading

The students read individually and/or with a partner. They need time to read, interact with book and its author, and have time to think about their reading.



Conferencing

Students may conference with the teacher, a peer, or a group. They should have the chance to engage in natural conversations about their reading. For a conference to be successful, it needs to occur in an atmosphere of openness, support, and cooperation where students feel comfortable enough to discuss their problems in reading and work with the teacher and/or peers to solve them. Conferences allow teachers to accomplish the following goals.

- ❑ Develop a close relationship with each student
- ❑ Take opportunities to stretch the student/s
- ❑ Take opportunities for affirming
- ❑ Check for understanding
- ❑ Evaluate student growth
- ❑ Hear students read orally
- ❑ Gather ideas for mini-lessons
- ❑ Take advantage of teachable moments

Conferences should be short: approximately 5 minutes for individuals and 10 to 15 minutes for a small group. With practice, you should be able to meet with each student once a week. The more a teacher confers, the better she/he will get at talking with their students about reading. It is easiest to start a conference by asking an open-ended question, a question that focuses on the content of the story to the student's own experiences, or a question that relates to a mini-lesson. The purpose of asking questions is simply to get the conversation going. A conference may start by saying, "I see you're reading . . . What do you think of it?" After the student's response, a teacher may ask, "What can you tell me about it?"

It is best to have in mind the needs of the students and then compose your own questions based on their needs. The teacher's role is to listen to what the student is saying and to take the lead for where the conversation needs to go next. The goal is for the teacher to talk less than the students, which is not always easy to do, but is necessary for a successful conference.

Record-keeping for Teachers

For evaluation of the student's progress and future conferences, it is imperative to keep records of your conferences. Record-keeping can take a number of forms, including the following examples.

- ❑ Anecdotal records
- ❑ Teacher's journal
- ❑ Checklists
- ❑ Status of the class

A teacher must choose his/her own method of record-keeping. Records on mini-lessons taught, as well as the students' progress, should be kept for future reference.



Record-keeping for Students

Students may also keep their own cumulative reading list or chart. This record could contain such information as date, title and author, rating of book (1-5), type of book, interesting words, and page numbers.

Responding

Responding may come in a variety of ways.

- ❑ Book talks
- ❑ Story frames
- ❑ Letter to author
- ❑ Story webs
- ❑ Conversation bubbles
- ❑ Word lists
- ❑ Literature discussions
- ❑ Interviews
- ❑ Think alongs
- ❑ Questionnaires
- ❑ Conversations
- ❑ Drama
- ❑ Readers' theatre
- ❑ Art
- ❑ Portfolios
- ❑ Student's reflections – literature journals, response logs, reading journals, reading logs, double entry diaries, dialogue letters

Responses, oral or written, help students make sense of their reading, reflect on their reading, and monitor their comprehension. Responses provide the teacher with information for assessment and further instruction, as well as a concrete record of the student's growth and change as a reader and a writer.



Before any student response is assigned, a mini-lesson should be taught to model and instruct the students on the expectations for that response.

Student-led literature discussions should be put gradually into practice when the teacher feels students can read the text with comprehension and can benefit from the chance to develop their own interpretations and questions. Through teacher modeling, the students learn to ask open-ended questions that relate the content of the story to the students' own experiences and to recent mini-lessons. To promote thoughtful discussions of literature, teachers also need to model the skill of effective participation and listening. During student-led literature discussions, the teacher's responsibility is to monitor the groups' discussions to provide guidance and help with the finer points of comprehension.

4. Sharing

At the end of every reader's workshop, children share books they read and activities they have been working on. These sharing sessions are **essential** because they validate the children's work and the importance of the reader's workshop. Students have an opportunity to find out about themselves and each other as readers and writers. It provides a framework for constructing meaning through active involvement with other learners.

Importance of Sharing Sessions

 For Teachers	 For Students
➤ Provides a systematic way to observe student interaction	➤ Validates their ideas
➤ Provides a systematic way to evaluate student interaction	➤ Gives them the opportunity to express what they've learned
➤ Gives an authentic setting for assessment	➤ Encourages positive feedback from others
➤ Helps to become aware of strategies individual students use as readers	➤ Provides them with an avenue for connecting their prior knowledge and experience with the text
➤ Provides integration of all components of literacy development (reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking)	➤ Gives them an opportunity to go beyond the literal retell level to a more in-depth analysis and emotional interpretation of reading
➤ Helps strengthen a sense of community	➤ Helps strengthen their skills as listeners, questioners, and decision-makers

5. Assessment

Nancie Atwell suggests that a grade be based on three parts.

- ❑ How the student followed workshop procedures
- ❑ The quality of the student's written responses
- ❑ The student's progress toward goals that have been set collaboratively by the student and the teacher

Additional Information

How will you know if the student has followed workshop procedures?

Gather information.

- ❑ During conferences with the student
- ❑ By keeping anecdotal records
- ❑ During "kid watching"

How would you evaluate student's written responses?

- ❑ Consider how the students are doing based on their individual ability.
- ❑ Evaluate only what has been taught.
- ❑ Let the students know ahead of time what will be evaluated.
- ❑ Develop a generic rubric to use for all responses.

How would a student set goals?

- ❑ A mini-lesson on goal setting may need to be taught.
- ❑ Students choose a goal and write it down.
- ❑ During a conference, the teacher may add a goal.
- ❑ The teacher may conference with a student towards the end of the marking period and discuss the progress made towards the goals set.

Other things to consider:

- ❑ Develop a checklist of the qualities that are important to reading and check off the items that a student is doing consistently.
- ❑ Know the reading level of your students.
- ❑ Allow your students to self-evaluate. Students are aware of how they are doing.
- ❑ Grades contain some measure of subjectivity. Be aware of your criteria and the reasons for them.



Professional Resources

Atwell, Nancie, *In the Middle*, Boynton/Cook Publishers, Heinemann.

Au, Kathryn H., Carroll, Jacqueline H., and Scheu, Judith A., *Balanced Literacy Instruction: A Teachers Resource Book*, Christopher Gordon.

Hagerty, Patricia *New Directions: Readers' Workshop, Real Reading*, Scholastic.

Mallow, Frances and Patterson, Leslie, *Framing Literacy*, Christopher Gordon.

Muschla, Gary Robert, *Reading Workshop, Survival Kit*, The Center for Applied Research in Education.

Routman, Regie, *Conversations*, Heineman.