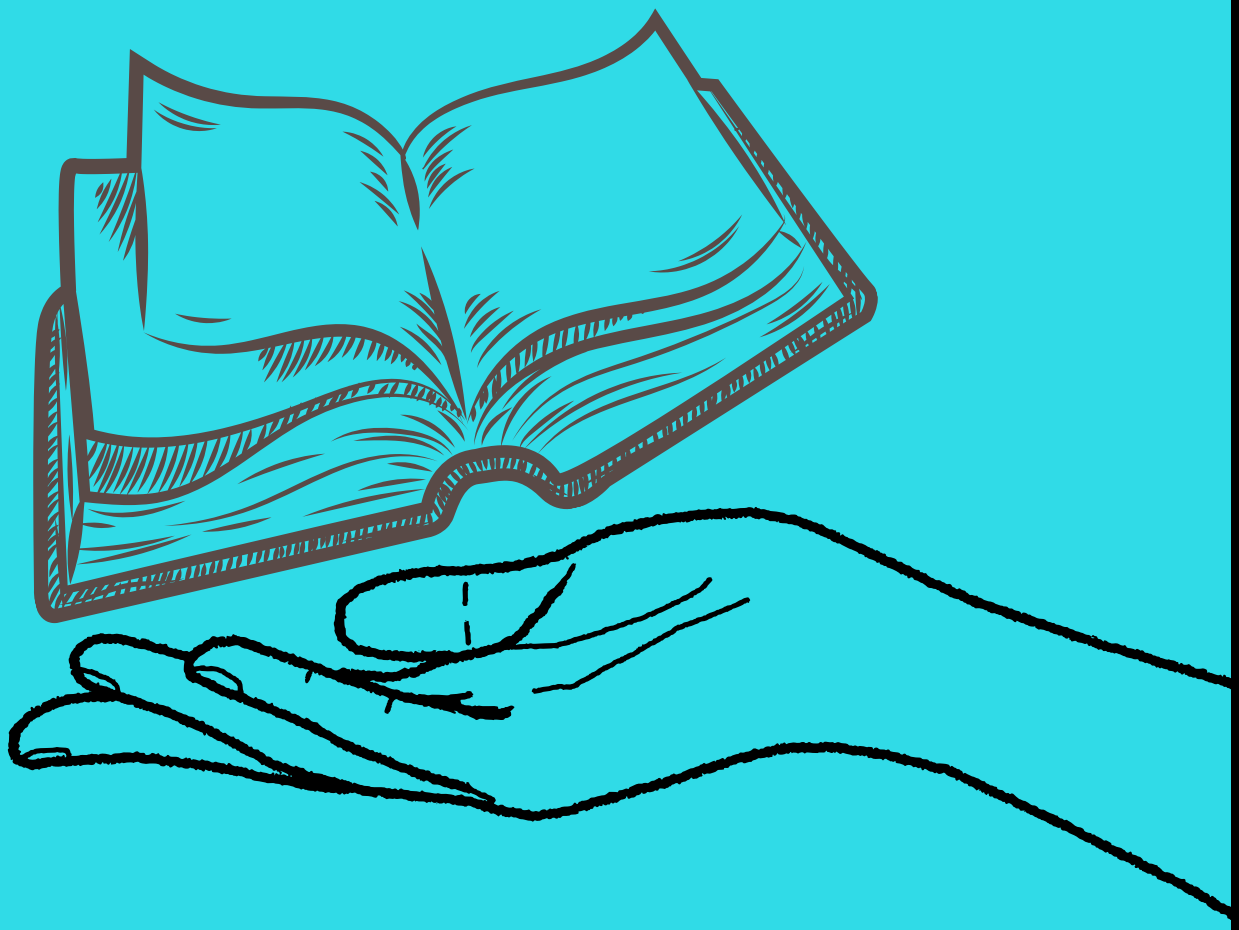
THE OKLAHOMA READER

Your literacy journey begins today.



VOLUME NO. 62 // ISSUE 1 // WINTER 2026
A publication of the Oklahoma Literacy Association

Finding inspiration through reading and writing.

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Write for us!

Let us lift up your voice and ideas for literacy learning!

The Oklahoma Reader is a peer-reviewed journal of the Oklahoma Literacy Association, an affiliate of the International Literacy Association.

The Oklahoma Reader
A Peer-Reviewed Journal of the Oklahoma Literacy Association

A Fond Farewell & A Look Ahead

-The Future of *The Oklahoma Reader*-

Dear Readers,

It is with hearts full of gratitude and pride that we present to you our final publication as your editorial team. Serving as the stewards of this journal has been one of the most rewarding chapters of our professional lives.

When we first embarked on this extraordinary journey, we were driven by a singular, powerful vision: to not just curate excellent content, but to boldly propel *The Oklahoma Reader* forward into a dynamic, indispensable resource that meets the rapidly evolving needs of every modern educator. Reflecting on these past three years, our hearts swell with immense pride for what we have achieved together. It has been a true labor of love! We didn't just update the journal; we revolutionized it. We breathed new life into its visual identity with a fresh, contemporary template, and critically, we re-envisioned our submission categories to align with the cutting-edge trends shaping literacy education today. In a pioneering effort to champion accessibility, we established a seamless electronic submission process, dismantling old barriers for authors. And most profoundly, we brought the journal "home," integrating all our publications directly onto the Oklahoma Literacy Association website. This shift has made the incredible work of our authors more discoverable, accessible, and central to the life of our organization.

As we prepare to hand over the reins, we are leaving you with a powerful, forward-looking collection of manuscripts that perfectly captures the current pulse of literacy education, masterfully blending the human element of teaching with the frontier of new technology. This volume is a true treasure trove of ideas: one author challenges us to move beyond standard markup, creating a personalized "record of curiosity" that drives deeper textual engagement, while multiple fascinating pieces tackle the digital elephant in the room—the AI Revolution—exploring how tools like ChatGPT are already reshaping everything from website evaluation to college composition courses. For those seeking to ignite creativity, look out for a piece on multimodal projects that cultivate literacy in ways that far exceed the traditional book. Additionally, we remain grounded in the essentials with work that offers a thoughtful approach to curriculum planning to ensure our youngest writers build foundational skills with purpose. Finally, you will find vital research focused on supporting academic vocabulary instruction through culturally responsive scaffolding that honors and uplifts diverse learners, rounding out a volume that is both innovative and essential.

As we sign off, we are thrilled to pass the torch to a team of educators who exemplify passion and excellence. Please join us in welcoming your incoming editors from Southwestern Oklahoma State University:

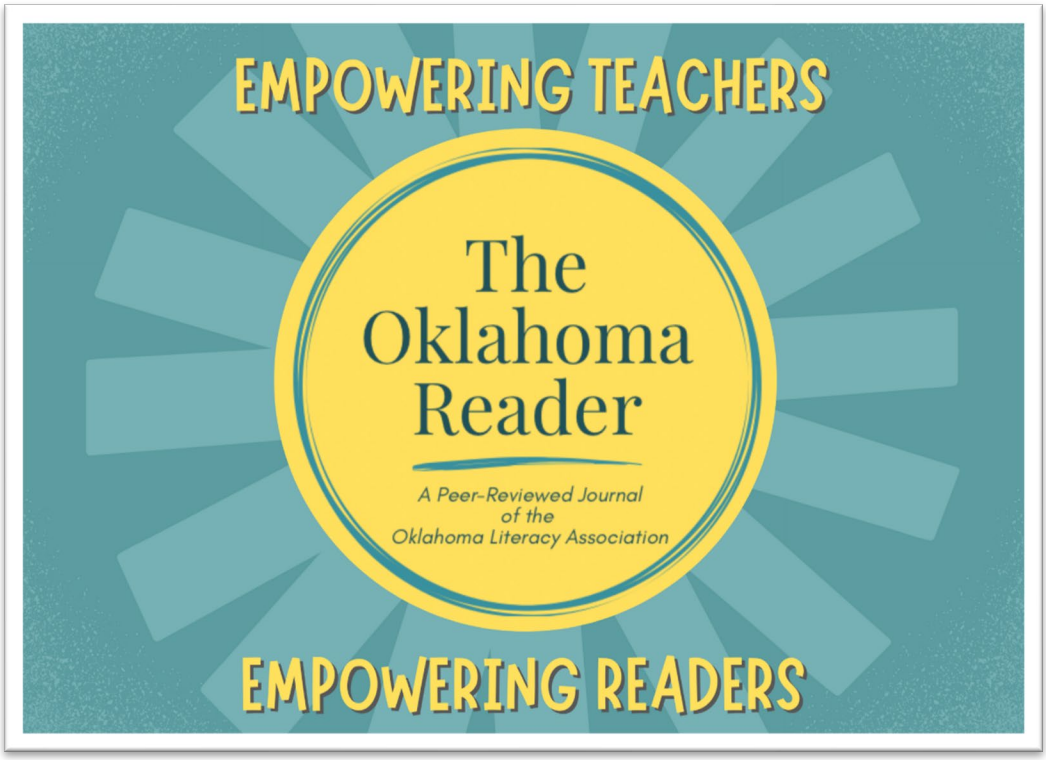
Dr. Kriss Larkin, Dr. René Fleischbein, Dr. Anika Rohla, and Associate Professor Natasha Tinsley

We know these colleagues well as they have been learning alongside your current editorship during this current publication cycle. We are confident they will bring fresh, innovative perspectives to the journal. Their deep love for literature and dedication to teacher education ensures that *The Oklahoma Reader* is in the very best of hands. You will find their full introductions and photos in the following pages.

Thank you for trusting us with your stories, your research, and your teaching moments. It has been a privilege to learn alongside you.

With gratitude,

Dr. Dana Oliver, Dr. DiAnn McDown, Dr. Mary Sloat, and Dr. Kelly Baker
The Oklahoma Reader Editorial Team (2023–2026)



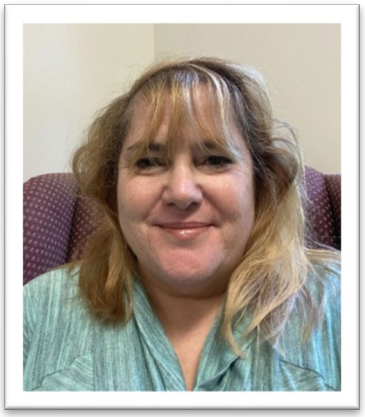
Meet the *New* Team!

Hello, readers of *The Oklahoma Reader*! We're excited to introduce ourselves and to continue the meaningful work of supporting educators and celebrating literacy across Oklahoma. We can't wait to collaborate with you, learn from you, and share the powerful stories and research that shape our field.
We invite you to submit your ideas, articles, and classroom insights— your voice is essential to the future of this journal, and we look forward to working with you!

Dr. Kriss Larkin

Dr. Kriss Larkin is an Assistant Professor of English and Humanities at Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford, Oklahoma. She holds bachelor's degrees in sociology and English from Middle Tennessee State University, a master's degree in literature with a concentration in creative writing from Belmont University, and a PhD in literature with a focus on creative writing from the University of Texas at Dallas. Exploring the interplay between sociology and English is a central passion, as she seeks to integrate the popular with the academic. Dr. Larkin's current work aims to demonstrate how popular culture, particularly rap and hip hop culture, can increase student attentiveness in the writing classroom, thus improving and promoting literacy. She is also a devoted reader of young adult literature and values its potential to solidify literacy skills and scholastic engagement in older readers.

Dr. René Fleischbein



René Fleischbein, Assistant Professor of English and Humanities at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, earned her PhD in English Literature at The University of Southern Mississippi where her research examined post-World War II British children's fantasy literature and its relationship to conduct books of the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly in how these genres teach young readers to negotiate their environments. Her areas of research include literacy studies, young adult literature, fantasy literature, British literature of the long 19th century, Early Modern literature, and rhetoric and its history. Dr. Fleischbein developed an interest in literacy studies while researching her master's thesis and encountering such texts as Margaret Meeks's *How Texts Teach what Readers Learn* (1988) and Diana Wynne Jones's "The Heroic Ideal–A Personal Odyssey" (1989), which strengthened her belief in the power of literacy to teach young readers how to navigate the world and cultivate critical thinking.

Dr. Anika Rohla

Dr. Anika Rohla, an Associate Professor of English at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, enjoys teaching English, German, and English Education courses. She also serves as the English Education Coordinator, where she loves working with pre-service teachers. Dr. Rohla has taught secondary English for 15 years in two public schools in Oklahoma. She earned her EdD from Southern Nazarene University in Administration and Leadership. Her dissertation focused on the implementation of Holocaust education in secondary English and social studies classrooms across Oklahoma. As a professional, Dr. Rohla loves teaching in the university classroom, researching and writing, presenting and organizing conferences, and providing professional development opportunities for educators. Furthermore, Dr. Rohla is involved in several professional organizations including the College English Association, Children's Literature Association, and the SB1671 Oklahoma Holocaust Legislation Coalition. She serves as the Northwest Regional Coordinator for the Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English and as also a member of the National, Oklahoma, and local Education Associations.

Natasha Tinsley, M.Ed., MFA

Natasha Tinsley is an Associate Professor in the Language and Literature Department and the Writing Center Coordinator at Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU). She teaches courses that focus on writing and literature, incorporating themes specific to diversity and mental health awareness. As part of her writing center responsibilities, she structures training for incoming consultants that carry the same themes to ensure writers feel supported. Her current conference presentations also hold similar themes to further support their necessary recognition and importance. She holds a degree in English and an MFA in Creative Writing from Oklahoma State University and an M.Ed. from Cameron University. Before SWOSU, she taught Language Arts to middle school and high school students, as well as attending several conferences and professional training centered around secondary education and student achievement. It is this experience as well as her current interactions with current students that makes her excited to join the incoming editorial team for *The Oklahoma Reader* and help support literacy efforts across all age groups.

A Message from the Oklahoma Literacy Association Chair,

Rori Hodges

Welcome to the Oklahoma Literacy Association!

My name is Rori Hodges, and I am honored to serve as Chair of OKLA for the 2025-2026 school year. If you're here, it's because you share something I've carried with me for most of my life—a deep love for reading and writing and a belief in their power to open doors for every student. My journey in education began in 2009 when I stepped into my first PreK classroom. For ten years, I had the joy of watching our youngest learners discover the magic of stories and the excitement of putting their own ideas on paper. I then spent five years teaching 3rd grade, where I saw firsthand how strong literacy skills become the foundation for everything else students tackle in school and beyond. Since January 2024, I've served as an Early Childhood Specialist at the Oklahoma State Department of Education, where I continue to advocate for literacy as a cornerstone of educational success. Whether you're teaching PreK or graduate students, working in a bustling suburban school or a close-knit rural community, you know the truth: literacy transforms lives. It opens up worlds, builds confidence, and creates opportunities. That's what OKLA is all about—supporting you in this vital work. As a member of OKLA, you'll find a community that truly understands the challenges and triumphs of literacy education. Our annual spring conference brings together inspiring speakers, research-based strategies, and practical tools you can use in your classroom right away. Our summer leadership series and book clubs offer deeper dives into topics that matter most to you. And our peer-reviewed journal, The Oklahoma Reader, keeps you connected to the latest thinking in our field. But beyond the events and resources, what makes OKLA special is you—the dedicated educators who show up every day to nurture readers, writers, and thinkers. Together, we're building a future where every Oklahoma student has the literacy skills they need to thrive. I invite you to explore our website, discover our membership benefits, and join us in this important work. Whether you're a veteran teacher or just beginning your career, there's a place for you in the OKLA family. Thank you for your commitment to Oklahoma's students. I look forward to connecting with you!

With gratitude,

Rori Hodges,
Chair, Oklahoma Literacy Association
Early Childhood Specialist, Oklahoma State Department of Education

Scaffolding Success: Culturally Responsive Academic Vocabulary Instruction for EL Newcomers

Samantha Crofford and Dr Qiuying Wang

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of targeted academic vocabulary instruction, specifically morphological instruction and cognate-based instruction, on English Learners (ELs) in a middle school in Oklahoma. The research integrates quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of how vocabulary development influences students' language proficiency and classroom engagement. Findings contribute to the growing body of research on effective literacy practices for ELs and offer actionable insights for educators supporting linguistically diverse learners.

Introduction

In working with second year EL newcomer students, we observed a significant instructional gap: the absence of targeted support for developing academic vocabulary. Although many students demonstrated notable growth in decoding and basic comprehension, they continued to struggle with the academic language required for success across content areas. This persistent gap highlighted the need for focused vocabulary instruction and motivated the present study, which examines the role of academic vocabulary development in supporting English Learners (ELs) at the middle school level.

This study investigates the effects of structured academic vocabulary instruction, specifically morphological instruction and cognate-based instruction, on ELs' language development and classroom engagement. To capture a comprehensive picture, the research integrates multiple data sources, including MAP growth assessment scores for reading, participation metrics, students' artifacts and teacher observations, reflections and feedback. Together, these perspectives offer a nuanced understanding of how intentional vocabulary instruction can strengthen language proficiency and promote academic success for middle school newcomer ELs (NWEA, 2023).

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

The Urgency of Academic Vocabulary Instruction

Academic vocabulary plays a pivotal role in students' academic success, particularly for English Learners (ELs), who often face challenges navigating the language of instruction in school settings (Poole & Sahakyan, 2024). Unlike conversational or social English, academic vocabulary consists of domain-specific and cross-disciplinary terms essential for reading comprehension, writing proficiency, and performance on standardized assessments. As Haynes et al. (2024) noted, English proficiency among ELs significantly declined in the years following the

onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, creating an even greater urgency for intentional vocabulary instruction.

This need is especially apparent in states like Oklahoma, where standardized testing data reveal widespread reading challenges. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only 23% of fourth-grade students and 20% of eighth-grade students in Oklahoma read at or above proficiency levels (Martinez-Keel, 2025). The situation is even more dire in districts like Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS), where 66% of fourth graders are not proficient in reading (Melon, 2024). These alarming statistics reflect systemic gaps in literacy instruction, particularly among vulnerable student populations. Yet, many districts continue to promote students regardless of literacy benchmarks, further compounding the issue.

Given these challenges, academic vocabulary instruction is not a supplementary element of literacy education, it is foundational. Explicit vocabulary instruction that includes visual supports, morphological analysis, and culturally responsive teaching strategies can empower ELs to engage meaningfully with content and improve their academic trajectories. Furthermore, such practices can benefit all learners, not just those classified as English Learners.

Supporting English Learners: Strategies and Barriers

Research underscores the critical importance of instructional support for ELs in achieving reclassification and avoiding long-term EL status (Poole & Sahakyan, 2024). The stigma associated with long-term EL designation can negatively affect students' self-perception and school accountability outcomes (Poole & Sahakyan, 2024). To mitigate these issues, effective instructional strategies must target the linguistic and cognitive needs of ELs, and provide scaffolds such as visuals, flashcards, cognates, and morphological cues.

Moreover, many ELs enter U.S. schools with rich literacy practices cultivated in out-of-school contexts, such as translating documents or interpreting for family members (Capps et al., 2005). However, traditional instructional approaches often fail to leverage these existing skills, resulting in missed opportunities to affirm students' linguistic capital and deepen their learning (Osipova & Lao, 2022).

Research consistently demonstrates that bilingual education strengthens academic achievement and can help close performance gaps between students' home and target languages (Thomas & Collier, 2002, Genesee et al., 2006, and Bialystok, 2001). However, despite these well-documented benefits, approximately 76% of emergent bilingual students in the United States are served in ESL or English-only programs, where they receive minimal or no instruction in their home language (Menken & Soloraza, 2013). This discrepancy highlights a missed opportunity to leverage students' existing linguistic resources to support academic development.

One evidence-based approach that bridges this gap is cognate instruction, a strategy commonly used in bilingual classrooms. Cognate instruction builds on the shared Latin roots of English and Spanish, enabling students to transfer vocabulary knowledge across languages (August et al., 2005). For instance, a Spanish-speaking learner can draw on their understanding of *construcción* in Spanish to infer the meaning of *construction* in English. Beyond cognates,

translanguaging has emerged as a powerful pedagogical framework for activating students' full linguistic repertoires. Translanguaging encourages learners to fluidly use all their languages to make meaning, interpret complex content, and engage deeply in academic tasks. Research shows that when students are invited to draw from their home languages alongside English, they gain greater access to rigorous material and demonstrate stronger cognitive flexibility and metalinguistic awareness (García & Sylvan, 2011).

Morphological instruction has been shown to significantly enhance middle school students' ability to recognize and manipulate meaningful word parts (Crosson & Moore, 2017). This form of instruction is especially beneficial for English Learners (ELs), as academic English is highly morphologically complex and often requires students to decode multisyllabic words composed of prefixes, roots, and suffixes. Research indicates that teaching students to break words into morphemes not only strengthens vocabulary knowledge but also supports reading comprehension, spelling, and overall language development (Crosson & Moore, 2017).

For all ELs, morphological instruction becomes even more powerful when Greek and Latin roots with cross-linguistic connections are intentionally selected. Many English roots share cognates in Spanish, enabling learners to draw on their first language as a resource. Studies show that activating students' home language in this way not only accelerates vocabulary acquisition but also fosters confidence, agency, and metalinguistic awareness. When ELs recognize that they already possess partial knowledge of many English academic terms, they develop a stronger sense of linguistic competence, which contributes to improved performance across content areas (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013).

Theoretical Framework: Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Zone of Proximal Development

This study is grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of learning, particularly his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD posits that learners can perform tasks beyond their independent capabilities when guided by a more knowledgeable other—typically a teacher or peer (Eun, 2019). Academic vocabulary instruction, when explicitly taught and scaffolded through visuals, morphology, and repetition, aligns with this theory by serving as a bridge between what students know and what they can learn with support.

In Vygotsky's view, cultural tools such as language, symbols, and visual representations mediate cognitive development (Eun, 2019). In the context of EL instruction, tools like flashcards, tracing sheets, syllable clapping, and word walls function not only as learning aids but also as instruments for cognitive development. Importantly, the effectiveness of these tools depends on their cultural and linguistic relevance. For example, Jiménez et al. (1996) uses cognates and culturally familiar imagery which enhances comprehension and retention for bilingual learners. When students recognize commonalities between English academic vocabulary and words in their home language, especially in Latin-based languages such as Spanish, they gain confidence and deeper linguistic insight (Jiménez et al., 1996; Echevarria et al., 2017).

Vygotsky also emphasized the social nature of learning, suggesting that classroom dialogue, peer collaboration, and contextualized practice play a critical role in knowledge construction (Eun, 2019). Activities like collaborative flashcard review, vocabulary games, and discussion-based prompts offer ELs opportunities to practice academic language in authentic contexts, fostering both language development and content understanding.

Professional Development and Teacher Capacity

Finally, this study speaks to the broader need for teacher preparation and professional learning. As Oklahoma and other states continue to rely on alternatively or emergency certified educators to fill classroom vacancies, there is an urgent need to provide those teachers with tools and frameworks that support multilingual learners. Too often, teachers report limited access to training in language acquisition or scaffolding techniques. This lack of preparation compromises their ability to deliver equitable instruction (Doxsee, 2023)

By integrating research-based strategies for academic vocabulary instruction, grounded in sociocultural theory and translanguaging practices, this study aims to demonstrate a constructive approach that benefits all learners while addressing the unique needs of ELs (Martin, 2025). Empowering teachers with this knowledge has the potential to close academic gaps and build inclusive classrooms where linguistic diversity is recognized as an asset rather than a barrier.

Methodology

Participants

Participants include 73 second-year newcomer ELL students enrolled in a large urban public middle school. The sample consists of 41 fifth graders (35 Spanish speakers, 4 Pashto speakers, 1 Vietnamese speaker, and 1 Burmese speaker) and 32 sixth graders (26 Spanish speakers, 3 Pashto speakers, 1 Dari speaker, 1 Chinese speaker, and 1 Vietnamese speaker). Parental consent was obtained prior to participation.

Table 1

Participant Demographics by Grade Level and Home Language

Grade	Total Students	Spanish	Pashto	Vietnamese	Burmese	Dari	Chinese
5th Grade	41	35	4	1	1	0	0
6th Grade	32	26	3	1	0	1	1
Total	**73**	**61**	**7**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**1**

Note. Participants included 73 second-year newcomer English language learner (ELL) students enrolled in a large urban public middle school. Parental consent was obtained prior to participation.

Intervention

1. Morphological Instruction as an Intervention

Morphological instruction served as a targeted intervention designed to strengthen English Learners' (ELs) academic vocabulary and reading comprehension. This intervention explicitly taught students to analyze and break down complex words into their meaningful components (prefixes, roots, and suffixes) in order to improve their ability to infer word meanings across content areas. Because academic English relies heavily on morphologically complex terms, the intervention equipped students with a generative strategy for decoding unfamiliar vocabulary. For ELs, in particular, learning how word parts carry meaning supports more efficient vocabulary acquisition, enhances metalinguistic awareness, and promotes greater independence when engaging with grade-level texts (Crosson & Moore, 2017).

2. Cognate-Based Instruction as an Intervention

Cognate-based instruction functioned as a complementary intervention that leveraged students' home languages to facilitate academic vocabulary learning. This intervention focused on teaching students to identify and use cognates, words that share similar spelling, pronunciation, and meaning across languages, to make sense of new English terminology (Uzun, 2024). By drawing explicit connections between English academic vocabulary and students' first-language knowledge (e.g., information and información), the intervention aimed to accelerate word learning and deepen comprehension. As many ELs, particularly Spanish-speaking students, already hold partial knowledge of English through cognate structures, the intervention positioned their home language as an asset. This approach not only supported

vocabulary development but also promoted confidence, engagement, and more equitable access to academic content (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013).

Data Sources

Data 1. Teacher journal

Qualitative data was collected through an ongoing teacher reflective journal, which documented daily classroom observations throughout the implementation of the instructional intervention. The journal entries captured both positive and negative student responses, instructional adjustments, and emerging patterns related to student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. Instructional adjustments included morphological awareness strategies, visual supports, and consistent routines that support student learning. This reflective process allowed for examination of how instructional strategies affected individual students differently, while highlighting the need for flexibility.

Data 2. Teacher observation notes of student progress

Teacher observation notes were collected from October 2024 through April 2025 to document students' engagement, instructional effectiveness, and growth in academic vocabulary acquisition. Observations indicated that students initially required time to adjust to new instructional routines; however, once expectations were clearly explained, student participation and independence increased.

Data 3. School district NWEA scores

Quantitative data comes from NWEA MAP reading scores of Fall 2024, Winter 2024, Spring 2025. MAP Growth Reading is a computer-adaptive assessment for grades K–12 that measures reading comprehension, vocabulary, and analysis of literary and informational texts, adjusting question difficulty based on student responses to accurately track growth over time. NWEA assessments provide educators with timely, data-driven insights to identify students' instructional needs, monitor reading growth, compare performance to national norms, and design targeted, differentiated literacy instruction within a school setting.

Data Analysis

Part I. Teacher Journal

The teacher journaled her experience of the implementation of vocabulary instruction. An inductive qualitative approach was employed to analyze teacher observation and instructional reflections collected across four months. Through open coding and thematic analysis, recurring patterns were identified, categorized, and interpreted to understand the evolving impact of vocabulary instruction on student engagement, development, and strategy use.

1. Challenges in Initial Engagement and Cognitive Stamina

Initial observations highlighted a consistent struggle among students to sustain focus when introduced to new academic vocabulary. Notably, students displayed limited cognitive stamina, particularly in decoding and encoding unfamiliar terms. Frequent letter confusions (such as mixing up *b* and *d* or *i* and *e*) surfaced during early assessments. These findings suggest that foundational literacy skills, especially phonological and visual discrimination abilities, required targeted reinforcement.

2. Instructional Adaptations and Engagement Strategies

As the implementation progressed, strategic instructional adaptations led to observable improvements in student engagement and vocabulary comprehension. The introduction of word walls featuring morphological breakdowns, cognates, and accessible definitions fostered a more visually rich and cognitively supportive environment. Game-like activities, such as syllable segmentation through clapping, emerged as effective tools to increase participation. A key turning point was the explicit instruction in distinguishing near-synonymous vocabulary through attention to "power words," which significantly aided students' ability to discriminate and internalize nuanced meanings.

3. Responsive Curriculum Adjustment and Cognitive Stretching

Upon completing the designated 5th-grade vocabulary list, advanced terms from the 6th-grade curriculum were introduced. This responsive curriculum adjustment not only sustained student interest but also promoted cognitive growth. Students rose to the challenge, suggesting a successful calibration of task difficulty that aligned with their evolving proficiency levels.

4. Student-Specific Growth and Strategy Transfer

The month of March stood out as a particularly successful period of implementation. Students retained and applied vocabulary knowledge with minimal regression. Student 6 (see table 2) who had received accommodations such as oral reading of assessment items, showed increased accuracy and confidence. This individualized support enabled meaningful participation and learning gains. Moreover, students across the class demonstrated the ability to transfer vocabulary strategies to other content areas, indicating the beginning of cross-disciplinary generalization.

The analysis of classroom observations revealed a trajectory from early-stage vocabulary learning struggles to increasingly sophisticated strategy uses and vocabulary retention. Instructional scaffolds such as morphological support, gamified learning, and differentiation through accommodations played a critical role in fostering engagement and learning. The findings underscore the importance of responsive, strategy-rich vocabulary instruction tailored to students' developmental needs and contextual realities.

Part II. Teacher observation of students' progress.

Based on the teacher's detailed observations from January to March, the following table summarizes each student's progress over time across several indicators: engagement, vocabulary acquisition, use of accommodations, peer interaction, and overall academic development**.**

Table 2

Individual Student Progress Across Instructional Periods

Student	Background	January Progress	February Progress	March Progress	Summary of Growth
1	Afghan female, age 10, first-year student	Unable to recognize letters or numbers; relied on word tracing	Required one-to-one instruction; guessed responses; limited progress	No notable progress; continued guessing; difficulty following schedule	Minimal growth: instructional level exceeded current readiness
2	Afghan male, age 12, first-year newcomer	Progressed from letter recognition to simple word reading; highly engaged	High participation; mentored a new peer; demonstrated spelling success	Accurately identified vocabulary and definitions; applied knowledge across subjects	Significant growth; demonstrated leadership and high intrinsic motivation
3	Afghan male, age 10, second-year newcomer	Motivated learner; required repeated exposure; struggled with reading definitions	Responded well to accommodations; benefited from collaboration with ELA teacher	Improved word–definition matching; increased confidence in spelling and Lexia	Steady progress through scaffolding and persistence
4	Hispanic female, age 11, second-year newcomer	High performing; self-regulated; Spanish not spoken	Motivated peers; sought additional vocabulary and reading challenges	Temporary decline in scores due to distraction and social regression	Strong overall performance with minor motivational fluctuation

5	Hispanic female, age 10, first-year newcomer	Consistently accurate; no missed vocabulary questions	Used English exclusively; active classroom participation	Demonstrated strength in morphological awareness and syllable segmentation	Consistent, high-level growth; intrinsically motivated and collaborative
6	Guatemalan male, age 11, first-year newcomer	Struggled academically; motivated by external rewards	Expressed desire to read; limited home practice; frequent guessing	Increased disengagement; behavior concerns; parental involvement required	Initial cooperation followed by notable regression
7	Afghan male, age 12, second-year newcomer	Highly motivated; independent repetition; strong family support	Served as peer mentor; collaborated across language groups	Demonstrated independent testing skills; confident and respected by peers	Substantial growth in autonomy, leadership, and academic independence

Note. Student progress was documented through teacher observation notes collected from January through March. Descriptions reflect qualitative observations of engagement, instructional responsiveness, and academic vocabulary development.

An inductive analysis of student progress notes from January to March revealed distinct developmental trajectories shaped by prior schooling experience, cultural adaptation, motivation type (intrinsic vs. extrinsic), and instructional responsiveness. Seven core patterns emerged:

Differentiation Necessity.

Students with no prior schooling (e.g., Student 1) struggled to grasp foundational literacy skills, signaling a mismatch between instructional demands and learner readiness.

Accelerated Growth with Support.

Students like Student 2 and Student 3 demonstrated accelerated progress when instructional accommodations (e.g., read-aloud, peer support, 1:1 scaffolding) were consistently applied and reinforced.

Peer Influence and Social Motivation.

Peer dynamics significantly influenced academic behavior. Students 2, 4, and 7 acted as informal mentors, enhancing both their own and their classmates' learning.

Resilience and Autonomy.

Student 7 exemplified self-regulated learning. His journey from passive recipient to classroom leader underscores the impact of consistency, family encouragement, and strategic scaffolding.

Behavioral and Emotional Influences.

Students 4 and 6 displayed fluctuating performance tied to social-emotional factors. While Student 4 rebounded after a motivational talk, Student 6 regressed without effective external support.

Morphological Awareness Gains.

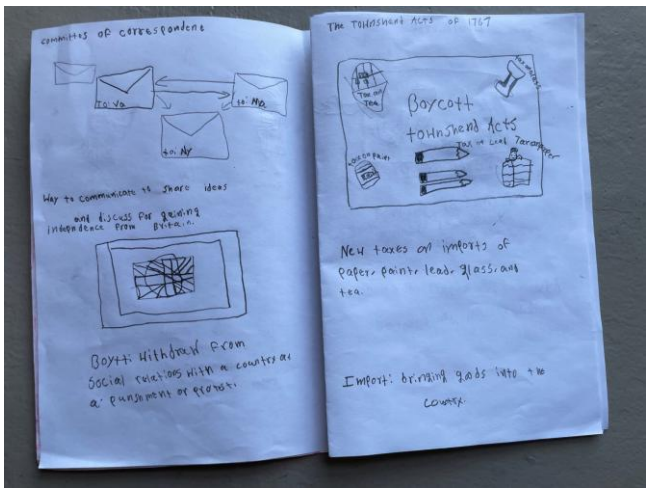
Several students (e.g., Students 3 and 5) began applying morphological knowledge and syllable analysis strategies, reflecting internalization of vocabulary instruction methods.

Equity Over Equality.

The reflection across students highlighted the limitations of uniformly designed instruction. Greater progress was observed where instruction was adapted to individual readiness and contextual need.

Figure 1

Example from Student 5



Note. Figure 1 is an example from student 5 retelling the events leading up to the American Revolution.

This booklet was implemented in my third year of teaching. The two previous years, students struggled with the events leading up to the American Revolution. In my personal opinion, producing these booklets was helpful by engaging the student with content knowledge.

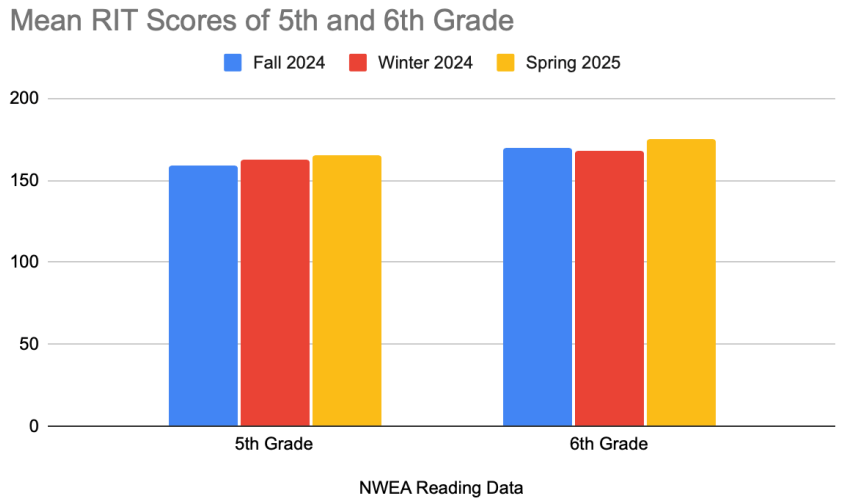
Together, these findings suggest that vocabulary development in multilingual newcomers is most effective when instruction is adaptive, responsive, and emotionally attuned to students' linguistic backgrounds, social identities, and readiness levels. Sustained engagement, individualized support, and collaborative peer learning emerged as essential conditions for measurable vocabulary and content learning progress.

Part III. NWEA MAP reading scores

The NWEA MAP reading scores Fall 2024, Winter 2024, Spring 2025 for 5th and 6th graders were presented to show students' progress in reading processing, vocabulary and critical reading. These benchmarks are based on historical data and predictive modeling from millions of student test records, allowing you to see how a child's scores compare to national norms.

Figure 2

NWEA MAP reading scores Fall 2024, Winter 2024, Spring 2025



Note. In Figure 2, the scores were combined between the three 5th grade classes and then two sixth grade classes.

Over the course of a year, 5th grade NWEA Map RIT scores increased from 159 to 165, while 6th grade NWEA MAP RIT scores increased from 170-175. This indicates measurable progress in reading comprehension amongst the fifth and sixth grade English learners. These gains reflect the student's ability to engage with more complex texts, which is likely supported by the targeted academic vocabulary strategies provided in instruction. By providing an instructional emphasis on morphological awareness, cognates, and visual support, it contributes to the students' improved capacity to derive meaning from texts. This means students are growing not only quantitatively but also qualitatively by being exposed to various reading strategies.

Discussion

This study highlights the powerful impact of integrating cognate awareness and morphological instruction into academic vocabulary development for multilingual learners. The findings suggest that when vocabulary instruction is scaffolded through visuals, linguistic comparisons, and interactive strategies, students become more engaged and are better able to internalize and apply academic language across content areas.

One of the most promising observations was students' increased participation and confidence when they could draw on their home languages to make sense of English academic terms. This aligns with research that emphasizes the importance of recognizing and leveraging the linguistic assets multilingual learners bring to the classroom (Fine, 2018). Rather than viewing students' first languages as obstacles, the instructional model positioned them as bridges to deeper understanding. By explicitly teaching cognates and connecting them to morphology and meaning, educators can help students transfer knowledge across languages and content areas.

In particular, the word wall that included both English academic terms and their cognates in multiple home languages, such as Spanish, Arabic, Burmese, and Vietnamese, proved to be a central instructional and cultural tool. It not only served as a reference for vocabulary development but also validated students' linguistic identities. This multilingual approach fostered a more inclusive and equitable learning environment, where students could see themselves reflected in classroom instruction.

Furthermore, the incorporation of morphological awareness, through syllable segmentation, root word identification, and stress pattern analysis, supported both decoding and vocabulary acquisition. These metalinguistic strategies strengthened students' ability to identify word parts and use that knowledge when encountering unfamiliar academic terms. As Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests, students were able to complete more complex linguistic tasks with appropriate scaffolding than they could independently (Eun, 2019).

The role of interactive review games, such as Cognate Bingo and vocabulary scavenger hunts, also cannot be understated. These activities created a low-pressure environment where students could practice academic terms in meaningful and playful ways. Movement and collaboration encouraged repetition and semantic processing, further supporting retention.

Finally, this work also responds to broader challenges in education, especially in states like Oklahoma, where reading proficiency scores remain low (Martinez-Keel, 2025; Melon, 2024). By foregrounding academic vocabulary instruction and culturally responsive practices, this model contributes to efforts aimed at narrowing persistent achievement gaps and building stronger language foundations for all students.

While results were promising, future research should explore longitudinal outcomes, particularly how cognate awareness influences reading comprehension and performance on standardized assessments. Additionally, more professional development is needed to support teachers, especially those who are alternatively or emergency certified, in implementing these strategies effectively.

Limitation and Future Direction

This study provided valuable insights into the implementation of academic vocabulary instruction in an English Learners classroom. There were a few limitations that must be acknowledged that may affect the findings and interpretation. The study that was conducted used a relatively small sample of English learners from a single school. The results may not be generalizable to broader populations, especially in diverse educational settings where student demographics, instructional resources, and teacher training may differ. Not only diverse educational settings, but different instructional approaches could also be a factor. Teaching styles, classroom management, and familiarity with academic vocabulary instruction can affect how the intervention is implemented and received by students. Not all teachers teach the same way, and not all students learn the same way; therefore, instructional approaches often need to change to accommodate those needs.

The instructional intervention was implemented over a one-year time frame. Vocabulary instruction and utilizing academic language is a long-term process. If there were to be a longer duration, it could have allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of instruction on both retention and academic performance. Not all students are at the same English language proficiency levels within the classroom. With varied levels, this could have influenced how they respond to the instruction. The approach may have been more effective for some with a proficiency level, while others can shed light on where extra instructional methods are needed.

Despite the limitations, this study contributes to the growing body of research on academic vocabulary instruction for English learners. It also offers important implications for future research and classroom practice. Studies in the future will need a larger, more diverse population, extended timelines, and a valid, workable instructional method to help validate and expand these findings.

Recommendations for Future Research and Classroom Practice

Future efforts should prioritize disciplinary literacy and context-driven vocabulary instruction that integrates academic language development with content learning. Cross-disciplinary collaboration among content-area teachers is essential to establish consistent instructional processes, reducing student confusion and promoting coherence across classrooms. In addition, technology-enhanced vocabulary instruction should be explored thoughtfully to ensure equitable access and meaningful integration, rather than serving as a standalone solution. While technology can strengthen traditional instructional practices, overreliance may limit students' ability to meet future academic standards.

Longitudinal research on vocabulary development is also needed to capture patterns of growth and retention that short-term studies often overlook. Such research can provide critical insight into the long-term impact of instructional methods and support data-informed decision-making, particularly for identifying students who are not meeting grade-level expectations and refining targeted interventions. Furthermore, examining the role of morphological awareness is essential for sustained vocabulary growth and academic success. Systematic inclusion of morphological instruction in curricula, technology tools, and teacher preparation can enhance English learners' ability to analyze and derive meaning from complex academic language.

Collaborative action research offers a powerful approach for improving academic vocabulary instruction by empowering teachers to engage in reflective, data-driven inquiry within their own classrooms. Through shared investigation and collaboration, educators can develop sustainable practices that address the diverse linguistic needs of English learners. Finally, developing and evaluating adaptable intervention models, supported by technology for personalization, can ensure equitable access to rigorous content for all students, not only English learners, and contribute to closing persistent achievement gaps.

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Revisiting Website Evaluation with ChatGPT

Dr. Jodi Pilgrim and Dr. Sheri Vasinda

Abstract

The ability to analyze and evaluate online sources for credibility remains a widespread concern. The purpose of this article is to share the results of an AI Challenge in which ChatGPT was asked to evaluate the credibility of 18 hoax websites. The queries were conducted in the spring of 2023 and December 2024. In the AI Challenge, ChatGPT was provided the following prompt: "*Is this website credible (followed by the website's URL)?* We collected screenshots of ChatGPT's answers to our queries and analyzed the responses. Quantitative analysis included obtaining a percentage of the queries ChatGPT got correct. Qualitative analysis included multiple readings of the responses to determine how AI tools might benefit instruction related to website evaluation. In 2023, only 27.8 % of ChatGPT's responses were clearly accurate. The chatbot determined five of the 18 hoax websites were not credible and one was credible. In December of 2024, 88.89% of ChatGPT's responses were accurate. Hoax websites that were initially difficult to analyze were later labeled as not credible by ChatGPT, indicating ChatGPT has progressed in its ability to determine website credibility on this task. The findings of this study provide insight into the use of AI for website evaluation, or reliability reasoning.

Introduction

ChatGPT is a generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbot which made its debut on November 30, 2022. As educators concerned about K-12 students' abilities to evaluate online resources in an effective manner, we thought we'd see how well OpenAI's ChatGPT could evaluate the credibility of websites. In this ChatGPT challenge, we asked the online tool about the credibility of several hoax websites we have collected over years of working with children on determining website credibility. Our favorite hoax website about the famous tree octopus yielded the following response from ChatGPT:

> No, the website https://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/ is not credible. It contains information about the mythical "Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus" which is a well-known hoax and is not a real species. The website was created to demonstrate how easily false information can be spread on the internet and to raise awareness about the importance of fact-checking and critical thinking.

The AI tool accurately described this website and did so in a manner that exceeds the skills exhibited by many K-12 students. For instance, in 2006, researchers from the University of Connecticut assessed 25 seventh graders' abilities to determine the credibility of the tree octopus' website. All 25 students, who had been identified as the most proficient online readers in the school, believed the content was authentic and lacked the skills to determine inadequate credibility (Krane, 2006). In addition, when told the website was a fake, the students struggled to find evidence to confirm a lack of credibility. A more recent study showed more promising results with first through fifth graders evaluating the website. Only 65% of the elementary students in this study fell for the hoax (Pilgrim et al., 2019).

The purpose of this article is to share the results of our ChatGPT Challenge. Although the chatbot's response to our query accurately identified the Tree Octopus website as lacking credibility, not all of the responses regarding hoax websites used in this ChatGPT challenge were clear and precise. Yet, the responses generated by the tool yield useful insight for teachers and students alike. For years, experts have been working hard to provide tips and tools for students to use in website evaluation (November, 2008; Schrock, 2002; Zhang et al., 2011). This topic is certainly one that needs to be revisited, as research indicates students in K-12 settings need instruction related to determining the credibility of online resources (Pilgrim & Vasinda, 2021; Zhang et al., 2011). In this article, we revisit strategies for website evaluation, or reliability reasoning (Pilgrim et al., 2019), through the analysis and extension of a ChatGPT challenge.

Artificial Intelligence

According to the International Society for Technology Education (ISTE), "To prepare students for the careers of today — and tomorrow — educators must explore and integrate artificial intelligence (AI) into K-12 classrooms. AI is a critical element of any STEM curriculum" (ISTE, 2023, para. 1). ChatGPT, created by OpenAI, is a generative AI tool that has gained significant attention. The chatbot, capable of performing a variety of tasks with surprising plausibility and speed, enables users to ask questions about anything, including how to write a lesson plan, a recommendation, or examine the credibility of a website. Because it mines data and learns its responses from the internet, its output needs to be scrutinized, just as other internet sources.

Even though OpenAI's ChatGPT has raised concerns about the use of the chatbot by students for cheating purposes, many educators wonder how we can turn concerns about ChatGPT to instructional uses (Roose, 2023). However, there remains concern that the information ChatGPT provides is inaccurate or misleading. In a ChatGPT challenge, 18 hoax websites were used in queries in which the chat bot was asked to determine credibility. The challenge provided interesting results that offer insight into ways the tool could be used to encourage students to expand their knowledge of website structures and online information and to apply this knowledge to identify suspicious websites.

Background: Website Evaluation

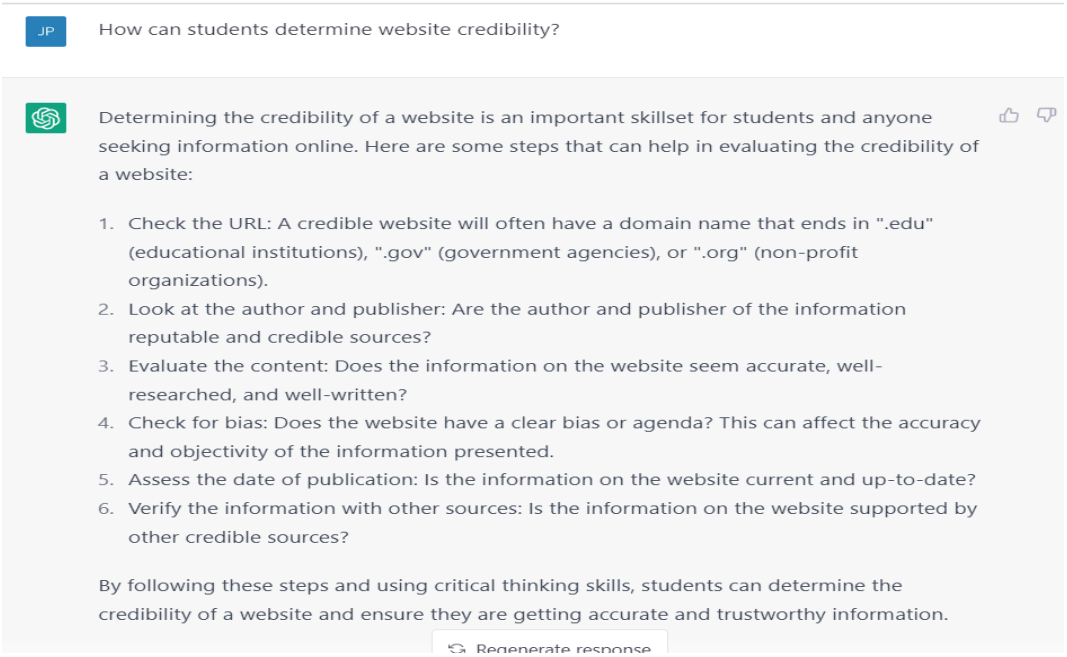
Evaluation of information, regardless of whether the content is paper-based or web-based, requires critical thinking skills, including analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing information (Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2017). Critical thinking is more than a set of subskills. It is a stance or disposition of being actively reflective (Dewey, 1933) and, therefore, is situated in a constructivist theoretical perspective. Dewey called this disposition reflective thinking, in which learners actively persist in careful consideration of evidence and rationale to establish a belief. Dewey's foresight included "selecting and weighing the bearing of facts and suggestions as they present themselves, as well as if deciding whether the alleged facts are really facts and whether the idea used is a sound idea or merely a fancy" (pp. 119–120). The ability to think critically is the foundation of students' evaluative thinking, creativity, and innovation (University of Connecticut Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, n.d.) and is a key factor in evaluating information on the internet. Thinking critically about online information is often referred to as web literacy (Leu, et al., 2015; November, 2008).

Website evaluation is one of many skills required of online reading (Pilgrim, et al., 2018), but it is the most difficult, especially in an era of fake news (Pilgrim & Vasinda, 2021). Because of the participatory nature of Web 2.0, determining the credibility of sources is one of the most critical skills of the 21st century. Understanding bias and the ways information can be manipulated and altered requires the development of healthy skepticism (Leu, 2017) and reliability reasoning (Pilgrim, et al., 2019). Children need to understand how to find credible sources on the internet as they encounter information within wikis, websites created by unknown sources, or websites that sell products and target internet users, as well as websites created by trusted sources.

Figure 1 presents the response ChatGPT generated when asked how students can determine website credibility. This response reiterates tips Zhang et al. (2011) used in a study with 242 fourth and fifth graders using the WWWDOT strategy. The WWWDOT strategy, which uses a clever acronym to help students remember ways to evaluate sources, encourages students to ask and consider: 1) Who wrote this and what credentials do they have? 2) Why was it written? 3) When was it written? 4) Does it help meet my needs? 5) Organization of the site? 6) To-do list for the future. The findings from the study indicated that students receiving instruction in the WWWDOT framework recognized a greater need to evaluate information on the internet for trustworthiness. We will review each ChatGPT suggestion to provide a review of how to check for website credibility.

Figure 1

ChatGPT response to "How can students determine website credibility?"



Check the URL

Many students do not understand URLs. In a study examining first through fifth graders' knowledge of the concepts of online text, participants responded to a task in which they had to

identify the URL (the administrator pointed to it on a screen). Most students viewed the URL space as a search bar. Of the 80 students interviewed, 13% of first graders, 14% of second graders, 53% of third graders, 53% of fourth graders, and 85% of fifth graders correctly responded to the question about the URL (Pilgrim et al., 2018).

A URL serves as a readable address represented by a numerical code, or Internet Protocol (IP) address. This code identifies the location of resources on the internet, similar to call numbers on library books. The URL provides insight into information about a website's origin, content, author, etc. For example, the URL, https://storylineonline.net/activities, is interpreted in the format of protocol://domain/other_information. The first few letters, https, indicate the hypertext transfer protocol is a secure site due to the "s" included at the end. The domain, or IP address, is next and represents the host, the owner of the website. The last part of the URL, called the top-level domain or extension, identifies the source of the content, such as commercial, non-profit, or educational (Table 1). Google adds new top-level domains, which may contribute to the complexity of determining the source of the content. For example, Google has added .guru, .how, and .brand as top level domains (Google, 2015). The final section of the URL, when included, provides other information. For this example, it indicates activities, thus completing the unique web address for the resource found on the internet (November, 2008).

Table 1

Common Extensions (also called Top-Level Domain Codes)

Common Extensions	Initial Source of Content
.com	Commercial or Business
.edu	Education, usually higher education
.gov	Government
.net	Networked Computers and Storage (to connect users to an array of computers and services)
.org	Any organization
.co	Company
.ac	Academic Institution (outside of US)

Source: November (2012)

ChatGPT's response about the URL provides some insight into determining details about a website. For example, it is somewhat beneficial that the response included the technical term, "domain." However, the information about the ending of the website is only partially helpful. Even though ChatGPT's response indicated .org aligns with a nonprofit organization, it is important to recognize that this extension is available to anyone (November, 2012).

Websites can also end in extensions that are indicative of a country's origin. While .edu and .k12 will access US sites, the UK uses .sch for school and .ac for higher academic

institutions. They also have a .uk in the extension position. Table 2 includes a brief list of some examples of country codes.

Table 2

Example of Country Codes (also called Top-Level Domain Codes)

Examples of Country Codes	Matching Country
.au	Australia
.cn	China
.fr	France
.jp	Japan
.us	United States
.za	South Africa

Source: November (2012)

Determine the Author and Publisher

ChatGPT's response includes "look at the author and publisher." The W in the WWWDOT approach to website evaluation also prompts students to ask, *Who wrote this and what credentials do they have?* Locating an author of a webpage as well as the organization helps determine funding sources or suspicious information. Although this is a great tip, how do we teach students to do this? First, we can teach online text features (Pilgrim et al., 2019). If a website contains an *About* tab, students can use it to seek this information. In addition, with knowledge of a URL, a student can truncate a website, which means they eliminate everything after the extension. For example, the hoax octopus' site, https://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus, includes additional information after .net. When that information is removed or deleted (remove treeoctopus), the home website includes clues to the author's identity, including his quote, "serving the paranoid since 1997."

Unlike most texts found in libraries, which are vetted for accuracy, materials found on the internet require close scrutiny. In the case that an author or publisher is not easily located, students may locate a website's publisher information by using the Whois? Database (November 2008). If a website's content seems questionable and students want to know who owns the site or has published the material, they can go to www.whois.com. By entering the domain in the search bar, one can determine who registered the website, when it was registered, and when it expires. Using the tool, one can determine that the author of the tree octopus website registered his website in the year 2000.

Evaluate the Content

Evaluating the content includes a range of critiques. In contrast to the gated garden search controls of many school districts, the "wild wide web" (Vasinda & Pilgrim, 2019) contains unvetted content, fake news, ads, and other features that distract from desired information and make website evaluation complicated. The term "fake news" has been used to describe fabricated

media, with no factual basis, that is presented to the public as a credible report (Alcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Brennen, 2017). Loos et al. (2018) as well as other researchers (Bovens & Loos, 2002) suggest that fake news threatens information access, which is a basic right of all citizens. To discern credible information and news, readers must apply critical thinking to develop what we call "reliability reasoning" (Pilgrim et al., 2019, p. 85-86), or the ability to determine the credibility of online information. The development of such critical thinking requires instruction and practice; yet many teachers are reluctant to allow children to search the wild wide web due to safety concerns (Vasinda & Pilgrim, 2019).

In a 2019 study (Vasinda & Pilgrim, 2019), students in grades 1-5 were asked, "How can you tell if this website will provide correct information that is true or accurate?" Only 18.9% of participants were able to answer the question correctly. Participants were unable to verbalize ways to examine credibility. Inaccurate answers were common, which students either mentioning or pointing at "real" photos. This finding suggests students would likely be fooled by fake news on the internet that included authentic-looking photos.

Check for Bias

Most texts, both print-based and online, reflect bias of some sort which means it provides information while favoring one side or position (Jones, 2023). The second W in the WWWDOT approach, prompts students to ask, "Why was it (the website) written?" This question helps students consider the author's purpose. Authors of an informational text often want a reader to see an issue as they see it. Considering the author's "why?" supports students in determining whether the information is objective and accurate because writing purposes to a large extent affect the thoroughness and accuracy of the content (Zhang, et al., 2011). Jones (2023) recommends checking the source for bias by looking to see what other types of information the source publishes. Students can investigate source bias by clicking the author's link and searching for other published articles.

Access the Date of the Publication

The copyright date is fairly easy to find in a textbook. Accessing the publication date on a website can be more complicated and must be explicitly taught. The third W in the WWWDOT approach prompts students to ask, "When was it written and updated?" In the 2019 study mentioned earlier, no first (n=15) or second graders (n=14) were able to locate copyright information. Twelve percent of third graders (n=16), 40 % of fourth graders (n=15), and 60% of fifth graders (n=20) identified the copyright. Typically, the copyright date of a webpage is found by scrolling to the bottom of the page. Articles often had the date at the top with the author's name. Finally, as mentioned previously, if a website's content seems questionable and students want to know who owns the site or has published the material, they can go to www.whois.com.

Verify the Information with Other Sources

Verifying information across sources is also referred to as cross-referencing. Students should verify suspicious content on a website by conducting a search to locate additional information about the topic. The T in the WWWDOT approach, called the to-do list for the future, refers to the importance of using multiple sources to verify and compare to the information found on the internet. The following exercise, which employed ChatGPT queries,

demonstrated that cross-referencing and comparing websites is a critical step in the website evaluation process.

ChatGPT Challenge

In the spring of 2023, initial queries were conducted to see if ChatGPT could determine the credibility of hoax websites. Our goal was to analyze 20 hoax websites that we had used in our work as teacher educators. Two of the selected websites were no longer available, so we examined 18 websites. In the AI Challenge, ChatGPT was provided the following prompt: "*Is this website credible (followed by the website's URL)?* In December 2024, we replicated the queries and recorded the updated results. A list of the 18 websites and a synopsis of the ChatGPT responses are presented in Appendix A.

We took screenshots of ChatGPT's answers to our queries and analyzed the responses. Quantitative analysis included obtaining a percentage of the queries ChatGPT got correct. Qualitative analysis included multiple readings of the responses to determine how use of the chatbot might benefit instruction related to website evaluation.

Did ChatGPT Get It Right? 2023 Findings

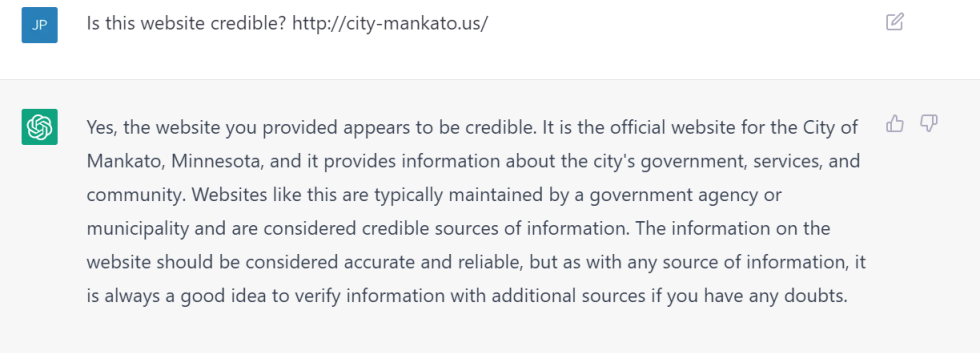
Overall, only 27.8 % of ChatGPT's responses were clearly accurate. The chatbot determined five of the 18 hoax websites were not credible and one was credible. The other responses ranged from "difficult to say" to "it depends." These responses were not always accurate but included informative tips students could use to further determine credibility. In terms of AI responses, it is necessary to point out that ChatGPT replies are rarely identical. In other words, if asked the same questions next week, the responses may vary. In the next section, we will explore ChatGPT's responses to the queries and whether or not they were accurate or possibly helpful to internet users seeking assistance with reliability reasoning.

ChatGPT says "Yes" to credibility

One website, http://city-mankato.us/, was mislabeled as credible. Figure 2 presents the ChatGPT response regarding credibility. Even though the initial response is yes, the response ends in "it is always a good idea to verify information with additional sources if you have any doubts."

Figure 2

ChatGPT says "yes" to credibility



What made ChatGPT determine this website to be credible? Perhaps the .us extension? A student unfamiliar with the city would not have the background knowledge to determine if the information on the website was credible. Therefore, an alternative step may be to have students check to see if there is another website for the city. Upon completing this particular exercise, students will find the actual website for the Mankato (www.mankatomn.gov). Students might also research other city websites, which would result in knowledge that they often end in .gov. For example, the places in which we live, Belton, Texas (www.beltontexas.gov), and Stillwater, Oklahoma (https://stillwaterok.gov/) end in .gov.

After determining the website is *not* credible, encourage students to try the whois database. A search using the Whois database shows that the registrant and administrative contact is Don Descy. In a web search for this name, students will likely find the website, http://descy.50megs.com/descy/webcred/EvalIntRes4.htm, which indicates that Don Descy is an instructional media and technology consultant in Mankato, MN. His work aligns with evaluating internet resources.

ChatGPT Says "No" to Credibility

In addition to correctly identifying the Tree Octopus site as not credible, ChatGPT accurately identified four other unreliable websites (Appendix A). The rationale for these determinations varied. The tree octopus website was deemed "a well-known hoax and is not a real species." Figure 3 depicts the four other ChatGPT responses.

Figure 3

ChatGPT Finds the Fake

JP Is this website credible? https://www.dhmo.org/

No, the website https://www.dhmo.org/ is not credible. It contains information about the supposed dangers of dihydrogen monoxide (DHMO), which is a common scientific term for water. The website presents false and misleading information about water in an attempt to alarm the reader and demonstrate how easily false information can be spread. The website is not a credible source of information and should not be used for research purposes.

JP Is this website credible? https://improbable.com/airchives/classical/cat/cat.html

The website https://improbable.com/airchives/classical/cat/cat.html appears to be part of the Annals of Improbable Research (AIR), a humor magazine that publishes articles about science and research that are "improbable" or "ignoble" (i.e., trivial or humorous).

While the website may be entertaining and humorous, it is not a credible source for scientific or factual information. The content on this website is intended to be humorous and satirical, and should not be used as a reliable source of information.

If you are looking for credible information on a particular topic, it is important to find reputable sources, such as peer-reviewed scientific journals, established news outlets, or reputable academic or government websites.

JP Is this website credible? https://web.archive.org/web/20161201213424/http://abcnews.com.co/obama-executive-order-bans-pledge-of-allegiance-in-schools/

No, this website is not credible. The website "abcnews.com.co" is not affiliated with the reputable news organization ABC News. The article you mentioned, "Obama Executive Order Bans Pledge of Allegiance in Schools," is not credible and appears to be fake news. This type of misinformation can spread quickly and cause harm, so it's important to verify information from multiple reputable sources before accepting it as true.

JP Is this website credible? https://joebiden.info/

I wouldn't say that the website "joebiden.info" is a credible source of information about President Biden. The website's authenticity and objectivity cannot be determined just by its URL. The information on a website, regardless of its URL, should be evaluated based on its accuracy, reliability, and objectivity, among other factors. It's also important to consider the source of the information and the author's credentials, if they're listed.

It's best to obtain information about President Biden and other public figures from reputable news organizations, government websites, and other credible sources.

The ChatGPT response for the first website in Figure 3 includes the information that lacks credibility: "The website presents false and misleading information about water in an attempt to alarm the reader and demonstrate how easily false information can be spread." How could a teacher support a student evaluating the credibility of the website?

Having students analyze this website may promote academic vocabulary. For example, the water molecule has the chemical formula H2O, meaning the molecule is composed of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom. Literally, the term "dihydrogen monoxide" means "two hydrogen, one oxygen." Unpacking this term through structural, or morphological, analysis not only models a strategy for understanding this word, but also demonstrates a strategy transferable to other Greek- and Latin-based science vocabulary. Once students understand the manipulations of roots in the article, the lens through which they examine the website may change.

A key to student analysis of this website would be to have them examine the forward links (November, 2008). In other words, teachers may have students click on hyperlinked words. In a modeling activity, a teacher could click on "controversy" and point out that the text refers to a "conspiracy" and a DHMO issue (water issue). Although there are continuing references to a "cover up," the website never explains the actual issue. In addition, that page appears to be published by the Environmental Assessment center, but a quick search reveals there is no agency by that exact name. Under "special reports," the link to the Editorial contains text that states, "BAN DIHYDROGEN MONOXIDE - THE INVISIBLE KILLER!"

The second response in Figure 3 suggests the website appears to be part of a humor magazine with articles reflecting improbable science. The URL, which includes the word *improbable*, is the first clue for students to detect. If they do not know the meaning of the word, they can look it up or use morphological analysis (im = not; probably = likely or reasonable). Another step to determine credibility is to look at the author and publisher. A teacher can model ways to locate the author or the home page. There are two ways to find the home page. With this website, students may scroll to the bottom to find the Home button. They can also truncate the website. Either method leads to a page titled, "Improbable Research," described as "research that makes one laugh, then think." Evaluating the content of this website also raises alarms. Although the articles on this page seem current (2023), the article titles are silly. For example, one article is titled, How to Befriend Crows.

The third response in Figure 3 suggests the website is not affiliated with the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), an English-language commercial broadcast television and radio network owned by The Walt Disney Company. The wording "fake news" is even used by ChatGPT. How can our students determine this information? Yes, they could ask ChatGPT, but as seen, the chat bot is not always accurate. Students need to develop reliability reasoning (Vasinda and Pilgrim, 2019).

National Geographic Kids shares information for children on "spotting fake news" that provides especially helpful information for this particular situation. The article by Kay Boatner (n.d.) suggests that a well-known news source (like ABC or BBC) is not going to try to trick the public. They also suggest that if the story is real, many publications will cover it. Therefore, students should cross reference the website for similar information elsewhere.

The final response in Figure 3 is vague. The response states "I wouldn't say the website…is a credible source of info about Joe Biden. The URL is mentioned, as if it was considered in determining this answer, but there is no specific information that details why the website is not credible. Instead, it is suggested that the information on a website should be evaluated based on its accuracy, reliability, and objectivity. Therefore, locating the author/publisher of this website is an important next step. At the bottom of the webpage, internet users encounter a warning: "Parody / Satire. This is NOT the Joe Biden campaign website."

ChatGPT Appears Uncertain

In the remainder of the queries, the chatbot did not confirm whether or not sources were credible but alluded to a need for further investigation. Many responses provided outstanding tips that prove beneficial. Of particular importance were mentions of personal websites, educational websites, and online stores.

Personal Website

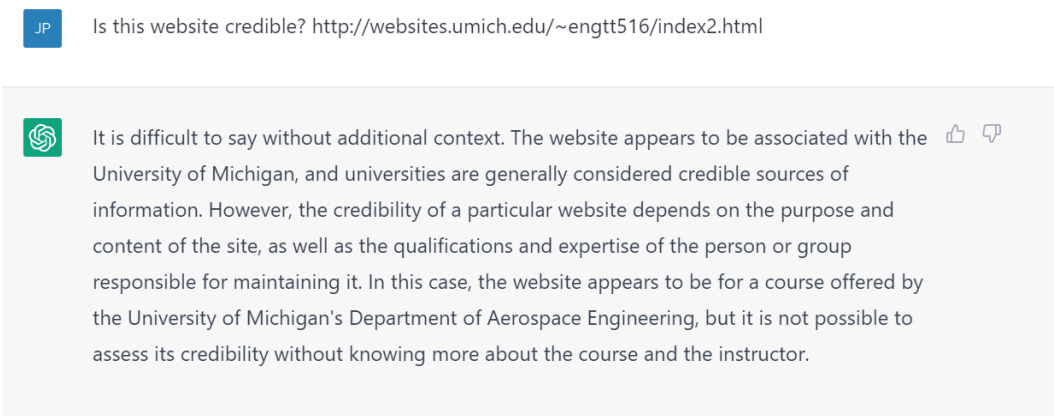
In three responses, the chat reads that "the website you provide appears to be a personal website." What constitutes a personal website? The response provides no clues, but teachers can provide instruction about personal websites. One way to determine a personal website is with tilde (~). Figure 4 includes ChatGPT's assessment of the website, http://websites.umich.edu/~engtt516/index2.html is partially correct. It appears to be associated with University of Michigan. However, the tilde (~) mark denotes a personal website. This particularly personal website is a hoax. Although students can typically trust .edu websites, it is important that they care able to read the entire URL to take note of any other clues to the author information.

The personal website https://www.deadlysins.com/guinea-worm does not include a name or any other indication of personal ownership in the URL. However, when one arrives at the website, at the very top, there is a red note that reads: "Who does this? I'm a fictional writer, among other things. Find me at . . ." This statement is a clue for readers. "Fictional writer" signifies that the website probably includes fiction rather than facts.

The third personal website, http://www.weathergraphics.com/tim/fisher includes the author's name in the URL. Therefore, as ChatGPT cautions, "the credibility of a particular site depends on the qualifications and expertise of the person responsible for maintaining it, as well as the accuracy of the information they provide." (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Identifying Personal Websites



Educational Websites

ChatGPT called two of the websites "educational websites" that "provide information." Both websites ended in .com instead of .edu. The Chatbot reported that both websites (based on a quick review of the information provided on the site) appear to be "well-researched and well-written." However, the response was not helpful in terms of recognizing an authentic educational website or providing insight into website credibility. In addition, K12 students would struggle to identify a well-researched website—what does this mean, and how can we teach students to look for such websites? We believe teachers can model ways to skim websites for this type of detail. For example, the www.allaboutexplorers.com hoax website has a "For Teachers" tab, which may lead the reader to assume credibility. It also has references on the "about this site tab." The AI chatbot may have described the website as well-researched for this reason. In actuality, the website is designed to provide teachers with lessons on conducting internet searches. The site stated:

> Because we wanted to make a point about finding useless information even in a site which looked at first to be fairly well put together, all of the Explorer biographies here are fictional. While many of the facts are true or based on truth, many inaccuracies, lies, and even downright absurdity are mixed in indiscriminately. As such, it is important that you do not use this site as a source of reference for your own research!

The Progression of ChatGPT and AI: 2024 Findings

Since our 2023 ChatGPT's challenge, ChatGPT has emerged as a leading generative AI tool for many people, used by 200 million people every week, up from 100 million over the same period a year ago (Reuters, 2024). As ChatGPT has grown, competitors such as Google's Gemini, Anthropic's Claude, Meta's Llama, Microsoft's Copilot, and Perplexity's Perplexity have joined the competition. ChatGPT now has more advanced paid versions of the chatbot based on levels of access and capabilities. In addition, ChatGPT Search was launched in 2024. The launch of the browsing tool for ChatGPT enabled the language model to access live information from the web, moving beyond its initial limitations of being trained only on data up to 2021. However, internet users no longer need to use ChatGPT for AI assistance. Now, moving at a fast rate, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing internet navigation. Queries using search engines like Google or Safari generate AI responses, so internet users do not need to investigate websites located in online searches. Instead, they can read AI generated responses to their internet searches, accompanied by links to sources. In December of 2024, we revisited our ChatGPT challenge to examine potential changes in query responses. We conducted our queries again and added updated findings to Appendix A in the far-right column.

In December of 2024, ChatGPT did much better than in the first challenge. Overall, 88.89% of ChatGPT's responses were accurate. Hoax websites that were initially difficult to analyze were labeled as not credible by ChatGPT, indicating ChatGPT has progressed in its ability to determine website credibility. For example, 10 of the websites ChatGPT was initially indecisive about were labeled as not credible in the updated inquiry. In addition to stating these websites were not credible, ChatGPT included a "Here's Why" section in its response, detailing reasons the websites were not suitable sources for facts. For example, the query on http://www.mystiuqe.net/cybertan.htm resulted in an explanation about the unusual URL, including how it seemed unprofessional and potentially outdated or personal rather than institutional or scholarly. The response indicated that a lack of HTTPS (secure connection)

suggested the site may not be well-maintained or secure and that the domain name "mystiuqe.net" was unfamiliar and didn't appear associated with reputable organizations, educational institutions, or credible sources. ChatGPT ended with, "If you'd like, I can browse to find more about the site!"

Two ChatGPT responses were inaccurate. ChatGPT indicated that the hoax website http://websites.umich.edu/~engtt516/index2.html was likely to be credible. The .edu domain makes the website difficult to evaluate without a closer examination of the website's content. ChatGPT indicated that the hoax website https://askanydifference.com/difference-between-saltwater-and-freshwater/ was "moderately reliable" based on "clear and simple explanations about the differences between saltwater and freshwater" and its general structure. ChatGPT concluded that, "While this website might be acceptable for general informational purposes, it lacks academic rigor and citations. For more authoritative sources, you should consider references from recognized educational institutions or peer-reviewed scientific sources (e.g., articles from JSTOR, ScienceDirect, or Nature). (OpenAI, 2024, para. 3).

Discussion and Implications

Our findings indicate that ChatGPT provides helpful tips students can use and teachers can model in the process of discerning website credibility. In our 2024 ChatGPT Challenge, the chatbot was fairly accurate in determining the credibility of websites. Other more extensive research has found that AI tools like ChatGPT can be accurate and reliable in answering questions, especially in the field of medicine (Kuşcu, et al. 2023; Walker et al., 2022). On the other hand, some AI users have noted that ChatGPT exhibits different reliability in various domains. Shen et al. (2023) found that While ChatGPT shows relatively high correctness in the recreation and technology questions, it underperforms in law and science domains.

Even though AI is becoming more widely used and, at times, more reliable, our findings suggest that internet users must continue to exercise caution when examining credibility of any tool or source. In our work with children and teachers, we have drawn this conclusion repeatedly. In the past, we recommended teachers use hoax websites to model thinking about text features and facts. For example, teachers can model how to understand a URL or how to alter the URL by deleting everything after .net to reveal the home page of a website. We have been strong advocates for student exposure to authentic opportunities to evaluate online sources as part of classroom practice. This recommendation aligns with researchers who promote exposure to online experiences at an early age to develop literacy skills (Baildon & Baildon, 2008; Leu et al., 2015). "By helping students learn how to learn from online information, we provide them with an important path forward to literacy, learning, and their future" (Leu, et al., 2015, p. 145).

The difference in this study, however, is that ChatGPT's responses could be a helpful teaching tool, even when the response is inaccurate. In teaching website evaluation and reliability reasoning, teachers provide tips and model reliability reasoning. Through the use of ChatGPT and other AI tools, teachers can support students' skills by sharing the responses the chatbot produces and discussing website credibility. Therefore, the implications of this study reflect the potential for using AI and hoax websites to model website evaluation.

Next Steps for Educators

We recommend educators consider the use of AI when teaching website evaluation. The first step for a classroom teacher would be to determine which AI tool to use. Many school districts permit AI for staff use, but caution would need to be exercised when using AI with students. The teacher could model the use or determine if there is a tool vetted or promoted by the district. ChatGPT is one of many well-known AI tools. An AI tool advocated by some districts is MagicSchool AI, which provides lesson planning IEP suggestions, assessments, and more. Other popular tools include Microsoft's Copilot and Google's Gemini. Once a tool has been selected, we recommend step by step modeling of reliability reasoning using familiar hoax websites as well as authentic websites with potential credibility issues.

In addition to the use of AI with website evaluation, we advocate for general awareness regarding the importance of AI literacy. AI will be essential for work and school (Bowen and Watson, 2024) and AI literacy is "knowing enough about how AI works to use it effectively" (p. 5). Knowing enough, also means knowing about. After engaging in this challenge and other AI projects, we have become aware of the environmental impact of generative AI in terms of massive electrical consumption and water usage in its processing (Zewe, 2025). Therefore, teachers should incorporate AI literacy judiciously. If a simple internet search is sufficient for accessing information, there may be no need for AI. When engaging in difficult problem-solving, such as determining the credibility of a website, teachers may consider AI. Discussion about potential misinformation and biases integrates critical thinking about credibility and provides hands-on opportunities to use AI ethically and productively.

Conclusion

ChatGPT and other AI tools have had a significant impact on education, both as a learning tool with potential for increasing efficiency, and as a concern, with the potential for plagiarism and decreased critical thinking skills. In this article, we presented the ChatGPT Challenge to support website evaluation, which is an important skill for being a productive consumer of information. Students need strategies for website evaluation, with many reminders to use them until it becomes second nature (Baildon & Baildon, 2008). These reminders could come in the form of response to a ChatGPT query in which students use AI for clues to website credibility, shifting from evaluating sources to interpreting synthesized responses.

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College Writing 112 Course and ChatGPT

Dr. Carolyn Stubbs

Introduction

High school teachers prepare students for writing at the collegiate level so that they will become familiar with the quantity and quality of writing required; however, students may not have received the fundamentals of writing in their early grades, making it difficult for teachers to increase their skills in the four years that they are in high school. During the pandemic, learning transitioned from face-to-face interaction to online learning, and teachers were often unable to provide consistent instruction due to students lacking access to laptops, Wi-Fi, or a quiet space to learn at home. These factors had a negative impact on students' ability to retain what they had learned previously and acquire new knowledge. Additionally, students suffered significant learning loss, particularly in literacy skills, which impacted both their reading and writing abilities (Azevedo, 2020; Donnelly & Patrinos, 2021; Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2024; Hancock et al., 2020). Today, educators are attempting to bridge the gap between students' current knowledge and what they need to know to succeed in college-level courses.

ACT Data and Why It Matters

In 2023, the ACT Profile Report revealed that 65% of students who took the exam were unable to achieve a passing score of 20 on the English Language Arts (ELA) section. The score of 20 on the ELA section of the ACT indicates that these students have a higher probability of successfully completing their college-level composition courses. Scoring below 20 means that students lack the foundational concepts of writing; they will struggle to produce formal writing that is well-structured and demonstrate critical thinking (ACT, 2023). College professors assume that students entering college possess these skills, which can create a disconnect for students who may not understand what the professor wants from them. According to Goldstein (2025), whether students have a fixed or growth mindset can also impact their literacy skills. Therefore, students who repeatedly receive poor grades on writing assignments may feel that they can never improve their writing because they may not realize that becoming a better writer requires skills, practice, perseverance, and quality instruction.

Using AI for Academic Writing

Current research indicates that AI can be a valuable tool for supporting students in academic writing (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2024). Controversies surrounding the use of AI in the writing process stem from students' overreliance on the system and the potential for AI to facilitate plagiarized assignments. Chesley (2024) noted that students have gaps in their writing and that structured writing programs are needed to fill those gaps, providing students with the foundation necessary to achieve academic and career success.

Wang (2025) studied both U.S. and international college students in a 3-week Writing Unit to examine the impact of ChatGPT. The students used ChatGPT for prewriting, organization, revising their work, and editing. The participants reported that ChatGPT helped them fully develop their ideas without worrying as much about the mechanics of writing, in the

initial stages of the process. The participants reported that receiving personalized feedback at any time made them feel less stressed about writing. The study's findings also revealed that ChatGPT was especially beneficial for ELL students who faced challenges writing due to the language barrier. Using AI to assist students in writing is valuable across disciplines because it enables students to understand the content of non-writing courses while simultaneously improving their writing skills.

Zdravkova and Ilijoski (2025) conducted a mixed-methods study incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine college students' use of AI in a computer ethics class. Students were required to produce three types of writing: (a) fully student-written, (b) fully AI-generated, and (c) hybrid (student and AI). The survey administered to the students consisted of 25 questions grouped into six themes examining their perceptions about: (1) productivity-time management and efficiency, (2) Gen AI usage-brainstorming and refining their work, (3) assignment process- the instructions that they received from their teachers about how to use AI, (4) ethical concerns-plagiarism, overreliance on AI and the integrity of their work, (5) learning support-AI assisting them in understand how to develop their writing skills, and (6) student attitudes-satisfaction and comfort with using AI.

The findings showed that 63% of the students were satisfied with using AI. 43% of the students reported that they worried about plagiarism and AI-generated hallucinations (fabricated facts). According to Zdravkova and Ilijoski (2025), students also wanted an ethical framework to ensure their work would not be perceived as plagiarism and more flexible student-centered strategies when assigned writing tasks. A key finding from the study indicated that students felt that they did not receive clear instructions on how to use AI to assist them with their writing. The study's implications for educators suggest that explicit instructions on how to utilize AI effectively are crucial for teaching students to use AI correctly. Barrett and Pack (2023) argue that teachers need professional development on how to utilize AI to support students during the writing process.

With AI here to stay, K-12 and higher education teachers can lead the charge in teaching students how to use AI effectively, ensuring they are academically prepared to handle college-level writing (Kim et al., 2025). Working with students in the PAVE Program (Program for Academic Vision & Empowerment) helped us to understand how AI could be used as a tool to teach students how to become better writers.

Program Academic Vision and Empowerment (PAVE: Hybrid Block for PAVE Students Fall 2024

PAVE students participated in a pilot program known as the Hybrid Block at Oral Roberts University (ORU). The program provides additional academic and social support to help students transition to a regular schedule in the spring of their first year. Under this program, all the students were enrolled in the same four courses: Introduction to College Mathematics and Introduction to Sociology for the first seven weeks, followed by American Government and Composition 1 concurrently for the second seven weeks. The courses were online, and the PAVE Team co-facilitated the classes by teaching students the material in self-contained classrooms. All PAVE members had experience teaching students in grades K-12 or on the collegiate level. However, the primary teacher was assigned based on expertise in the specific course. Students attended two other classes that were not part of the block and followed a regular college schedule

(Oral Roberts University, n.d.). Below is a sample of the Hybrid block schedule for the first seven weeks.

Table 1:

PAVE 2024 - FALL A

Study Hall Hours	Monday 9am-9pm	Tuesday 9am-9pm	Wednesday 9am-9pm	Thursday 9am-9pm	Friday 9am-9pm	Saturday 10-12pm/2-6pm
7:30 AM			GEN 150/HPE 7:30-8:25am	GEN 150/HPE 7:30-8:25am	GEN 150/HPE 7:30-8:25am	
8:00 AM						
8:30 AM		SOC 101 8:30-10:30am				
9:00 AM			SOC 101 Lab 9-10:30am	MAT 099 Lab 9-10:30am	SOC 101 Lab 9-10:30am	
9:30 AM						
10:00 AM						Study Hall 10am-12pm
10:30 AM						
11:00 AM	MAT 099 Lab 11am-12pm	THE 104 11am-12pm	CHAPEL	THE 104 11am-12pm	CHAPEL	
11:30 AM						
12:00 PM						
12:30 PM						
1:00 PM	SOC 101 1-3pm	GEN 150 1-2pm		MAT 099 1-3pm	MAT 099 1-3pm	
1:30 PM			MAT 099 Lab 1:15-2:15pm			
2:00 PM						Study Hall 2-6pm
2:30 PM						
3:00 PM						
3:30 PM						
4:00 PM						
4:30 PM						
5:00 PM						
5:30 PM						
6:00 PM						
6:30 PM						

Note: PAVE 2024 Fall A (First 7 Weeks)

In the Hybrid Block, Introduction to Sociology was the first course, along with Introduction to College Mathematics. Each week, students had writing assignments in sociology, which included discussion questions and essays. The Sociology professor used the information in the textbook to create discussion questions and essay prompts. The discussion questions included: (a) explain Cooley's looking glass self-concept, and how it has impacted you positively or negatively, (b) describe a paradigm shift that has happened in your life and discuss how you felt before and after the shift, and (c) explain the five elements of culture and discuss how two elements have impacted you. The professor sought to have students apply Sociology concepts to real-world applications, which require higher order thinking skills.

To answer these questions, students needed to read the textbook. For those students who had not read the book, the PAVE Team employed silent reading as a literacy strategy, allowing students to read independently in class or in another classroom with a team member. During this period, the PAVE Team was available to answer students' questions. We monitored and gauged their comprehension of the text based on their notes and discussions with us. Using Socratic questioning also helps us to determine if they understood the text (Hiebert & Reutzel, 2014).

As the semester progressed, the team provided scaffolding to ensure that students read the material before arriving in class. The goal was to demonstrate to the students the connection between having a good working knowledge of the topic first, before starting the writing process. During our first class session, the PAVE Team taught students the different stages of writing, such as understanding the prompt, brainstorming ideas, organizing their thoughts about the topic, developing a thesis statement, creating an outline, completing a first draft, and making revisions to that draft (Kim et al., 2025; Purdue Online Writing Lab, n.d.; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Writing Center, n.d.)

Helping students understand the steps in the writing process, especially those needed in the prewriting stage, was eye-opening to many of them. Students often wanted to start writing immediately, with very little knowledge about the topic or understanding of the prompt. Some students refused to write at all in our presence. In these cases, the most important step was to develop a relationship with the students so that they would be vulnerable enough to show us their work.

Strayhorn (2019) argues that students need to experience a sense of belonging and establish connections on college campuses. Students must feel that they matter and that teachers, staff, and other students care about them. To gain their trust, we set aside time to know them on a personal level, often discussing topics unrelated to the coursework. The PAVE Team would help them find their classes on campus, eat lunch with them, bring them snacks, look at pictures of their family members, and play soccer with them. These moments helped them see us as people supporting their college journey, which encouraged them to open up to us and share their writing. We came to understand, first-hand, that one of the first steps in the writing process for some students involves forming a relationship with them.

The next step involved teaching students literacy strategies to help them understand the prompt. They received instructions on how to recognize the topic within the prompt and how to decode it. We instructed students to read the prompt several times, underlining and highlighting key words. Next, they would jot down their thoughts about what they had read. Students were encouraged to look up unfamiliar words and record them for future reference (COD Library, n.d.; Klipfel & Cook, 2017). Other literacy strategies include teaching students to be aware of their intended audience for their work and understanding the specific writing tasks they need to perform, such as comparison and contrast, cause and effect, and others. They were provided with instructions on how to cite their work, which was necessary for the writing assignments, as well as the specific format and length requirements (Caulfield, 2025). We also used short videos from YouTube that offered content on these topics to provide students with a refresher whenever needed. The videos were housed in our learning management system, D2L, and the students had open access to the materials.

Once students understood the prompt, the PAVE Team discussed with them how reading and writing go hand in hand and that the more information they had about their topic, the more it would help them generate ideas, create an outline, write a thesis statement, and compose a rough draft. Then they received instructions on how to take notes by jotting down main ideas, details, and questions from the reading. We allowed students to take notes through speech dictation using Word if we detected that they were nervous about writing notes, to overcome the barrier of writing notes. We would use scaffolding techniques to encourage them to rely less on the speech-to-dictation feature in the future.

The PAVE Team also employed collaborative literacy activities, such as think-pair-share, reciprocal teaching, and literacy circles. According to Boudreau (2021), literacy circles enable students to discuss their ideas, receive feedback from their peers, and foster a sense of community within the classroom. We also discovered that think-pair-share allowed students to develop their thinking about reading and construct their own knowledge. This strategy was particularly helpful for individuals who were less social in a classroom setting and did not like working in small groups. Working with peers may seem less threatening, and students may be more willing to reveal their weaknesses (Carss, 2007). Another strategy we employed included

allowing students to read and discuss what they read in small groups. These small groups also helped students develop metacognitive skills by enabling them to understand and monitor their own learning. We discovered that students were enhancing their metacognition skills through observation and listening to their conversations. The PAVE Team also offered suggestions to encourage them to think more critically about a topic (Brown, 1980; Flavell, 1979).

Afterwards, the PAVE Team conducted whole-class discussions in which students engaged in robust class discussions about the topic and how they planned to answer the question. They were openly challenged by their peers about how they would answer the prompt, which made students justify their answers using information from the reading, thereby strengthening their critical literacy skills. Their ability to stand firm on their positions regarding the prompt demonstrated that the student had a good command of the information and was progressing through Bloom's Taxonomy of analysis, evaluation, and creation (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). According to Denise Ahlquist (Great Books Foundation, 2025), students who engage in meaningful discussions about the material they have read can improve their reading comprehension by listening carefully to the ideas of others, communicating their own ideas, interpreting information, and collaborating with others.

Following these in-class discussions, team members reviewed the students' brainstorming ideas, notes from the reading, and their personal thoughts on the topic. Students were instructed to use ChatGPT to assist with their writing and refine their work. Needless to say, some of them were shocked that they would be allowed to use it for class assignments.

Instructions on Using ChatGPT

First, we instructed them to reread their work and create several questions that they would ask ChatGPT about how they could answer the prompt. The students used the questions, along with their brainstorming ideas, notes they had jotted down, and information from the reading, to generate responses from ChatGPT about the best way to start answering the prompt. Then, they, along with their teachers, reviewed the ideas generated by ChatGPT. The team assisted the students in revising their questions to ask ChatGPT more in-depth questions, such as identifying weaknesses in their arguments and learning how to make better connections between concepts, reading, and their ideas.

ChatGPT also provided the students with references. We encouraged them to challenge the system and not to be afraid to say that it was wrong or inconsistent. Students were given prior instruction to double-check the references provided by ChatGPT, in case the AI generated references did not exist (Zdravkova & Ilijoski, 2025). Students adjusted their work and developed their thesis statement using ChatGPT, incorporating their notes from the reading, personal thoughts, in-class discussions, and highlighted keywords.

The PAVE Team asked students to develop an outline based on their work on chart paper, helping them visually see how to organize their paper. This visual aid also helped them sequence the work logically, determining what should come first, second, and so on. This also gave them additional time to review their notes and further interpret their work if needed. The PAVE team provided instruction that further strengthened students' reading and writing fluency as they were taught the components of an outline, including the introduction, body, and conclusion, and how to create concept maps, where similar ideas are grouped in sections. They laid out their plans. Students participated in a gallery walk where they viewed each other's work and provided

pointers using sticky notes on how to improve their plan, which would become their working outline and the foundation for their rough draft.

With a strong outline in their hand, students were asked to open a new Microsoft Word document so that they could share it with us. At the top of the document, they were asked to paste their thesis statement and outline. By doing this, we had the opportunity to review their work as they made changes, and we wrote comments for improvement directly on the shared document. Then, students used their notes from reading, student feedback, personal thoughts, and notes they jotted down during the class discussion, along with other sources, to start writing a paragraph for the first main point in the body section of the outline. The students wrote the paragraph directly under the corresponding section on the outline. They used the three supporting ideas to build paragraphs, and the team encouraged them not to focus on formal writing in their first draft. The students repeated the process for the second and third paragraphs.

In the past, we have noticed that when asking students to start the introduction, they often become lost and struggle to compose it, even after we have provided instructions. Having them work on the body section of the outline first, so that they could work on it independently, was a strategy to build their confidence. It was easier for them to pull from their notes and outline on chart paper to compose each paragraph. Several rounds of refining their work took place as students utilized ChatGPT to enhance the depth of their writing by uploading finished paragraphs to ask for feedback from ChatGPT. The team helped students ensure that ChatGPT accurately captured their intended message. These discussions helped students understand that AI cannot do the work alone but still requires their input to refine its output. The team also demonstrated to the students the difference between their own voice and tone versus what ChatGPT produced (Wang, 2025).

Once students had completed their first draft, they worked with a team member and received coaching on how to refine their writing even further. Grammarly was used to help students improve their work by providing real-time feedback, explaining why their writing is incorrect, building vocabulary, and teaching them the rules of writing. Using Grammarly helps students troubleshoot writing issues independently, so that when the team is unavailable, they can write independently. Once the students had completed the first draft of their work, they submitted it to ChatGPT for further refinement. This process helps students view Chat GPT as a virtual tutor that assists them in writing, rather than doing the work for them (Wang, 2025; Kim et al., 2025). Even after ChatGPT had reviewed the students' work and produced its recommended revisions, the team encouraged the students to critique ChatGPT's recommendations. After reviewing ChatGPT's suggestions, students did not accept all of them, but they made changes to reflect their ideas better (Kim et al., 2025)

Teaching students that their brains are far superior to ChatGPT and that the AI Bot is learning from them can be a challenging task. Our team informed students that AI requires human input to improve. Initially, students found it difficult to believe they could produce work as good as, or even better than, ChatGPT. However, over time, they witnessed the flaws in the system the more they used it: (a) providing false citations, (b) hallucinating (making up fake information), and (c) failing to conduct higher-order thinking. Research indicates that ChatGPT lacks the sophistication to examine information from different perspectives and contextualize information to encompass background information, relationships, and surroundings. ChatGPT can only take a student so far because the technology is evolving, but it cannot understand how

and why (Kim et al., 2025). Human interaction is important, especially when it comes to teachers providing face-to-face instructions for writing. Even with ChatGPT, students need personal interaction with teachers who provide support through discussions, encourage them to think critically, understand their needs, and model the skills needed to improve their literacy skills. Using ChatGPT as a tool to help our students may be a necessary step in the evolution of education. However, educators must come together to counter the notion that AI-generated work is superior to the creative process that lies within the minds of our students.

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What's Your Name? Building a Global Perspective through Culturally Diverse Picture Books

Amy D. Davis, Ph.D.

How do teachers build a global perspective in their students? How are they able to honor students' identities while also emphasizing that they are part of an even larger collective? Teachers who embody a global perspective and exhibit cultural competence are those who realize they are part of a bigger picture and willingly appreciate the cultures of their student population. They celebrate their students' cultural identities and assist them in accepting and appreciating cultures other than their own. They realize that when they are open to other cultures, it builds a sense of empathy and understanding. Teachers can build a global perspective and cultural competence within their students by sharing culturally diverse children's literature. This paper highlights seven books about global naming traditions and the importance of pronouncing one's name correctly. There is flexibility in sharing these titles with various grade levels.

Cultural Competence in Teachers

The National Education Association (NEA) defines cultural competence as a teacher's ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than their own (NEA, 2009). Cultural competence begins with teachers identifying, examining, and challenging their own cultural belief systems and challenging cultural stereotypes. Teachers who are culturally competent view students' cultural differences as assets and values and celebrate these differences in their classrooms.

Teachers' cultural backgrounds can influence their perceptions of truth or perpetuate cultural stereotypes (Gay, 2018). Furthermore, teachers' attitudes and academic expectations can either negatively or positively impact their students' academic achievement. Spindler (1963) states that teachers are "cultural transmitters" because they bring their own culture and values into the classroom. If there is a conflict in cultures between students and the teacher, Irvine (1990) refers to this as "cultural discontinuity." If teachers react negatively and adhere to their own set of cultural values, this in turn, can interfere with and limit student learning, lower teacher/student expectations, and result in teachers forming negative expectations based on students' racial identity (Graybill, 1997).

Diamond and Moore (1995) have organized the specific roles and responsibilities of teachers in culturally responsive pedagogy into three categories: *cultural organizers, cultural mediators,* and *orchestrators of social contexts for learning.* Teachers as *cultural organizers* means they understand how culture operates within their classroom dynamics. The atmosphere they create is one where cultural diversity is honored and celebrated. As a result, their students feel comfortable that their cultural voices and experiences are heard in the learning space and become part of the learning process. Teachers as *cultural mediators* means they allow their students to engage in critical conversations about conflicts among different cultures. In addition, these teachers allow their students to analyze the discrepancies between mainstream cultural ideals and those cultures not identified as "mainstream." They help their students clarify their

ethnic identities, honor other cultures, develop cross-cultural relationships, and help students understand and avoid racial stereotyping. The final category is *orchestrators of social contexts for learning* in which teachers recognize the influence culture has on learning and make their instruction to align with the sociocultural contexts of ethnically diverse students. Even though teachers' own cultural backgrounds and belief systems can affect their perceptions of other races, those who are culturally competent take the time to examine and reflect upon these systems (Diamond & Moore, 1995; Gay, 2018). As a result, they are capable of creating diverse learning environments that celebrate and honor students' cultural differences.

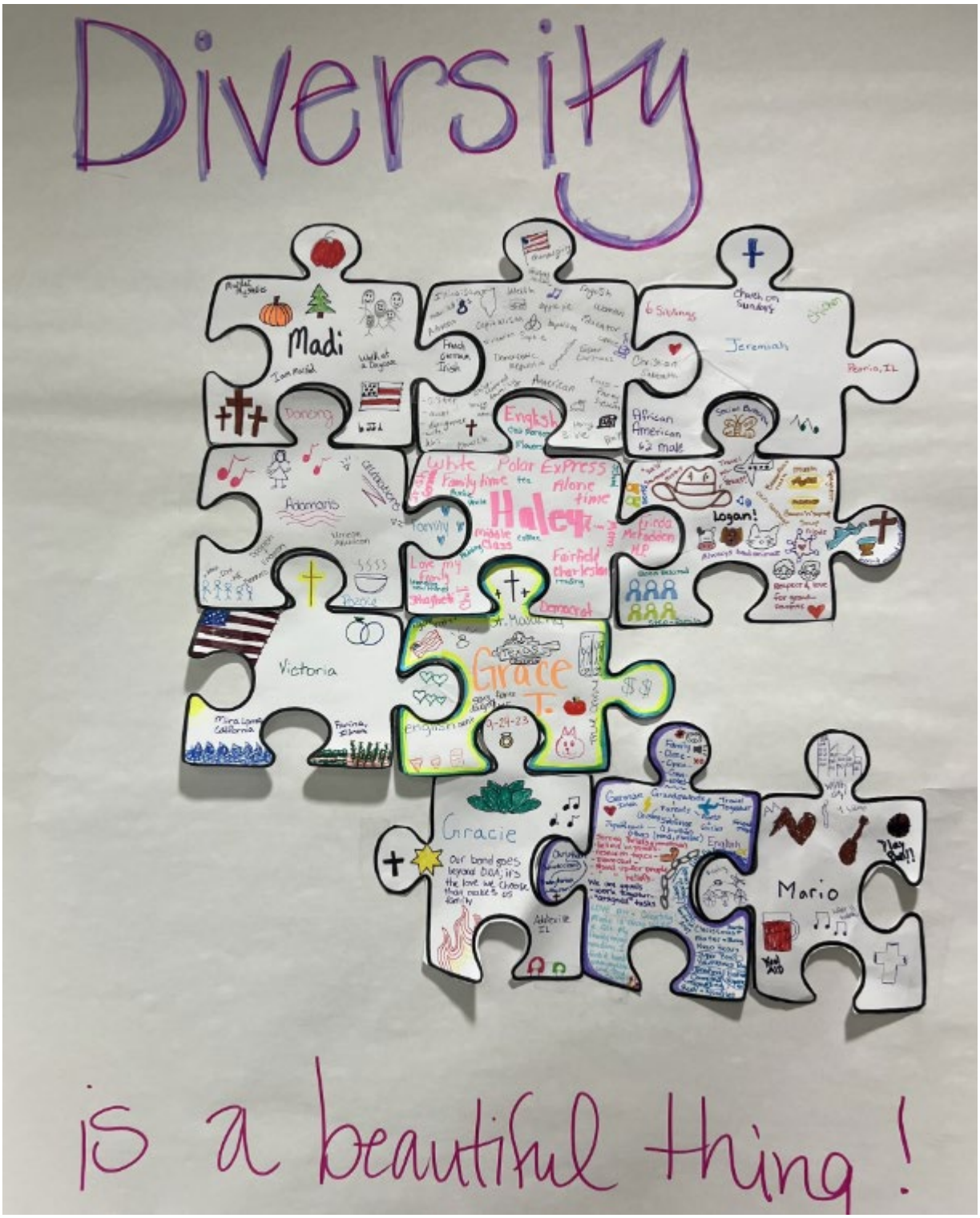
Developing Students' Cultural Identity

Muhammad (2020) suggests that one's identity is "fluid, multilayered, and relational" (p. 67). Students' identities are shaped by their culture and literacy practices (Sutherland, 2005). When students learn about cultures other than their own, they learn to accept and live peacefully with others. Muhammad offers suggestions to teachers in her book, *Cultivating Genius*, to help teachers learn and understand their students' identities by suggesting activities to reveal cultural information such as name meaning, beliefs, languages, literature, rituals, traditions, and celebrations (2020).

An activity I incorporate into my undergraduate multilingual course to create a global perspective is the "Diversity is a Beautiful Thing!" exercise (see Figure 1). I provide a blank puzzle piece and ask students to examine their culture. They put their name, families' ethnicity, any customs or traditions they practice, the language or languages they speak, and finally, the religion they practice. I explain there is not a "right" way to complete it as long as it contains the information listed above. In the culminating activity, they arrange and paste their puzzle pieces on a piece of chart paper. By completing this activity, students see that each puzzle piece is different, which reinforces that we are all individuals, but we can come together as one.

Figure 1

Diversity is a Beautiful Thing Exercise



Cultural Representation in Children's Literature

Effective teachers recognize the different voices in their classroom and incorporate these voices into their curriculum (Alanis, 2007). Because one's personal identity is shaped by their culture, teachers can assist children in developing their personal identities by sharing culturally diverse children's literature (Muhammad, 2020). There are numerous benefits of utilizing diverse children's literature with students. Firstly, it can provide insights into the cultural and historical experiences of different ethnic groups (Kim, 1976). Multicultural children's literature is a way to expose students to different cultures and improve the reader's understanding from a different point of view other than their own (Gay, 2018). Secondly, it can help children to understand, visualize, and develop positive interracial relationships with other cultures (Wanless & Crawford, 2016). Lastly, sharing diverse children's literature can foster understanding, empathy, and compassion. Students can begin to understand racial injustices that perpetuate in American society.

Teachers can be intentional and purposeful in their planning and incorporate culturally diverse children's literature into their pedagogy to promote a global perspective and cultural competence within their students. Additionally, they need to know how to select books that represent cultural accuracy and authenticity and are free of cultural biases and stereotyping (Aoki, 1992; Slapin & Seale, 1992). Students look for themselves in our instructional materials; in the classrooms where they reside, they want to feel seen and heard that their teacher cares enough to embody and accept their cultures. In Muhammad's (2020) work, she believes that students are "seeking to find curriculum and instructional practices that honor the multiple aspects of who they are" (p. 69).

Significance of a Name

The name given at birth plays a significant role in one's identity. Names carry our culture, values, and traditions. According to Muhammad (2020), "it is through our names that we place ourselves in the world" (p. 74). What about those students whose names do not fit into the mainstream culture? Teachers who are culturally competent understand the importance of this and make sure to pronounce their students' names correctly (Vreeland & Harris, 2024). This might mean asking students to pronounce their name.

My father was an immigrant to the United States and with him, he brought his name, János Cindrich, (YAN-os sin-DRU-itch) which he later changed the spelling to Cindrity (sin-DREE-tee). I grew up with a last name that no one could spell or pronounce and after some time, my name felt like a curse. He owned a house painting business, and his customers would call for work, and one called and asked for "Janice Cinderella," that was it for me. Needless to say, I was grateful when I married and changed my last name to Davis. Even though my maiden name is part of my ethnicity and represented my heritage, I was tired and annoyed having to correct peoples' spellings and pronunciations repeatedly.

Global Naming Traditions

Around the world, there are different naming traditions that differ from the United States. For example, in the Spanish language, the word *apellido* means "last name" which translates to "family name" in English. Hispanics have two *apellidos* in their full name, the first family name is from their father, and the second comes from the mother. Individuals may have two names that

precede their family names, but the second name is not their middle name. It could be an alternative to what they can be called. For example, if parents could not decide whether to call their child Maria or Andrea, they can call her Maria Andrea. A composite name that consists of two names can be counted as one name, for example, María José is one name. In addition, individuals may have four composite names that count as two names in addition to their family names so some can have up to six names or more (Maguina, 2022).

Korean Naming Traditions

In the United States, parents typically give their children three names, first, middle, and last. In Korea, they also give their children three names, however, the order of the names differs. The family surname comes first then it is followed by the first name. For example, *Kim Soo-ah*, *Kim* is the family name and *Soo-ah*, the given name. Common surnames in Korea are *Lee, Kim*, and *Choi* which are passed down from the father's side.

First names typically have two syllables and may reflect desired traits such as *Soo-ah* means "beautiful and good" while *Nari* means "lily." The naming practices and names often signify the respect for their elders and the importance of harmony (Benton, 2023).

African Naming Traditions

Naming traditions in Africa are symbolic and parents select names for their children to reflect the child's birth like the time of day, weather, or season (Appiah, 2010). In addition, they may select names that represent the traits parents wish for their children. The name *Kwaku* (KWAY-koo) originated from the Akan tribe in Ghana and means "born on a Wednesday" and *Ngozi* (INN-GO-zee) is from the Igbo tribe in Nigeria and means "blessing."

Culturally Diverse Children's Literature – What's Your Name?

A name is a part of one's personal identity and sharing naming tradition can build a global perspective in students. We want them to begin noticing how their culture is similar and different to others. When teachers share books with students during shared read-alouds, it may be an opportunity to access and build cultural background knowledge. The next section describes a variety of books that all reflect the cultural significance of a name, naming traditions, and the importance of pronouncing students' names correctly.

Book 1: Syed, A. (2022). *That's not my name!* Viking.

Audience: Preschool-1st grade

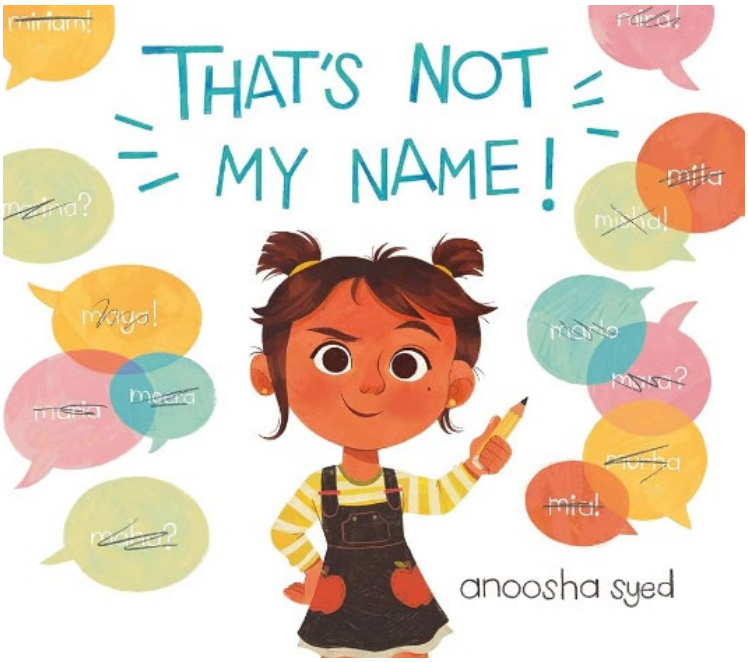
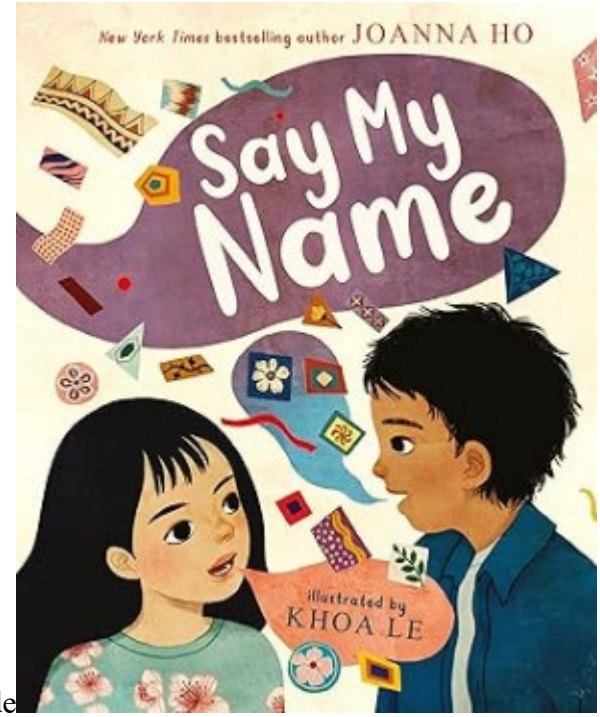


Image from That's Not My Name!, by Anoosha Syed, 2022, Viking. Copyright (2022) by Anoosha Syed.

"That's Not My Name!" written and illustrated by Anoosha Syed. The story is about a young girl, Mirha, who is excited about her first day of school. She is so excited to make new friends, but when her classmates and teacher mispronounce her name, she is disappointed and feels rejected. With an ethnic name that is not part of the American mainstream culture, Mirha struggles to find her name among all the name keychains at the gas station. When she and her mother order a hot chocolate at the café, the barrister misspells and mispronounces her name. Mirha's mother tells her how special her name is, it means "happiness" in Arabic and tells her, "the first time I heard you laugh, I knew it fit you perfectly" (Syed, p. 17). Mirha returns to school determined to help her classmates pronounce it correctly.

"That's Not My Name!" is a book to share with young children and help them realize how special their names are to their cultural identity and the importance of pronouncing names correctly.

Book 2: Ho, J. (2023). *Say my name.* Harper.



Audience: Preschool – 3rd grade

Image from Say My Name, by Joanna Ho, 2023, Harper. Text Copyright (2023) by Joanna Ho, Illustrations Copywright by Khoa Le.

"Say My Name" was written by Joanna Ho and illustrated by Khoa Le is a story about the significance of pronouncing one's name correctly. The book celebrates six children of Chinese, Tongan, Persian, Navajo, Mexican, and Ghanaian descent and their connections to their cultural backgrounds.

Teachers can share this book with children to inform them of the significance of one's name and how it connects to their culture. In the back of the book, there is a pronunciation guide and information about each of the six names and cultures highlighted in the book.

Book 3: Martinez-Neal, J. (2018). *Alma and how she got her name.* Candlewick.

Audience: Kindergarten-3rd grade

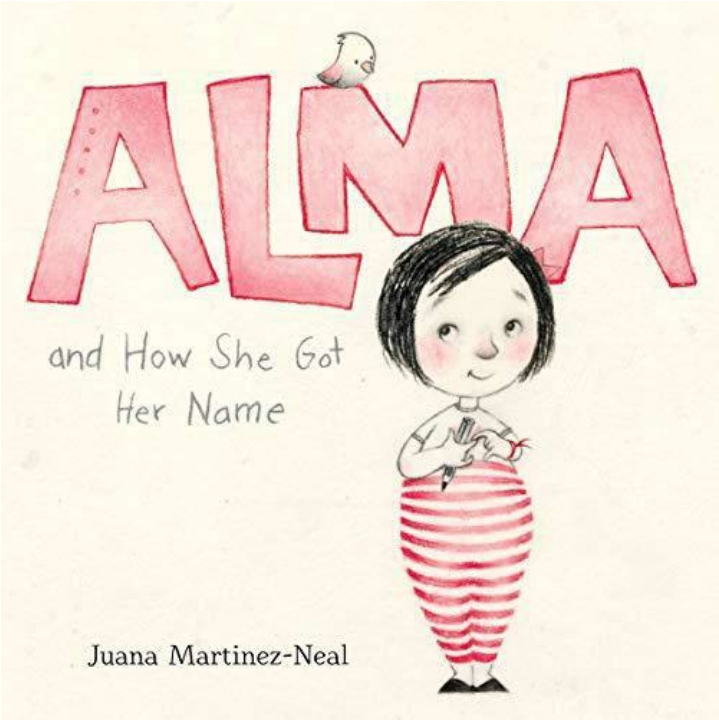


Image from Alma and How She Got Her Name, by Juana Martinez-Neal, 2018, Candlewick. Copyright (2018) by Juana Martinez-Neal.

"Alma and How She Got Her Name" by Juana Martinez-Neal is about a young girl, Alma Sophia Esperanza José Pura Candela, who wonders how she ended up with so many names. There is a story behind each name given to Alma, and the story highlights the people connected to her.

Teachers could share this book with students to build background knowledge of naming customs in Latin culture.

Book 4: Choi, Y. (2001). *The name jar.* Dragonfly Books.

Audience: Preschool-2nd grade

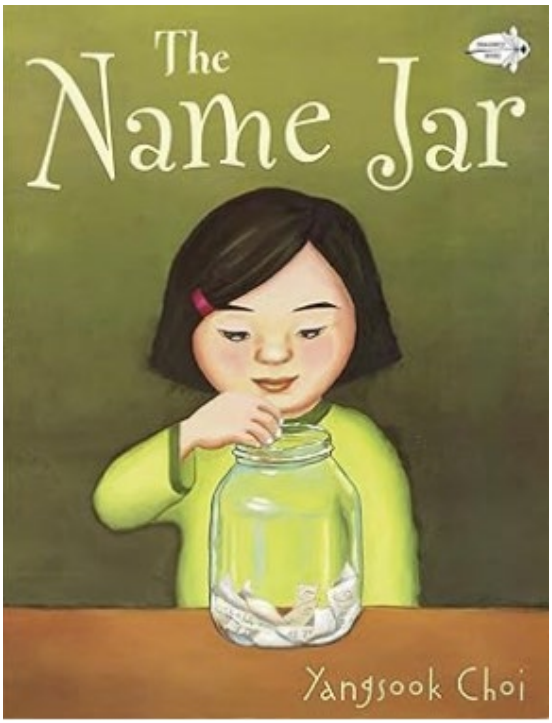


Image from The Name Jar, by Yangsook Choi, 2001, Dragonfly Books. Copyright (2001) by Yangsook Choi.

"The Name Jar" was written and illustrated by Yangsook Choi and is about how a young girl learns to appreciate her Korean name, Unhei. She is the new kid in school and wants to fit in with her American classmates, so she decides to choose an American name. Her classmates suggest names and place them in a jar. Later in the story, Unhei learns how her family went to a name master to select her name which means "grace." She decides to keep her Korean name and helps her classmates pronounce the sounds and shares the Korean characters of her name.

Teachers can share this book with their students to illustrate the importance of embracing one's culture. Interestingly, it is common practice for individuals immigrating to the United States from Asian countries to Americanize their names. Sam Louie shared his story as a first-generation Chinese immigrant from Hong Kong of how he acquired his "American" name. He claimed when they arrived in Seattle, "My parents went to the one white couple they knew and asked them what would be nice names for us here in the U.S." (Louie, 2021, p. 1). His parents thought this would be the best way to assimilate and show their willingness to adopt and adapt to American culture. Teachers could have this conversation with their students; how would they feel to move to another country and change their names?

Book 5: Thompkins-Bigelow, J. (2020). *Your name is a song.* The Innovation Press.

Audience: Preschool-1st grade

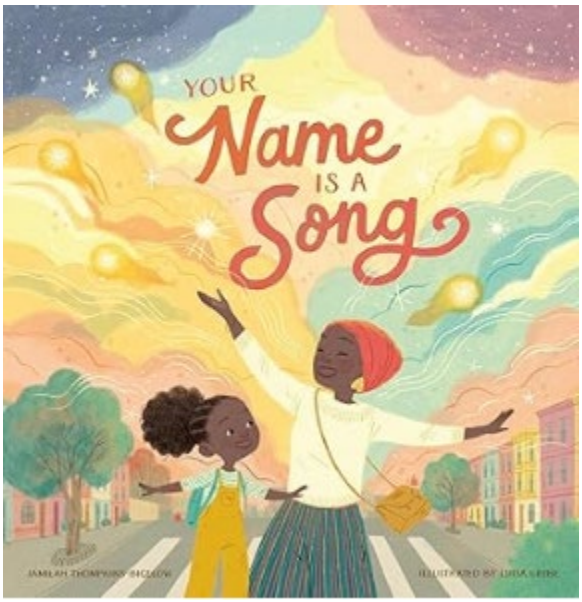


Image from Your Name is a Song, by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow, 2020, The Innovation Press. Text Copyright (2020) by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow, Illustrations Copyright (2020) by Luisa Uribe.

"Your Name is a Song" was written by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow and illustrated by Luisa Uribe. It is the story of a young girl who is frustrated that her teacher and classmates are mispronouncing her name. As a result, feeling discouraged, the girl tells her mother never wants to return. On the walk home, her mother begins singing names of African, Asian, Black-American, Latinx, and Middle Eastern descent to show her how to teach her classmates and teacher to pronounce her name. When she returns to school the next day, she teaches everyone her song that incorporates everyone's name including hers.

This is a wonderful book to share with students about the importance of pronouncing a name correctly. There is a glossary of names featured in the story including pronunciations and a link to a video of the author pronouncing the names. Teachers could share this video with their students.

Book 6: Mnensa, M. (2023). *Kantiga finds the perfect name.* Crocodile Books.

Audience: 1st-2nd grade

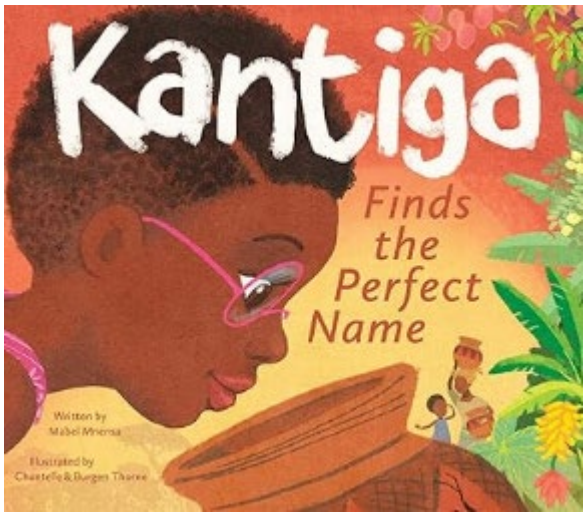


Image from Kantiga Finds the Perfect Name, by Mabel Mnensa, 2023, Crocodile Books. Text Copyright (2020, 2023) by Mabel Mnensa, Illustrations Copywright (2020, 2023) by Chantelle & Burgen Thorne.

"Kantiga Finds the Perfect Name" was written by Magel Mnensa and illustrated by Chantelle and Burgen Thorne. This story is about a little girl who lives in South Africa, and she does not like her name, Kantiga. She is frustrated at the way people pronounce it and wants to find the perfect name to replace it. As her quest continues, she learns a bit more about who she is and the origin of her name. At the end of the story, she realizes how special and unique she is and decides to keep her name.

This is a story that shows the cultural significance and meaning of one's name. Teachers can share it with students to illustrate the importance of names to students' cultural identities.

Book 7: Wedlick, S. (2023). *Naming ceremony.* Abrams.

Audience: Preschool-3rd grade

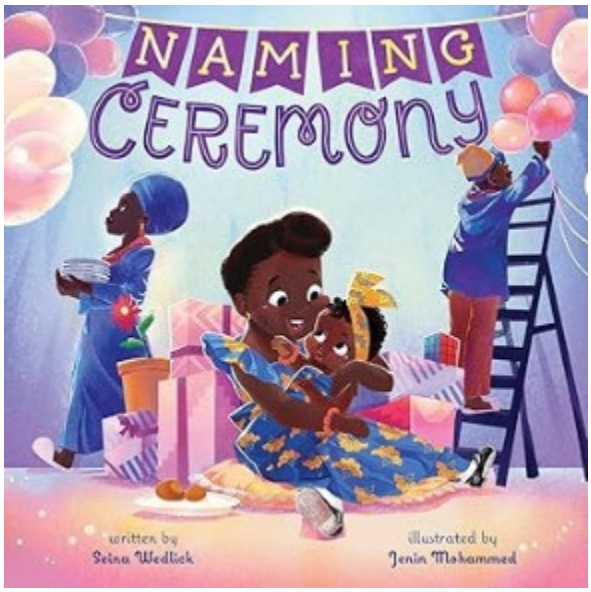


Image from Naming Ceremony, by Seina Wedlick, 2023, Abrams. Text Copyright (2023) by Seina Wedlick, Illustrations Copyright (2023) by Jenin Mohammed.

"Naming Ceremony" was written by Seina Wedlick and illustrated by Jenin Mahammed and celebrates a multigenerational Nigerian family. Amira picked out a name for her little sister. When friends and family arrive at the home for the naming ceremony, they bring names like *Shakira, Akahana*, and *Uhwe*, each with their special meaning: *thankful, bright red flower,* and *moonlight.* Amira hopes the name she has picked out for her sister is special enough. Her parents decide on the name, *Habiba,* which means *beloved.* Amira gives her the name, *Otta* or *friend* because her little sister will always have her as a friend.

This is a special book about the naming ceremony tradition in West Africa. In the back of the book, there is an author's note about this tradition. Teachers could share this knowledge with students and discuss how their names were selected.

Informal Assessment and Feedback

The use of diverse children's literature during a shared read-aloud offers teachers an opportunity to honor their students' cultural identities and build empathy and understanding for others. How will teachers know if they have been successful in completing this task? Here are some suggested assessment and feedback ideas:

- Sharing background information with students. For example, when using the book, "Naming Ceremony," providing students with information about African naming traditions. Then asking students to respond to questions such as "How does Amira's little sister receive her name?"

- When students answer questions, asking them to write their answers on a whiteboard then share with their peers.
- Assigning a writing activity where students respond to prompts like "Explain the significance of pronouncing someone's name correctly. Use examples from the text we read."
- Providing extension activities, such as having students research the origin and significance of their names.
- Assigning research reports where students have to gather information about global naming traditions and create an online presentation to share with their peers.

Conclusion

Teachers have the opportunity and ability to create and build a global perspective within their students. The instructional materials and activities they plan can have a positive impact on helping students think about cultures other than their own. It begins with self-reflection, can teachers identify, examine, and challenge their cultural belief systems? Do they view students' cultural differences as assets and celebrate these differences in the classroom? As one begins to realize we are part of a larger picture, the differences become less emphasized and you begin to understand, accept, and empathize with others.

The sharing of diverse children's literature during shared read-alouds can build background knowledge. This paper highlighted the significance of cultural naming traditions using seven titles. Because names carry our identities, our culture, values, and traditions, it is a common trait found throughout all cultures. When teachers take the time to learn about cultural naming traditions, it empowers them to think about how they can honor their students' identities and promote a global perspective and cultural competence within their students.

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Beyond the Book: Cultivating Creative Literacy Through Multimodal Projects

Katie Fields

In today's digital age, literacy instruction demands approaches that engage students through multiple modalities while developing critical thinking skills (Varaporn & Sitthitikul, 2019). Traditional book reports and comprehension questions often fail to inspire deep engagement with texts or showcase the rich interpretations students construct during reading (Wilhelm, 2016). This article presents a creative project approach that transforms how students interact with literature, allowing them to demonstrate understanding through innovative formats that honor diverse learning styles and multiliteracies. The creative project assignment described here has been successfully implemented in both graduate and undergraduate teacher education courses (Reading Pedagogy PreK-6th Grade at the graduate level and Teaching Reading in the Primary Grades for undergraduate preservice teachers). This versatility demonstrates how the approach can be adapted for both novice and experienced educators. What makes this assignment particularly valuable is its flexibility. It can be modified for any grade level, across content areas, and for various types of texts. Most importantly, it rekindles joy in the reading process, reminding both teachers and students that literacy learning can and should be a creative endeavor. Interestingly, this assignment originated from a suggestion by ChatGPT, demonstrating how emerging technologies can inspire innovative teaching practices when educators approach them with clear pedagogical goals. This origin speaks to the instructor's commitment to modeling openness to new ideas and continuous professional growth, the same mindset the assignment aims to foster in teacher candidates.

Theoretical Framework

This assignment is grounded in Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory, where meaning emerges through the reader's active "evocation" of the text in transaction with personal experience, and Wilhelm's (2016) emphasis on "being the book" via embodied, dramatic responses. Creative multimodal projects enact these principles by inviting preservice teachers to co-construct interpretations beyond literal comprehension, as confirmed in recent reader-response studies (Kim, 2024) and literature circles fostering critical and creative dispositions in teacher education (Gündoğdu et al., 2025; Ömeroğlu & Hakkoymaz, 2025).

Purpose of Activity

The purpose of this creative project activity is to develop students' critical literacy skills while fostering creativity and deeper engagement with texts. The assignment helps students develop several essential literacy skills, concepts, strategies, and attitudes (Nugent, 2023). Students build deep reading comprehension by thoroughly understanding a text's characters, themes, plot, and setting to successfully complete their chosen project, as demonstrated through reader-response approaches (Kim, 2024; Roe & Vukelich, 1999). The various project options require critical analysis as students examine texts from different perspectives, considering

character motivations, thematic elements, and narrative structures. Students also develop interpretive skills by exploring literature beyond literal meaning, engaging with symbolism, inference, and contextual understanding throughout their creative process. Additionally, the variety of project options encourages multimodal expression as students translate literary understanding into different formats, strengthening their ability to communicate across multiple modes (Varaporn & Sitthitikul, 2019). Perhaps most importantly, students develop creative connections to literature by extending and reimagining texts through personally meaningful creative processes, fostering a deeper appreciation for reading, aligning with creative teaching packages for preservice educators (Nugent, 2023; Simpson et al., 2023). This assignment is also an intentional effort to provide teacher candidates with alternatives for their own students to demonstrate autonomy, academic choice, and creativity while simultaneously showcasing their understanding of character development, story comprehension, and literary components. By experiencing these creative approaches themselves, graduate students gain firsthand knowledge of how providing choice and creative freedom can deepen engagement with texts without sacrificing academic rigor. Research consistently shows that creative responses to literature enhance reader engagement and comprehension (Wilhelm, 2016), as confirmed by reader-response studies with preservice teachers (Kim, 2024) and by multimodal tasks that boost critical reading and motivation (Varaporn & Sitthitikul, 2019).

Teaching Activity

The Creative Project Assignment

This 100-point assignment asks students to select a book relevant to the grade level they teach and choose one creative project option to complete and present to the class. Students are encouraged to keep project ideas in their writers' notebooks throughout the reading process. The assignment works particularly well for teacher education courses, as it serves dual purposes: reinforcing literature analysis skills for graduate students while modeling engaging literacy activities they can adapt for their own classrooms.

Project Options

The instructor offers students nine creative options, each targeting different literacy skills and learning preferences. Students may also propose their own original ideas by emailing the instructor for approval prior to beginning their project.

1. **Character Letters and Diaries**: Students write from a character's perspective, developing empathy and character analysis skills while practicing narrative writing.
2. **Book Trailers**: Students identify key narrative elements and transform written text into visual storytelling.
3. **Literary Analysis Podcasts**: Students develop critical analysis skills while building speaking and presentation abilities.
4. **Alternative Endings**: Students demonstrate understanding of character development and plot structure while exercising creative problem-solving.
5. **Literary Artifacts**: Students concretize abstract literary concepts and symbolism through physical objects related to texts.

6. **Author Biographies**: Students combine research skills with narrative writing as they explore connections between authors' lives and their works.
7. **Literary Instagram Profiles**: Students analyze character traits and relationships through a familiar contemporary medium.
8. **Literary Mashups**: Students synthesize elements from different texts, demonstrating advanced comparative analysis.
9. **Stanley Cup Stickers**: Students select a character and design symbolic stickers for their Stanley cup, explaining the significance of each design choice.Beyond-the-Book.docx

Implementation Guidelines

To implement this activity effectively, the professor should introduce the project early in the course, share exemplary past projects, and discuss assessment criteria. Providing structured planning time allows students to brainstorm and receive feedback on their concepts. Establishing check-in milestones where students share their progress fosters accountability and allows for adjustments. Setting clear expectations for the final presentation format (time limits, required elements, etc.) helps guide students toward successful completion. Including a written reflection component encourages students to articulate their creative choices and connections to the text, deepening their metacognitive awareness.

Examples of Student Projects

The flexible nature of this assignment has led to remarkably diverse and thoughtful projects, illustrating transactional evocation through creative responses (Roe & Vukelich, 1999), with multimodality deepening understanding and critical thinking (Tkach et al., 2025). One graduate student used Character.ai to create a rap battle between Shakespeare and Dr. Seuss, demonstrating deep intertextual analysis. Another produced a book trailer for Dragons Love Tacos, reimagining it as a horror movie due to the house burning down at the end, showcasing interpretive inference. A third developed a comprehensive cookbook featuring recipes inspired by various versions of The Little Red Hen (cake, bread, pizza, etc.), creatively exploring cultural narrative variations. This could extend to PreK classrooms by reading multiple versions and baking the foods. These projects inspire teachers to implement similar approaches in their own classrooms. One graduate student, a 5th grade teacher, adapted the Stanley Cup Stickers option (as Croc charms) with their class after reading about Winter the dolphin. Students designed charms representing setting, main character, conflict, and resolution, then explained their significance in writing. This exemplifies how the assignment scales effectively to PreK-6th grade, blending creativity with literary analysis to enhance comprehension across elementary levels (Becker, 1999)

Evaluation Methods

To evaluate this activity effectively and ensure the learning purposes are achieved, the instructor uses a comprehensive rubric that assesses both the creative product and the underlying literacy skills, per schema/transactional models in reader-response (Giovanelli & Mason, 2018). The rubric evaluates projects across five key dimensions:

- **Text Understanding (30 points)**: Assesses thorough comprehension of the chosen text, accurate representation of characters/themes/plot, and depth of insight beyond surface-level understanding.

- **Creativity and Originality (25 points)**: Examines unique perspectives, thoughtful design choices, and meaningful text extensions.
- **Technical Execution (20 points)**: Evaluates meeting format requirements, attention to detail, quality craftsmanship, and effective medium use.
- **Presentation (15 points)**: Assesses clear explanation of project choices/connections, audience engagement, and time limits.
- **Reflection (10 points)**: Examines articulation of learning process, creative decisions, and teaching applications.

Students receive the rubric at the beginning of the assignment to guide their work. After presentations, they complete a self-assessment using the same rubric before receiving the instructor's evaluation, encouraging metacognitive reflection. Additionally, peer feedback forms allow classmates to highlight strengths and pose thoughtful questions about each project, creating a supportive learning community while providing multiple perspectives. The success of this evaluation approach is evident in both the quality of student work and their ability to articulate their learning. When students can clearly explain why they made specific creative choices and how those choices connect to their understanding of the text, the instructor knows the purpose of developing critical literacy skills has been achieved. Moreover, the excitement students express about implementing similar projects in their own classrooms suggests the assignment successfully models engaging literacy instruction.

Conclusion

The Creative Project assignment transforms literature study from passive consumption to active meaning-making. By offering multiple entry points through diverse project options, it honors different learning styles while developing essential literacy skills applicable across grade levels. Through careful scaffolding and thoughtful assessment, the activity strikes a balance between creative expression and rigorous literary analysis, preparing teacher-candidates to implement similar approaches in their own classrooms. Most importantly, this assignment reminds both teachers and students that literacy instruction can and should be joyful. When educators invite creativity into their analysis of texts, they not only deepen understanding but also nurture a lifelong love of reading and literature that students carry beyond their classrooms. The versatility of the project options ensures that all students can find a mode of expression that resonates with their strengths while challenging them to demonstrate sophisticated understanding of texts.

As students transform their reading experiences into creative productions, they develop not only as readers but as thoughtful interpreters of the world around them. The instructor's ultimate hope is that by the end of the course, teacher candidates will have been exposed to a plethora of ideas to transform their own classroom practices. By experiencing the power of creative engagement with texts firsthand, these future and current teachers are better prepared to implement similar approaches with their own students. The enthusiastic response to this assignment, particularly the way many participants have already begun adapting it for their own teaching contexts, suggests it achieves this goal effectively. When teachers experience the joy of creative literacy instruction themselves, they become more likely to cultivate similar experiences for their students, creating a ripple effect of engaged, meaningful literacy learning.

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Creating Community with Children's Books

René Fleischbein, PhD; Kriss Larkin, PhD; Anika Rohla, EdD; and Natasha Tinsley, MFA

Introduction

Reading literature cultivates multiple forms of connection: between readers and the characters they encounter; among readers who engage with the same texts; and between readers and the social, cultural, and geographical contexts in which narratives unfold. The books included in this edition of "Off the Shelf" promote a sense of community and encourage thoughtful consideration of how reading can enhance one's connections with others, including those in the immediate physical world. In this section, we present a curated selection of K–12 texts—arranged by grade and reading level—accompanied by assignment suggestions and discussion prompts. We hope this collection contributes to sustained, meaningful inquiry into the role of community in literacy learning.

For educators, children's books are a powerful way to build a community where students feel valued, connected, and supported. Narrative naturally draws children in as they create shared experiences that help students develop an understanding with each other and learn about viewpoints other than their own (Hughes et al., 2022). No matter if the story is shared as a read-aloud, through popcorn reading, or discussed after individual reading time, students become linked through the engagement and experience with the story. Community is created as readers become emotionally invested in diverse stories, establishing a sense of validation and belonging (Heineke et al., 2022) in the classroom and beyond.

In the following sections, the authors of this article, René Fleischbein, Kriss Larkin, Anika Rohla, and Natasha Tinsley introduce four children's books—ranging from early childhood to high-school level—that foster reading engagement and the building of community. Each section provides a synopsis, rationale, lesson plan, and teaching strategies for the books.

How Children's Books Help Educators Establish a Sense of Community

Children's literature is more than just entertaining and teaching young readers; it is a way for kids to learn, grow, and connect with others. Engagement with literature is a way to establish a sense of community, as characters, settings, and storylines are a reflection of different families, neighborhoods, and communities. Stories not only foster a sense of understanding, connection, and reflection on what experiences link us to different members within communities, but they also help us understand to see what sets us apart and makes our own stories unique (Heineke et al., 2022). No matter if students are being read to, or reading on their own, books teach about empathy, kindness, creating relationships, and supporting others. Polakow (1986) discusses Beekman's (1983) notion that during reading, children are active intentional builders of meaning and partners in dialogue with others, and their participation in the reading process helps them create a social world (p. 45). Children use narratives to create meaning of the world around them: how to live with others, what is similar and different within their frames of reference, and how their actions contribute to the overall collective well-being of the community. Educators should choose literature that will help students create dialogue with the text, and this "dialogue during the story reading is actually very positive and is something to be encouraged and developed," as

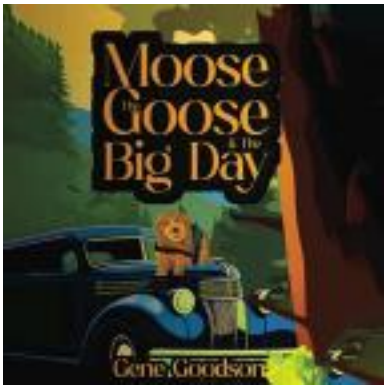
it helps kids understand the social frameworks and their roles within their communities (Hall & Moats, 2000, p. 29).

Choosing books that show communities and feature characters from diverse backgrounds, along with repeated themes, such as kindness, support, and understanding, ensures that students will not only see themselves reflected within these communities but also develop an understanding for communities that are different than their own (Heineke, et al., 2022). Such literature opens the door for students to share their experiences and witness how others "do life," in contrast to their own understanding of community. Overall, children's books that teach young readers about community help them foster and grow their understanding of others, of themselves, and how everyone comes together to create a community of love, respect, and support.

Children's Literature Selections

In this section, the authors of the article discuss various literature selections that address the importance of building community. Anika Rohla looks at *Moose the Goose & the Big Day* by Gene Goodson (K-2nd grade, emerging/beginning reader). Natasha Tinsley examines *I Am Enough* by Grace Byers (3rd-5th grade, transitional reader). René Fleischbein explores *The Railway Children* by Edith Nesbith (4th-6th grade, intermediate reader). Kriss Larkin reviews *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* by Ransom Riggs (7th-12th grade, advanced reader).

Moose the Goose & the Big Day by Gene Goodson
Alpha Publishing (K-2nd grade, emerging/beginning reader)



Synopsis: Told from the point of view of the service dog Moose, *Moose, the Goose & the Big Day*, tells the story of how he meets his family for the first time, his new owner, and how he slowly grows into the role of a service dog. He is a labradoodle dog who saves his new owner, goes on adventures with him, and becomes a member of his new community.

How this Story Creates Community

It is important for students to develop empathy and understanding. Ideally, they will learn that people navigate life differently to be successful and be part of a community. While many kids have pets in their lives, and have even seen service animals out in public, they often do not understand their importance. In *Moose the Goose & the Big Day,* young children can understand the importance of service animals to their handlers, how they help their handlers overcome obstacles, and become valuable helpers for their handlers to become part of the community around them. Students develop empathy, knowledge of the importance of service dogs, and how

people use different ways to integrate themselves into society in order to be successful. Through the labradoodle Moose's perspective, kids are drawn into adventure and learn about different points of view. Kids build foundational skills like reading fluency, develop reading comprehension, increase vocabulary knowledge, and phonemic awareness, as they are drawn into the story and Moose's sweet, innocent personality. Kids will be intrigued by growing with Moose from pup to young adult, learning about his role, training, and responsibility to support his handler who suffers from PTSD. Kids understand that to be part of a community, people sometimes need help and support.

This book is the first in a series. The second is *Moose the Goose Meets Big Pepa and Gig*. The third is *Moose the Goose Goes to the Farm*. The author is a former state trooper who is Moose's owner. Moose supports him in his battle against PTSD.

Lesson Plan: Reflecting and Connecting Learning with Community

Objective: This lesson is designed to teach early childhood and lower elementary students how to reflect and connect what they have learned from the book to their own experiences and community. It teaches students how to improve their reading and then to transfer their new knowledge and relate it to personal experiences. In this lesson, students complete a chart before and after reading the book, listing animals they like and that would support them and fight their fears or struggles they want to overcome. They create one-pagers. The one-pager is a colorful poster that has the student's writing and drawing on it. By connecting the texts to the world around them and their experiences, students not only reflect on how the lessons of the story foster inclusion and understanding for service animals, but they are also able to transfer this new knowledge by creating their own 'support or helper animals' that can help them understand and overcome their fears/struggles.

Materials:

- *Moose the Goose & the Big Day* by Gene Goodson
- Chart on board
- White paper
- Pencil
- Colored Pencils

Hook/Engagement: For students to be able to use personal experiences and participate in this lesson, they need to be able to understand how the text and their worlds are connected.

Help students make some initial connections by activating their prior knowledge about animals and how they can help us. Show them pictures of service dogs that might lead people who are visually impaired, oxen that pull objects, or horses that carry riders. Draw a two-column chart on the whiteboard or a piece of chart paper. Label one side "Animal" and the other side "Help." Ask students to talk about what help means to them. Then, ask them to give you some examples that belong in the help category. Next, have them think of specific animals that help and how it does this its 'job.' For example if a student says horse, the 'help' might be pulling a wagon. Alternatively, for younger grades, have the terms on cards that then can be matched, e.g. the red cards have all the animals, the blue cards all the ways to help.

Explain to students that the author of the book, *Moose the Goose & the Big Day* needs a specific kind of help that might not always be visible. Talk about things that are difficult for them, like obstacles, fears, etc. Encourage students to see how Moose, a service dog, helps his handler overcome his struggles.

Vocabulary: service animal-is an animal that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability to help them participate fully in their communities. Community-a group of people who share a common location, interest, or identity.

Objective: Explain to students that they will make connections to their experiences as they listen to the book, *Moose the Goose & the Big Day*, and that they will use their experiences to record their connections on their white papers. Students will write and draw their own 'helper' animal and how it helps them overcome difficulties, fears, or struggles, showing text-to-world connections. Teachers will grade the students' one-pagers containing these elements.

Focused Instruction: Explain to students that good readers think about what they have learned about the topic after they read. Connecting the story to something they have experience with will let them better understand the story.

Prior to reading the book, read the title, *Moose the Goose & the Big Day*, aloud and show the students the cover of the book. Ask them to describe the front. Tell them that the dog is Moose.

Questions: What does Moose look like? What is he doing? What facial expression is he making? What do you think he helps the owner do? Then, read the book aloud to students and discuss the pictures. Help students to activate their prior knowledge and make connections to their own experiences. Model examples of text-to-world connections to help students understand how reading a book connects to the world and community around them.

For example:

- "This book shows how Gene got his dog Moose. Have you ever gotten a pet? How was that?"
- "Look how Moose is helping Gene here by doing …. . One time, I had a difficult time, my … helped me do…. Have you experienced something like that?"
- "Gene is part of the small community here, but it is difficult for him to complete/do…. Moose is helping him by doing…, so he can be part of the community."
- "One time I felt I was not part of a community. This is what happened…. I was able to overcome this by doing…. Have you ever experienced that?

Guided Practice: After reading the book, discuss with the students the content a little more. Then use the chart from the beginning and add how Moose is a dog and what he did to help.

Next, encourage students to think about their favorite animal, one they have, or one they wish they would have. One a new chart, write each student's name and add their animal. Then have them think about what they are scared of, struggle with, or need to overcome. Write it next to their name and animal. Discuss with them how their helper/support animal will help them overcome their struggles, fears, etc.

Once students are finished, have each student share their animal and how they want to use it to overcome their struggles/fears. This allows them to connect their answers to the text. As students are giving their answers, discuss how everyone in their community has struggles/fears and sometimes needs support or help to overcome them, just like Moose helped Gene.

Independent Practice: Give students sentence starters on copied paper:

Part I

"I am scared of _____."

"It is difficult for me to _____."

"I struggle with _____."

They fill in the blanks of **one** of them.

Part II

"My support pet, _____, will help me get rid of my

fear."

Part III

Students cut out the sentence starters and glue them on white paper.

Part IV

Students draw and color their animals and how it helps them get rid of their fears/struggles.

OPTIONAL modification:

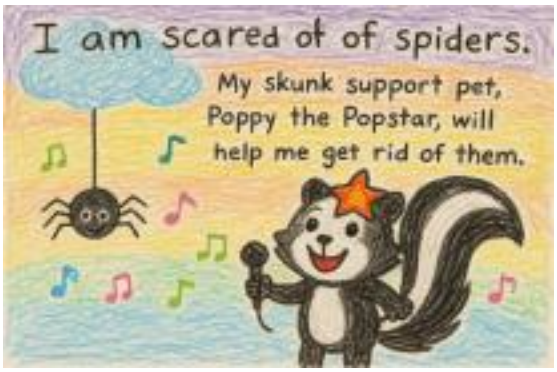
Have sentence starters on a white piece of paper printed and kids just add one word. Right below in a little boxed area, they draw their animal and the fear/struggle.

OPTIONAL extension:

Students can write one to three reflective sentences about how they are part of a community and how sometimes they need some help from their community to overcome their fears/struggles, etc.

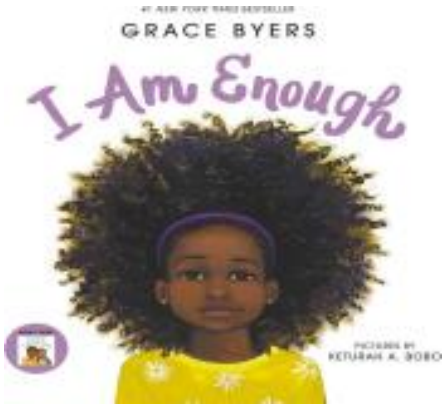
Assessment, Reflecting, and Planning: These components should show how students connect and reflect what they have read/teacher has read to them to their own experiences, as well as their knowledge of how support fosters community. Modifications to parts or all of the suggested lesson is expected and encouraged. Educators will use a simple rubric to assess the one-pagers. For example, educators will give points for the sentence that shows the fears/struggles, the sentence that shows overcoming them (the animal and what it does), and then the coloring/drawing component.

Example (generated with Open AI, 2025):



Example Rubric:
Struggle/Fear Sentence (5 points):
Animal/Overcoming Sentence (10 points):
Coloring/design/drawing (10 points):
Total (25 points):

I Am Enough by Grace Byers
(3rd-5th grade, transitional reader)



Synopsis: Published March 6, 2018 and told from the 1st person point of view, the book includes different rhymes that outline the positive qualities that children should see within themselves. The different images show children working together, completing activities, and providing support for each other and for themselves. Overall, the book uses vivid images and descriptions to demonstrate the joy and need for understanding personal worth and the worth of others.

How this story creates community

A community starts with a person, an individual. We must first learn to value and respect ourselves before we can do so for others. This book creates an environment where children learn to see their own worth which can lead them to see the worth in others. By starting off with an image of a child by herself, the book sets the stage for self love and self acceptance. That idea is reinforced through the first person narration. The varying images of children working together and supporting each other with children on their own remind the reader that they cannot pour from an empty cup. The reader must learn to accept themselves so they can accept others. The lyrical language throughout further supports the idea of community by indicating that no one is supposed to be like another person, but everyone deserves a right to exist in their own way. The book makes a point of pointing out and celebrating differences, creating one of the definitions of community, which is "a feeling of fellowship with others."

Lesson Plan: Activating Prior Knowledge/Fostering Community

Objective: This lesson is designed to teach primary students how to activate prior knowledge before they begin reading. The lesson teaches students how to make text-to-world connections using the book *I Am Enough* by Grace Byers. In this lesson, students help complete a KWL chart by making text-to-world connections before reading the book and then making new text-to-world connections after reading the book. By connecting the texts to the world around them, this activity should help students understand the value they can see in themselves, and the value that exists in others, promoting empathy, togetherness, and community.

Materials:

- *I Am Enough* by Grace Byers.
- KWL Chart
- Chart Paper

Hook/Engagement: Help students make some initial text-to-world connections by activating some of their prior knowledge about love and hate. Draw a two-column chart on the whiteboard or a piece of chart paper. Label one side "Love" and the other "Hate." Ask students to first talk about what love means to them. Then ask them to give you some examples that belong in the love category. They can say things like "family," "friends," "ice cream," or "God." Then do the same with hate, asking them what it means and providing examples such as "mean people," "vegetables," or "extra homework."

Explain to students that the author of the book *I Am Enough* talks about a specific kind of love that is important for people to have, and that making these text-to-world connections will help them understand the book. Tell them that they are going to make even more text-to-world connections.

Vocabulary: Enough- in or to a degree or quality that satisfies or that is sufficient or necessary for satisfaction: sufficiently. 2. Fully, quite. Community-a group of people who share a common location, interest, or identity.

Measurable Objective: Explain to students that they will make connections to the world as they listen to and independently read the book, *I Am Enough*, and that they will use a KWL chart to record their connections. Students will write and draw answers to questions they formulate about the text as well as new text-to-world connections.

Focused Instruction: Explain to students that good readers think about what they already know about the topic before they read. Connecting the story to something they already know about the world will help them better understand the story.

Use a KWL chart and model text-to-world connections. Read the title, *I Am Enough*, aloud and show the students the cover of the book. Ask them to describe the little girl on the front. How old does she look? What is she wearing? What facial expression is she making? What does that expression say about how the child feels? Then, take a picture walk through some of the pages of the book. Guide students to understand that the book shows different children doing various activities together. Help students to activate their prior knowledge and make some text-to-world connections by asking them what activities they see the children doing. See if students are familiar with how to play the games in the book. Model examples of text-to-world connections to help students.

For example:

- "This book ties people and activities to togetherness. When I think of togetherness, I think that it must be something that makes you feel comfortable and safe."
- Write this information in the "K" column. Ask students to share and write their ideas in the same column. Encourage students to be as general as possible so the information can be applied to anyone.
- Next, model several questions that you have about love now that you have started to think about what you already know:
- "I know that this book is about togetherness. But I would like to know what that has to do with love. What does love have to do with playing with others? Does that love have a name?

Write these questions in the second column and then have students share their thoughts.

Guided Practice: Tell students that as you read a portion of *I Am Enough* aloud, they will think about the questions they asked and listen for the answers. Model some text-to-world connections as you read; for example, talk about your knowledge of love for a friend, or how you have learned to make new text-to-world connections when thinking about activities and togetherness. Point out how reading this book has helped you think about love in a different way.

Then have students write or draw answers to:

- Love to me means _____.

Once students are finished with this activity, ask them to share their answers and to make a text-to-world connection to explain their answers. As students are giving their answers, ask them to show you the pages and point to the pictures that helped them answer their question.

Independent Practice: Have students read a portion of the book on their own. Then ask students to write or draw answers to:

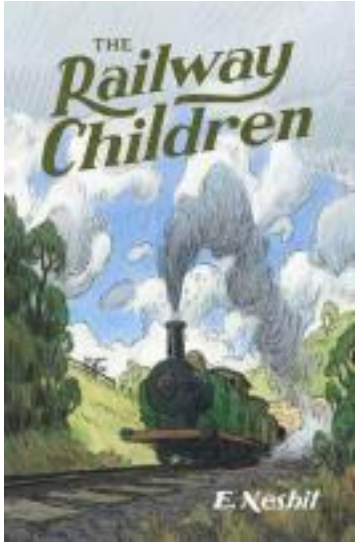
- My love for _____ has helped me by _____.

or

- The love I gave to _____ has helped them by _____.

Encourage students to share their answers.

The Railway Children by E. Nesbit
(4th-6th grade, intermediate reader)



Synopsis: E. Nesbit is well known for writing child characters who are realistic, capable, voiced, and quick-thinking. In both her fantasy and domestic fiction stories, Nesbit gives children room to explore, make decisions, and interact meaningfully with the adults around them.

In *The Railway Children* (1906), Roberta ("Bobbie"), Peter, and Phyllis move from the city to a country house called Three Chimneys after their father is wrongly accused of a crime. While their mother must work to support the family, the children adjust to their new life by forming a community among the workers and passengers at the nearby railway station. The children's courage and kindness help them form friendships that eventually play an important role in reuniting their family.

One of the book's most memorable events occurs when the children discover that part of a hillside has slipped onto the train tracks. Knowing a train is coming, they quickly make warning flags from the girls' red petticoats and manage to stop the train in time to prevent a disaster. Later, the railway officials hold a ceremony to thank them. After the adults give their speeches, Peter is asked to speak for all three children. Even though Bobbie is the oldest, Peter is chosen because, in 1906, boys were often expected to speak in public while girls were not.

How this Story Creates Community

Throughout the novel, *The Railway Children* illustrates how community is created and sustained. The children's daily interactions with others in their community, including the railway workers, passengers, neighbors, and visitors, demonstrate how empathy, cooperation, and small acts of kindness cultivate meaningful social bonds. The support the children receive from their community, coupled with the help they offer others, shows how shared experiences and mutual care strengthen connections among individuals, ultimately reinforcing personal growth and communal unity.

Assignment Suggestions for Grades 4–6

These activities help students think about character, perspective, and historical context.

Purpose of This Lesson

Students will explore key scenes from *The Railway Children* to analyze how gender expectations, community roles, and historical context shape character behavior and social interactions. Activities build close-reading skills, perspective awareness, and the ability to compare historical and contemporary norms.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify and explain how gender expectations influence character behavior in the ceremony scene.
- Recognize the difference between polite expectations and personal feelings.
- Understand how historical gender expectations shaped the ceremony scene.
- Prepare and deliver a short speech demonstrating point of view.
- Compare the ceremony in *The Railway Children* to modern ceremonies or celebrations.
- Analyze what has changed—and what has stayed the same—between the novel's historical setting and today.
- Develop written or oral arguments supported by textual evidence.

Materials

- *The Railway Children* (chapter containing the ceremony scene)
- Printed excerpts of key passages
- Writing notebooks or devices
- Chart paper or board
- Optional: short video clips of ceremonies today

Vocabulary

- Community
- Ceremony
- Landslip/landslide/hillside slip
- Petticoat
- Flannel
- Ingenuity

Instructional Sequence

1. Planning & Diagnostic Question (Bellwork)

"Why do people have ceremonies? What kinds of ceremonies do you know about?"

Have students write briefly, then share examples (graduations, school awards, birthdays, sports recognitions, etc.).

This activates prior knowledge about formality, public speaking, and social

expectations. **2. Focused Instruction: Politeness, Gender, and Ceremony (10–12**

minutes) Introduce the context:

- Ceremonies follow *customs.*
- People often try to act *politely,* even when nervous.
- In 1906, boys and girls were expected to behave differently in public settings.

Explain the moment in the novel when the children are honored after stopping the train. Adults select Peter to speak—not Bobbie, although she is the oldest.
Ask:

- What were adults expecting of boys?
- How is this different today?

Clarify that students are analyzing historical expectations, not endorsing them.

3. Close Reading: The Ceremony Scene (10–15 minutes)

Read the selected passage aloud or in pairs. Students annotate for:

- Examples of formality or ceremony
- Where characters follow custom or expectations
- How characters behave differently from how they might today

Chart their observations as a class.

4. Guided Practice: Then vs. Now Comparison (10 minutes)

On chart paper or a board, create:

Then (1906 expectations) | Now (modern expectations)

Students contribute ideas:

- Who speaks in ceremonies
- How gender roles have changed
- What remains similar (gratitude, respect, recognition)

5. Guided Practice: Point-of-View Speeches (10 minutes)

Students select a character:

- Bobbie
- Peter
- Phyllis

Students sketch a brief speech representing the character's voice and feelings while still following polite ceremonial expectations.

Provide prompts:

- "What am I expected to say?"
- "How do I really feel?"
- "How does my personality shape my speech?"

Independent Practice – Assignment Options

1. Character Speech (Written or Oral)

Students write or deliver a speech from the point of view of one character at the ceremony.
Must reflect:

- Character personality
- Historical expectations
- Accurate events from the story

2. Then-and-Now Written Comparison

Students explain how a similar ceremony would work today.
Guiding questions:

- Who would speak?
- Would age matter?
- Would expectations for boys and girls be different now?

3. Community Reflection Paragraph

Students explain how the ceremony scene shows a community supporting the children—and how the children support their community in turn.

Assessment

Use a simple rubric with these categories:

- **Textual Evidence** – Uses accurate references to the ceremony scene
- **Historical Understanding** – Shows awareness of 1906 expectations
- **Organization** – Ideas flow logically
- **Character Voice/Perspective** – Speech feels authentic to the character
- **Conventions** – Grammar and spelling appropriate for grade level

Reflection (Optional End-of-Lesson Activity)

Students write in response:

- "How do I help create community in my classroom, family, or neighborhood?"
- "When have I done something polite even though I felt nervous or unsure?"

These reflections help students connect the story's themes to their own lives.

Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children
by Ransom Riggs (7th-12th grade, advanced reader)

Synopsis: Jacob Portman is a fifteen-year-old boy whose grandfather shared seemingly-magical photos with him. When Jacob's grandfather dies, he goes to the house in which his grandfather was raised and meets Miss Peregrine and children with special abilities, learning that he, too, has special abilities. Jacob, Miss Peregrine, and the children go on a terrifying magical adventure in 1940s Wales. The novel ends with Jacob leaving his father in favor of the children back in the house where his grandfather grew up

How this Story Creates Community

Jacob grew up not feeling connected to his family, with the exception of his grandfather, Abe, who shared photos of children doing magical, impossible things. Jacob is bullied in school for believing the photos are real and distances himself from Abe. When Jacob is fifteen, however, his grandfather calls, telling Jacob the monsters are after him. Jacob rushes to his grandfather's side in time to receive a message about Miss Peregrine and her home in Wales, where Abe grew up, before Abe dies. Up to this point, Jacob feels isolated, distanced from his family and having few friends. When he and his father go to Wales to find the house where Abe grew up, Jacob finds a group of peculiar children, or children with special abilities. He, it turns out, also has special abilities, and he finds community among these peculiar children for the first time in his life.

Lesson Plan: Embracing Uniqueness
and Building Community Through Narrative Writing
Grades: 7–12, with differentiated expectations
Time: 1–2 class periods, extendable as needed

Learning Objectives
Students will be able to:

- Analyze how difference, identity, and belonging shape Jacob's character development.
- Explain how the peculiar children form a community based on acceptance and shared purpose.
- Reflect on the concept of uniqueness as a source of strength.
- Create an original narrative featuring a protagonist with a unique ability or feature that parallels their own.
- Demonstrate understanding of character conflict, theme, and resolution through fiction writing.
- Produce writing appropriate to grade-level expectations (1+ page for grades 7–8; 3–5 pages for grades 9–12).

Materials Needed

- *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*
- Notebooks or writing paper
- Devices for typing (optional)
- Chart paper or digital projector
- Sticky notes

Prior Knowledge Questions (Bellwork):

- "Have you ever had a personal trait, interest, or skill that made you feel different?"
- "Has a unique quality ever helped you connect with someone else?"

Teacher Preparation:

- Select the passages that show Jacob's isolation and later belonging (e.g., Chapters 1–3 and the introduction to the children in the time loop).
- Prepare discussion questions about identity and belonging.
- Prepare a model example of a short narrative featuring a unique skill.

Possible Challenges to Anticipate:

- Students may equate "uniqueness" only with supernatural traits; guide them toward real-world abilities (empathy, creativity, resilience, observational skills, etc.).
- Some students may be hesitant to write about personal experiences; the fictional narrative provides emotional safety and distance.

Key Vocabulary for Grades 7–12

- Isolation – the state of being separated from others
- Identity – the qualities that make a person who they are
- Peculiar – unusual or distinct, often in a way that sets someone apart
- Community – a group connected by shared identity, experiences, or purpose
- Belonging – the feeling of being accepted and valued
- Trait – a characteristic or quality
- Allegory – a narrative that uses symbolic characters or events to explore deeper meanings

Focused Instruction

1. Mini-Lecture: Identity, Difference, and Community in YA Fantasy Discuss how fantasy stories often externalize internal traits (e.g., magical abilities as metaphors for real-world differences).

2. Close Reading of Excerpts
Model annotation:

- Jacob's sense of not fitting in
- The peculiar children's acceptance of one another

- How abilities shape their roles within the group
- How community provides safety, identity, and purpose

3. Whole-Class Discussion
Guiding questions:

- What does Jacob gain from entering the peculiar children's loop?
- How is their community different from the world he came from?
- What makes someone feel like they "belong"?
- How do our unique traits shape the groups we fit into?

Guided Practice

Activity 1: Uniqueness & Community Mapping
Students list personal traits, skills, quirks, or strengths (realistic or metaphorical).
Then they identify:

- How each trait has helped them connect with others
- How it might function in a fictional narrative

Share examples on an anchor chart titled "Our Uniqueness as Strength"

Activity 2: Character Brainstorm
Students choose one personal unique trait and invent a character whose trait:

- Helps them overcome a conflict
- Shapes their role in a community
- Reflects their internal struggles or strengths

Provide sentence starters for scaffolding (Grades 7–8) and more open-ended prompts for Grades 9–12.

Independent Practice – Narrative Writing Assignment

Students write an original short story featuring:

- A protagonist with the same unique feature, ability, or skill they identified about themselves
- A central conflict the trait helps resolve
- A community or friend group that forms around or is impacted by this trait
- A conclusion showing personal growth or renewed belonging

Writing Expectations:

- Grades 7–8: 1–2 pages
- Grades 9–10: 2–3 pages
- Grades 11–12**:** 4–5 pages (more complex character and thematic development encouraged)

Encourage students to connect their narratives to themes from the novel: identity, belonging, danger, trust, and self-discovery.

Assessment

Formative Assessments

- Character brainstorm (checks understanding)
- Participation in discussion
- Responses to bellwork and guided activities

Summative Assessments

Evaluate the narrative for:

- Clear characterization and conflict
- Integration of the unique trait
- Thematic connection to belonging/community
- Structure (beginning, conflict, resolution)
- Grade-level writing expectations
- Creativity and depth

Rubrics can be adapted for grade-level complexity.

Student Reflection (Exit Ticket Options)

- "How can uniqueness help people form stronger communities?"
- "What did your character learn that you also find true in your own life?"
- "How did writing this story help you think differently about yourself or others?"

Teacher Reflection

- Did students connect the themes of identity and community to their own experiences?
- Which students need more support with narrative structure?
- Did any students express discomfort with personal writing, and would an alternative assignment be helpful next time?
- Should the next lesson explore symbolism, trauma, WWII setting, or the novel's blend of photography and text?

Conclusion

Helen Keller once said that "alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much," showing that there is power, support, and love within a community (Adams, 2018). As educators, it is our role to create communities within our classrooms that foster love, support, and understanding for others. The hope is that these values transcend our classroom walls, making the world a better place. By choosing literature that not only engages kids in the reading process but also promotes inclusive and diverse communities, educators can help their students learn and grow in more than one way. The four featured selections from the above "Off the Shelf" section provide some ideas for all readers ranging from early to advanced. The additional lesson plans and teaching strategies provide tools and ideas to create a community of learners who are kind and supportive.

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Writing with Purpose: Curriculum Planning for Foundational Skills and Self-Regulation

Dr. Liza LaRue

Curriculum planning is a cornerstone of effective teaching as research consistently shows that coherent, well-structured curriculum is one of the most influential school-level factors shaping student outcomes ((Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Steiner, 2017) A high-quality curriculum provides a scope and sequence that ensures important goals are addressed over time, building the background knowledge and systematic progression students need to grow as learners (Hirsch, 2016; Schmidt & Houang, 2012). At the same time, strong curriculum design leaves space for teachers' creativity and responsiveness, allowing them to adapt instruction to their students' developmental needs and cultural assets (Danielson, 2013; Paris & Paris, 2001).

In the realm of writing instruction, thoughtful planning is essential. It helps teachers balance explicit teaching of foundational skills with opportunities for authentic expression, creating classrooms where children develop fluency, confidence, and purpose as writers (Graham & Harris, 2018; Berninger & Amtmann, 2003) When educators plan for writing, they are not simply selecting prompts or worksheets. They are making intentional decisions about the environment, the materials provided, the schedule of the day, and the kinds of experiences that will help children grow.

Planning also requires attention to what is known about child development in general and about each learner in particular, including their strengths, challenges, and cultural assets. This aligns with research showing that responsive planning strengthens engagement and supports students' ability to self-regulate as writers (Paris & Paris, 2001; Graham & Harris, 2018). In this sense, curriculum planning becomes the bridge between research and practice, ensuring that children encounter writing as both a skill and a form of communication. This article summarizes the findings from research on foundational writing skills, self-regulation, and curriculum planning and translates them into practical considerations for classroom and school-wide planning.

Planning the Environment

The physical environment of the classroom itself is a kind of curriculum, shaping how children engage with literacy tasks (Justice et al.2008). When children enter a classroom, they do not encounter a neutral space, but they encounter an environment intentionally shared by teachers to support their development. A space organized with writing in mind communicates to

children that their voices matter, sending the message that writing is not just an academic task but a meaningful form of communication within the classroom (Graves, 2016).

Print-rich walls filled with meaningful text, like labels, students' names, and anchor charts created with children, expose young writers to the forms and purposes of written language. Writing centers, stocked with a variety of pencils, markers, stamps, clipboards, envelopes, and multilingual print, provide children with agency and choice. This will encourage young writers to experiment, take risks, and grow a sense of their own identity as a writer (Rowe, 2008). The intentional placement of materials, flexible seating that allows movement, and accessible surfaces create an environment that supports independence and confidence.

In addition, these activities strengthen the graphomotor system, the coordination of motor and cognitive processes necessary for writing (Suggate et al., 2018). Handwriting depends on the integration of fine motor, visual motor, and cognitive processes that are known as the graphomotor system. Children need rich, playful opportunities to strengthen these systems (Suggate, S. et al., 2023). Therefore, teachers need to plan for fine-motor development to support writing. Activities such as rolling playdough, cutting with scissors, threading beads, using tweezers, or building with blocks strengthen the hand muscles, refine bilateral coordination, and the hand-eye coordination needed for efficient handwriting, which in turn prepares children for writing success.

Beyond mechanics, the environment helps shape children's beliefs about the purpose and importance of writing. When student writing is prominently displayed, the classroom communicates that children are authors whose ideas deserve visibility and celebration (Dyson, 2003; Graves, 2016). When teachers model their own writing through shared journals, planning pages, and quick writes, they make visible the decisions writers face, reinforcing the idea that writing is a tool for thinking, reflection, creativity, and communication (Morrow, 1990). Libraries organized by theme or inquiry topic further situate writing within a larger ecosystem of meaning-making, encouraging children to see connections between reading, writing, talking, and the world around them.

Together, the physical environment functions as both context and catalyst for writing development. It nurtures the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional foundations of writing, providing the conditions children need to develop fluency, confidence, and purpose. A well-designed environment tells children that writing matters in the classroom, that their stories matter, and that they matter as well.

Foundational Skills and Planned Routines

Writing instruction requires careful attention to foundational skills such as handwriting, spelling, and punctuation. These "lower-level" processes must become automatic so that children can focus on higher-order composition tasks like generating ideas and organizing text. Planning ensures that these skills are taught consistently and systematically.

Teachers who set aside daily time for handwriting, model fluent letter formation, and embed spelling into meaningful writing tasks help students build automaticity. Rather than treating handwriting or spelling as isolated exercises, effective planning integrates them into authentic contexts, such as labeling science drawings or composing letters to classmates. Research underscores that handwriting fluency is linked to overall writing quality (Berninger & Amtmann, 2003; Mangen & Velay, 2020). Children who write fluently have more cognitive resources available to generate and refine ideas.

Schoolwide planning strengthens this work. When campuses adopt a consistent handwriting model, students benefit from coherence across grade levels. Coaches and administrators play an important role in aligning routines and providing professional development so that foundational instruction is both intentional and adaptable.

Assessment and Adaptation

Curriculum planning must also be responsive. Teachers rely on observation, documentation, and assessment to determine what children know and what they need next. Writing samples, oral storytelling, and even pencil grips provide valuable information about developmental stages. These assessments help educators target instruction, whether that means additional multisensory handwriting support, scaffolds for multilingual learners, or enrichment opportunities for advanced writers. Rich sources of assessment data, like those previously shared, help teachers understand both what children can do independently and what they may achieve with targeted support (Anderson, 2018; NCTE, 2022).

Planning adaptations might involve flexible small groups, differentiated materials such as pencil grips or graphic organizers, or the integration of oral rehearsal strategies for students learning in more than one language. Flexible small groups allow teachers to respond to assessments in real time. Research supports the use of ongoing assessment to guide intentional grouping, ensuring that instruction targets specific skills, such as planning, handwriting fluency, or revision strategies (Graham et al., 2012). When teachers systematically document progress, they create a continuous feedback loop that directly shapes the curriculum planning and instructional pace. Such adaptations ensure that foundational skills and genre instruction are entry points rather than barriers. Leaders strengthen this process by protecting time for collaborative planning, where teachers can analyze student work and adjust instruction together.

Building Knowledge through Text Sets

Children cannot write effectively about topics they do not understand. Planning must therefore include deliberate opportunities to build background knowledge. One powerful strategy is the use of text sets. The term "text sets" refers to a curated collection of thematically connected text, whether across genres or modalities, that students read, view, or experience over time. Text sets may include picture books, informational articles, poems, videos, photographs, interviews, and artifacts that support students' inquiry and provide background knowledge needed for writing (Cappiello & Dawes, 2013, 2021).

Text sets should include authentic experiences and primary sources to deepen students' engagement and content understanding. For example, when learning the plant life cycle, teachers may sequence a narrative picture book, a set of poems, an informational science text, and a biography. Throughout the week, students encounter repeated vocabulary and related ideas in multiple contexts. These planned experiences deepen comprehension while also equipping students with language for their own writing. Research supports this approach, showing that multiple, thematically related texts improve both reading comprehension and writing outcomes (Lupo et al., 2019; Batchelor, 2019).

By embedding text sets across subject areas, such as science, social studies, language arts, teachers provide repeated encounters with concepts. Which then students can draw upon when composing. Planning is what allows this kind of coherence and intentionality to occur, ensuring that writing is grounded in meaningful knowledge.

Purpose, Genre, and Scheduling

Curriculum planning also shapes how children learn about the purposes of writing. Teachers explicitly model that we write to tell stories, to describe, to inform, and to persuade. Planned mini-lessons anchored in mentor texts demonstrate these purposes in action. For instance, reading *One Word from Sophia* can launch a persuasive writing unit where students craft letters advocating for playground improvements.

Scheduling is central here. Effective planning ensures that children experience a rhythm of whole-group lessons, small-group instruction, and independent or play-based practice. Centers might include handwriting games, opportunities to draft narratives, or dramatic play that becomes the basis for later written stories. A well-planned schedule balances explicit instruction with time for exploration and self-expression.

The Role of Leadership in Planning

Effective curriculum planning requires leadership structures that protect teachers' time, promote coherence across grade levels, and support sustained instructional improvement. Protecting time for collaborative planning is associated with measurable gains in instructional quality and student outcomes (Grisson et al., 2021; International Literacy Association, 2018).When leaders align campus routines across grade levels, like shared writing experiences, instructional language, and assessment practices, teachers experience greater clarity and consistency in their planning.

Beyond scheduling and structures, leadership plays a critical role in fostering teacher efficacy and autonomy. Research shows that effective principals cultivate a "safe" environment in which teachers feel trusted to experiment with new writing routines, adjust pacing, and integrate text sets into curriculum planning (Ryan & Hndry, 2022) This culture of professional trust replicates the self-regulation process that educators hope to see develop in young writers and strengthens teachers'' capacity to make informed instructional decisions. Leaders help establish a culture where planning is seen not as compliance but as the professional work of teaching.

Conclusion

Curriculum planning is the thread that ties together the many dimensions of writing instruction. By designing environments rich in print, establishing routines for foundational skills, embedding text sets to build knowledge, and scheduling varied opportunities for expression, teachers create classrooms where writing is meaningful and achievable. Through observation and adaptation, they ensure that instruction meets the needs of each learner. And with the support of administrators and coaches, planning becomes a collaborative endeavor that strengthens coherence across schools.

Ultimately, thoughtful curriculum planning allows children to write with both skill and purpose. It nurtures not only the mechanics of writing but also the motivation and self-regulation that transform young learners into confident communicators.

Furthermore, strong curriculum planning ensures that instruction is equitable and inclusive, honoring the diverse cultural and linguistic resources that children bring to the classroom. By weaving together explicit instruction, authentic opportunities for expression, and purposeful feedback, educators cultivate both competence and joy in writing. In this way, curriculum planning becomes more than a roadmap for instruction. Writing becomes a pathway for students to discover their voices, develop confidence in their abilities, and carry forward the skills of communication that will serve them for a lifetime.

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A Record of Curiosity: Personalized Annotation Options

Jennifer P. Gray

Many teachers often lament that students in their courses do not read or engage in the course materials consistently. There are many reasons why students at all course levels and within multiple disciplines may not read their materials, ranging from time management issues to lack of assessments to distraction to reading comprehension difficulties (McMurtrie, 2024; Johnson, 2019; Hoeft, 2012). Professional pedagogical development offerings frequently share strategies to address these lamentations and to help increase engagement with course readings, such as the use of reading quizzes, homework assignments, and in-class group work using the readings. These activities can support challenged readers and create necessary dedicated space for reading instruction. As Stover, O'Rear, and Morris (2015) remind fellow teachers, "[s]ince reading occurs in every content area, it is important for all teachers to provide reading instruction as it relates to the discipline" (p. 65). Reading is a natural partner to writing and thinking, so devoting class time and energy to effective reading strategies is a worthy goal regardless of the discipline or course level. Many teachers were strong readers, so they might not have direct experience to rely on when thinking about what struggling readers may need; in fact, reading instruction activities may be omitted entirely (Stover, O'Rear, & Morris, 2015).

Purpose of Activity

The Article Annotation Assignment (see Appendix for the assignment sheet and a sample rubric) focuses on a successful personalized annotation project that creates space for students to develop a record of curiosity with the reading, improving the reading experience. The project also presents an opportunity for reflection about the making of the student's own personalized annotation strategy. The assignment is applicable for a variety of writing classes in higher education or secondary levels, and the activity stretches across four class periods.

Students may already be familiar with different reading instruction activities commonly used throughout their past history, such as KWL, SQ4R, visual organizers, Cornell Note-Taking System, and Power Notes. These activities often include specific elements completed in a specific order, and they can easily be collected and evaluated. For example, students may recognize the KWL strategy (National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 2023), which involves the following three actions to determine before, during, and after reading:

K (what the student knows already)
W (what the student wants to learn)
L (what is being learned)

Students may know about the SQ3R or SQ4R method (Robinson, 1946), which involves the following actions that guide the entire process of reading:

S (take a quick survey, or look, over the reading first)
Q (transform the headers and content into questions)
R (read, looking for answers to the questions you created)
R (after each major section, recite the questions you found)
R (record your personal connections)
R (review the notes and experience you just created)

Students may be asked to create visuals from their reading, such as with graphic organizers, concept maps, or story maps, which break down elements within the readings, such as the theme or setting, and chunk out the material into sections that can be easily noted and referenced later.

The Cornell Note-Taking System is quite popular and used in many institutions. This system encourages handwritten work for better content absorption, and users divide their pages up into different units, such as spaces for questions, summary statements, and key thoughts (Pauk & Owens, 2010). Finally, students may have experience with Power Notes, which work to separate out main ideas (Power 1) with supporting ideas (Power 2 and 3) which help readers illustrate focus, evidence, and the relationship between major and minor ideas (NCTE, 2023). These beloved reading instruction strategies all rely on the general concept of annotation, whether online or by hand. Annotations are notes that are produced by the reader about the reading and/or the reader's history, education, or future. Using annotations can improve reading comprehension and engagement with the text's ideas as students reflect on the material they read and understand how it applies to their lives and to other subjects (Carillo, 2017). Students can use annotations as "a bridge" between reading about something and writing about something, and annotations can ultimately strengthen both a student's reading and writing abilities (Carillo, 2017, p. xi). When students participate in annotations, they can actively work to make and discover meaning from their reading experiences.

Annotations when done well serve as a student's own record of curiosity about a piece of reading. This record of curiosity can be preserved and used however the student wishes, and the record of curiosity can be as unique as the students themselves. My Article Annotation Assignment was created to encourage a student's record of curiosity and build from the more formulaic and prescriptive annotation reading strategies that many students have already experienced, such as graphic organizers or KWL charts. The assignment creates space for students to annotate by hand on a hardcopy or on screen with digital options. Spending time on digital annotation options, which can be quite different from hardcopy options, can assist students who are using predominantly digital texts for access, personal preference, or cost reasons too (Cohn, 2021).

The Article Annotation Assignment takes an active stance and creates space for students to be makers of their own annotations for their own needs. Each student is different, so expecting students to use the same mode of a prescriptive annotation strategy can be stifling and boring. Much like the writing process is often viewed as distinctive to each writer, this annotation approach can be viewed in the same manner. These activities encourage students to incorporate elements, such as summary statements, reactions, and notes, within their documents to help improve their research. For example, students can use annotation to dissect the points and

purpose of an article or to ponder how to incorporate concepts and claims from a website into their projects.

When students are encouraged to personalize their annotations for their own use, they move away from a robotic approach of filling out a predetermined annotation approach, such as the KWL strategy. This generic approach to predetermined annotation options is the main reason why I created this Article Annotation Assignment; I found that students were not as engaged in annotation when I used a predetermined option. Instead, they were hunting for the answer that went on a line or in a section, working to provide the answers they thought I wanted to see, so they could earn a 100% on the product. The activity was about providing the "right" answer for a grade. In contrast, personalized annotations help students discover and deliberately make their own choices and determine what strategy or technique would be best for them. These engaged annotations help students "to see the value of what they are reading and to form new ideas about who they are and how they fit into the world in which they live" (Brown, 2007, p. 73). Making space to encourage reflection about their own choices can also help students figure out effective study strategies that could be used in other reading and writing situations. This assignment helps students understand what they need, why they need it, and how they can apply their own annotation strategy to other areas in their lives. Students report that they have successfully used their own personalized annotation strategies, developed via this assignment, in other courses.

Teaching Activity Description

Four Days: Creating Our Personalized Record of Curiosity

Day One: The class begins the Article Annotation Assignment unit by creating space to discuss what they know about the concept of annotation. None of what will be completed on day one is collected or graded, and I complete all the writing with the students. We begin by responding to the following prompt:

> Do some freewriting about annotations, such as your use of them in your past or current classes.

After about five minutes, I ask students to share from their writing, and they often speak about the many types of formal annotation strategies mentioned above, such as Cornell Notes. Many of them describe the annotation activity in a negative way, saying it was like mindlessly filling out worksheets or doing busy work.

After this conversation, usually around 5 minutes, we move into the focus for the assignment, which is to help students create annotation strategies that are unique to them and their purposes as readers and writers. We do this by spending time with a poem, and I like to use "Barbie Doll" written by Marge Piercy and published in 1971, which is anthologized in many writing textbooks and easily accessed online. I give students a hardcopy of the poem, replicated below:

This girlchild was born as usual
and presented dolls that did pee-pee
and miniature GE stoves and irons

and wee lipsticks the color of cherry candy.
Then in the magic of puberty, a classmate said:
You have a great big nose and fat legs.

She was healthy, tested intelligent,
possessed strong arms and back,
abundant sexual drive and manual dexterity.
She went to and fro apologizing.
Everyone saw a fat nose on thick legs.

She was advised to play coy,
exhorted to come on hearty,
exercise, diet, smile and wheedle.
Her good nature wore out
like a fan belt.
So she cut off her nose and her legs
and offered them up.

In the casket displayed on satin she lay
with the undertaker's cosmetics painted on,
a turned-up putty nose,
dressed in a pink and white nightie.
Doesn't she look pretty? everyone said.

Consummation at last.
To every woman a happy ending.

I ask the class to read the poem and then work with a partner to respond to the following: By yourself or with a partner, take out your laptops or electronic devices and try to figure out the following questions, taking care to jot down your answers on the page or in your Notebook:

Who is the writer? What do we know about this writer?
When was this piece published? What was happening at that time?
Where was it published? Who might have read this piece or had access?

I model research by sharing my screen at the front of the room as I look up the answers to the questions. After about 15 minutes, we come back together to the class as a group, and I ask the students to share. Because I encouraged them to "jot down" the answers they found, they are easily able to respond to the questions and are often enthusiastic to report what they know. This discussion usually lasts around 10 minutes. Then, we move into a discussion of the poem in more detail. I ask the class to read the poem, noting any thoughts and answers to these questions:

Define any words you don't know by jotting down the definition.
Make a note of how you are feeling when you are reading.
What words feel important? Mark them somehow.
What do you think happens at the end? Jot down an answer or question.

What is this poem about? Try to write a few words summarizing the poem.
Why might that message need to be shared? Ponder this idea and note your thoughts somehow.

Again, I model this activity by doing my own annotations, and I use a document camera to project my notes to the entire class. If this technology is not present or working, I just join a group and work next to the students. After about 15 minutes, we come back together as a class and I again ask students to share the results of each bullet point. For example, I ask students what word(s) they didn't know, and what were those definitions? When I ask them how they were feeling, they are able to point to the exact spot that created the feeling and then explain it. We usually talk for about 10 minutes.

After completing this discussion, I ask students to respond to the following prompt: How were your annotations today similar or different to the annotations you have used in the past?

After about 5 minutes of time to write, we have a closing discussion about this experience with annotations. Most students express an interest in how they were able to record their curiosity and interest in what stood out to them in the reading. This activity concludes the first day of the assignment unit, and the homework for day two of the unit is to read the assignment sheet and accompanying article for the Article Annotation Assignment and begin to annotate both items. Students receive a copy of both as they leave the classroom.

Day Two. The class begins day two by sharing what the students annotated on the assignment sheet and the article. I ask them questions about what stood out to them as important or what items they needed to define. Students share the types of annotations they used, how they used them, what their article looks like during and after annotations, and what it was like to mark directly on their article. Some students are hesitant to write directly on the article, as they may have been trained not to write directly on course materials. Throughout the entire process, I make sure to bluntly tell students that they are expected to write directly on the article, so they know they are not doing something wrong.

We look closely at the assignment sheet, focusing on how we can "make our annotations visible, as a record of our own curiosity." We spend the rest of day two discussing the specifics of the assignment sheet to ensure comprehension of the assignment. We also discuss the content and organization of the article. We use the concept of the rhetorical situation to dissect the article, focusing on the topic, purpose, author, audience, and context. With extra time, we continue with our annotations and work toward the final version of the assignment.

Day three. The third day includes a peer review session and a chance for students to share their in-process annotations with each other and with the instructor. A typical peer review session might involve groups of 3 students trading their work and reviewing the content to make sure the draft matches the requirements of the assignment. Areas of the draft that could use more detail can be marked. Students might also describe strong sections of their peers' drafts and identify what worked well for them as a reader.

Day four. After offering time for any final questions, the assignment is submitted. Since I have also participated in drafting the project, this would be an ideal time to share that draft or final version with the class.

Future Plans and Conclusions

After using this assignment for two years, I would like to branch out to allow more digital options for annotations in addition to the handwritten ones. Because the emphasis is on students actively discovering their own personalized annotation strategies that work for them, I do not want to assume that a handwritten option is the only option. Many students prefer to record their curiosity digitally, and their own creation process may be stifled by forced handwriting.

If the sample poem is too advanced or inappropriate for students, or if teachers simply get tired of using the same poem every year, the poems "maggie and milly and molly and may" by E. E. Cummings or "Knoxville, Tennessee" by Nikki Giovanni could be other options for younger students. Another possibility is to ask students to find their own poems to annotate, and the class could vote on what poem they would like to use for the project. A final approach could include selecting a poem written by the state's poet laureate.

Overall, this assignment results in positive feedback from students, as they appreciate the ability to personalize the content based on their interests, styles, and preferences. Students report annotating their reading materials more in other classes. They speak about how they have a connection with the material, and they really could understand the content. Conversations during class illustrate a higher level of reading engagement; students actually answer questions and talk! The reflection paragraph in particular helps students express how and why they used the annotations, which brings an ownership over the process they implemented. Certainly, this assignment provides a skill that helps students succeed in their other coursework and improve their reading experiences.

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Appendix

Article Annotation Assignment Sheet

In order to be a knowledgeable and responsible consumer of information in our classes and in the world, we need to be able to interact and understand the material we are reading (consuming). We must engage with it. We read all day, whether it might be formal documents, text messages, or social media. The use of annotations can help us become active readers who understand the rhetorical situation present within the material.

For this assignment, we will work to make our annotations visible, as a record of our own curiosity. Here is the process and what you will produce:

Read the provided article (teachers can use any article they wish):

1. Complete at least 45 substantial handwritten annotations directly on your article. Be as legible as you can. You will be turning in your hard copy of the article with these written annotations in the margins or on the back side of the pages. Here are some examples of different types of annotations you can use:
    a. Definitions of a word or concept that is unfamiliar
    b. Outside research summary you did to understand a content point in the article
    c. Notes about the author or the timing of the publication
    d. Identification or explanation of the main point of a section
    e. Noting something about the rhetorical situation
    f. Recording your reaction, response, or opinion about something in the article
    g. Asking questions about what you are not understanding or want to explore later
2. In a separate typed document with MLA formatting and formal language, provide the following **two** paragraphs:
    a. **Paragraph one**, the Rhetorical Situation: *In one large paragraph*, identify the rhetorical situation (purpose, topic, audience, writer, and context) for the article. Talk about all five of the elements from the rhetorical situation and defend your statements with **actual language** from the article.
        i. Provide the specific language/words from the article to explain and defend your thoughts. For example, who is the intended audience for this article? How do we know? What clues in the article communicate this intended reader to us?
        ii. Be sure to explain where and how you found out about each of the elements of the rhetorical situation (ex: According to the author's personal website…Based on page one of the article...).
    b. **Paragraph two**, the Reflection: *In one large paragraph*, identify what you learned from this experience of annotating. This discussion can include specific content from the article, discoveries about new study skills learned, future value of this activity in your education/career, and/or commentary on yourself as a reader. Be specific. Don't just say, "I learned a lot" or "I will approach things differently now." For example, show me what you learned. Show me what things are different or what you plan to change. Show me how you annotated before and what you are doing now.

Figure 1

Rubric

	A	B	C	D	F	0%
Annotations	At least 45 substantial annotations present	At least 45 annotations present but could be more substantial	25-44 substantial annotations present	25-44 annotations present but could be more substantial	Less than 25 annotations present	No annotation included
Paragraph one	Strong and detailed responses that leave readers with no questions	Good responses that leave readers with few questions	Content provided for each response but there is room for more detail	Some content points not covered and much detail is lacking	Most content points missing	No paragraph included
Paragraph two	Strong and detailed responses that leave readers with no questions	Good responses that leave readers with few questions	Content provided for each response but there is room for more detail	Some content points not covered and much detail is lacking	Most content points missing	No paragraph included

Note: This figure is the rubric used to assess the Article Annotation assignment.

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2026 Legislative Review: Literacy and Education

Dr. Dana Oliver, Co-Editor of The Oklahoma Reader

The following legislative summaries are intended to be *descriptive rather than evaluative*, offering straightforward summaries of selected bills without interpreting their merits or making judgments about their potential impact. These summaries are provided to help readers understand the general scope and intent of current literacy-related legislation, but they do not represent an exhaustive catalog of all measures that may be of interest. Instead, the bills highlighted here reflect those that editor, Dana Oliver, identified as most directly connected to literacy or of particular relevance to OKLA members and the broader reader community. While every effort has been made to accurately summarize the legislation, interpretation of statutory language can be complex, and a fully exhaustive detailing of each provision would limit the accessibility of this document. Readers are encouraged to review additional resources as needed to support their own understanding.

Section I: Staying Informed & Key Dates

For educators tracking the 2026 Oklahoma Legislative Session, the LENS (Legislative Electronic Notification System) provides automated email updates on specific bills. To stay informed on committee proceedings, educators can access the live streams for the Senate and House Education Committees.

Table 1
Key Legislative Dates for the 2026 Oklahoma Session

Date	Legislative Milestone
December 5, 2025	Bill request deadline
January 15, 2026	Bill introduction deadline
February 2, 2026	Session begins (12:00 p.m.)
March 5, 2026	Deadline to report measures from House of Origin committees
March 26, 2026	Third reading deadline in House of Origin
April 23, 2026	Deadline to report measures from Opposite House committees
May 7, 2026	Third reading deadline in Opposite House
May 29, 2026	Sine Die adjournment (5:00 p.m.)

Note. Dates reflect the planned calendar for the 2026 regular session. Changes are possible if the chambers adopt different deadline resolutions.

Staying informed throughout the legislative session is essential for educators and school leaders. The Legislative Electronic Notification System (LENS) offers a straightforward way to monitor measures that relate to your work by providing real-time updates as bills move through the legislative process. By selecting a few relevant notification options, you can follow the progress of legislation connected to literacy and other areas of interest without needing to track each

development manually. The chart below highlights several recommended LENS notification categories to help ensure you remain aware of whether a bill you are following is advancing or no longer under active consideration.

Table 2
Key Legislative Action Categories and Tracking Options within LENS

Action Category	Specific Option to Track	Why You Might Select This
Committees	Committee Report Filed	Indicates if a bill survived its first major hurdle and is eligible for a full chamber vote.
Committees	Returned to Committee	Rarely will a bill be continued after being returned to committee.
Floor	Third Reading	Represents the final vote in the originating chamber (House or Senate) before the bill moves to the opposite chamber.
Opposite Chamber	Measure Received	Confirms that the bill is now under consideration by the other legislative body.
Executive Action	Governor's Action	The Governor's approval or veto determines whether the bill becomes law.

Note. This table is included to help teachers and school leaders select potential bill tracking options within the LENS platform so they may stay informed about key points in the legislative process, track bill movement, anticipate changes affecting literacy instruction, and respond proactively as legislation develops. There are additional options each educator may find valuable when exploring the LENS platform.

Section II: The *Current* Strong Readers Act (SRA) Requirements & *Proposed* Amendments

The **current** version of the Strong Readers Act (70 O.S. § 1210.508B) is intended to strengthen literacy for students in Kindergarten through 3rd grade. The Strong Readers Act (SRA), which replaced the former Reading Sufficiency Act, outlines comprehensive literacy requirements for Oklahoma students starting in kindergarten to ensure foundational reading proficiency. Under these guidelines, schools are mandated to provide Tier 1 core instruction, which consists of at least 90 minutes of daily, scientific research-based reading instruction for all students. For students exhibiting a reading deficiency, schools must implement a Student Literacy Intervention Plan (SLIP) no later than 30 days after identification. These interventions, categorized as Tier 2 or Tier 3, should be provided in addition to the 90-minute core instructional block and are tailored to meet individual student needs through explicit, evidence-based methods.

Assessment and screening are central to the SRA, requiring all K-3 students to be evaluated using State Board-approved screening instruments, such as Amira or Star Early Learning Suite. These tools can serve as both universal screenings and specific assessments for identifying characteristics of dyslexia. If a student demonstrates below-grade-level performance in reading or is identified as being at risk for dyslexia characteristics, teachers must facilitate a conference

with parents to discuss the results and the resulting Individual Program of Reading Instruction (IPRI). Schools are also responsible for rigorous reporting, including maintaining an Annual District Reading Plan and submitting Beginning of Year (BOY) and End of Year (EOY) surveys to the State Department of Education to track student progress and program effectiveness

For more resources, visit OSDE Strong Readers for Schools or enroll in the Strong Readers Coordinators' Course on OSDE Connect.

HB 4420: Strong Readers Act Expansion with Retention Focus (Speaker Hilbert)
Oklahoma House Bill 4420, would amend the Strong Readers Act. The bill replaces multiple screeners with a single State Board–selected instrument that has been evaluated and ranked by the Commission for Educational Quality and Accountability (CEQA). Students identified through screening as demonstrating reading deficiencies or dyslexia-risk indicators must receive instruction using SBE-approved, science-of-reading–aligned materials, explicitly excluding balanced literacy and three-cueing practices. Accountability requirements expand to include annual reporting of individual intervention plans through accreditation, parent notification within seven days of identification, and monthly progress updates.

The bill implements promotion and retention rules, requiring that third-grade students who do not demonstrate proficiency be retained unless they qualify for a good-cause exemption. Proficiency may be shown through the statewide ELA assessment, an approved alternative assessment, or a standards-based portfolio. Students promoted under exemptions must continue receiving intensive intervention, and incoming third graders with deficiencies must be placed with highly effective teachers and provided intensified, data-driven supports.

Retained students receive additional instructional time, access to transitional instructional settings, and before- or after-school interventions delivered by specially trained teachers or tutors. The bill also mandates a "Read at Home" plan developed by OEQA and requires district Strong Readers Plans to include a reading specialist as part of the planning team. As implementation expands, these requirements will extend to grades four through eight. Additionally, the bill revises teacher preparation expectations to include study of the science of reading and explicit understanding of the negative impacts of balanced literacy and three-cueing, as well as how to identify and avoid such practices in instructional materials. (http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb4420&Session=2600)

HB 2944 (Hall) & SB 1271 (Bergstrom) Oklahoma READS Act- *Oklahoma Reading Excellence through Accountability, Development, and Standards Act.*
The Oklahoma READS Act, introduced as HB 2944 in the House and SB 1271 in the Senate, amends the Strong Readers Act to establish a mandatory, proficiency-based promotion system for early literacy. The act requires students in kindergarten through third grade to be screened for reading skills—including phonological awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—at the beginning, middle, and end of each school year. If a deficiency is identified, school districts must implement an individual reading intervention plan within 30 days.

Beginning in the 2027-2028 school year, third-grade students who do not meet grade-level targets on the reading foundations and vocabulary portions of the statewide assessment must be retained. Promotion for these students is limited to defined "good-cause" exemptions, such as those for certain English language learners, students with disabilities assessed via alternate

standards, or students passing a state-approved alternative assessment. Retained students must receive a minimum of 90 minutes of daily, research-based intensive intervention.

To support these standards, the State Department of Education will employ literacy coaches to provide daily technical assistance to teachers in low-performing districts. To qualify, a coach must hold a valid teaching certificate and either a master's degree with three years of reading-instruction experience or a bachelor's degree with five years of experience. These coaches must demonstrate competence in training others in science-of-reading-based instruction. Additionally, starting in the summer of 2028, districts are required to provide in-person summer reading academies for students who do not meet proficiency targets. Districts must also publish annual reports detailing retention and promotion data on their websites.

Under the READS framework, third-grade promotion becomes dependent on demonstrated reading proficiency beginning in the 2027 to 2028 school year. Students who are not yet reading on grade level must be retained unless they qualify for one of several defined good-cause exemptions, including exemptions for students with disabilities and English learners who have had less than two years of instruction. Retained or at-risk students must receive intensive intervention services designed to accelerate progress and reduce reading gaps. (https://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=SB%201271&Session=2600)

SB 1778: Strong Readers Act Expansion. (Sen. Pugh)
This proposed legislation expands the Strong Readers Act by establishing a formal Transitional First Grade (T1) as a bridge year for students demonstrating significant literacy deficiencies based on State Board approved screening instruments. Under this model, students participate in grade-level, non-academic activities, such as lunch, recess, and electives, alongside age-level peers, while spending the majority of the school day in smaller instructional settings designed to deliver targeted literacy instruction and high-dosage intervention aligned with science-of-reading research.

The bill places increased emphasis on early intervention by shifting the primary legislative focus to first and second grade, aiming to reduce the later need for third-grade retention. Transitional classrooms are structured to provide intensified, data-driven supports that can accelerate foundational reading development prior to the end of third grade.

In addition, SB 1778 requires districts to offer mandatory summer reading academies for students in grades one through three who do not meet literacy benchmarks on end-of-year screeners. To support implementation, the bill also authorizes the deployment of literacy coaches and technical assistance teams to help districts establish transitional classrooms and seasonally based intervention programs.
(http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=sb1778&Session=2600)

SB 1338: HEROES Program Expansion (Sen. Pugh)
This act transitions the "Literacy Instructional Team" pilot into a permanent, state-wide program managed by the Oklahoma State Department of Education to provide long-term stability for literacy support. It mandates the creation of regional expertise networks, which include designated regional literacy leads and at least one Dyslexia Specialist per region to support local educators. To ensure compliance and participation, the bill introduces funding penalties, stating that high-need districts that decline state-assigned coaching support will become ineligible for

specific Strong Readers Act formula funding.
(http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=sb1338&Session=2600)

HB 3023: Screening, Intervention, and Adjunct Restrictions (Rep. Lowe)
This bill proposes several amendments to the Strong Readers Act designed to adjust screening, intervention, and instructional requirements. The bill would reduce the number of State Board–approved screening instruments from three to two and shortens the deadline for implementing individual reading intervention plans from 30 days to 15 days following the identification of a reading deficiency. Interventions must consist primarily of direct instruction and not be digital intervention approaches. These services may not occur during core instructional periods for mathematics or other tested subjects.

The bill expands the Reading Proficiency Team to include a school principal or vice principal and authorizes districts to contract with retired teachers as literacy coaches. It establishes bi-weekly progress reporting requirements for families, including specific suggestions for supporting reading development at home. Regarding promotion, HB 3023 permits the Reading Proficiency Team to recommend retention for first- and second-grade students who do not meet established benchmarks. Retention becomes mandatory for third-grade students who do not meet proficiency targets unless they qualify for defined exemptions, including those based on an Individualized Education Plan, a medical circumstance, or documented improvement following prior retention. The bill also prohibits non-certified adjunct teachers from teaching core subjects such as reading and mathematics in kindergarten through sixth grade, with additional restrictions for schools that do not meet literacy and numeracy targets.
(https://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=HB3023&Session=2600)

Section III: Literacy, Academic, & Educator Certification Measures

SB 1293, LETRS (Sen. Hicks)
Establishes the "LETRS Training Revolving Fund" Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training for public school Pk-3rd teachers within a five-year period.
(https://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=SB1293&Session=2600)

SB 1538, 8th Grade Reading Proficiency for Driver's Licenses (Sen. Pugh)
Directs Service Oklahoma to deny driver's licenses or permits to minors who fail to prove school enrollment or high school graduation. It further requires applicants to demonstrate eighth-grade reading proficiency or provide proof of working at least twenty-four hours per week.(http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=sb1538&Session=2600)

SB 1360, Math Achievement and Proficiency Act (Sen. Seifried)
Building upon the foundations of the Oklahoma Math Achievement and Proficiency Act, 1360 directs the OSDE to establish a three-year pilot program starting in the 2026-2027, which utilizes specialized mathematics instructional teams to provide technical assistance and support to districts with high numbers of struggling students. Teams assist educators in recognizing educational needs, particularly for students with math-related learning disabilities like dyscalculia. The legislation creates the Office of Mathematics Improvement to oversee these efforts and monitor the implementation of screening instruments and professional development across the state. (https://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=SB%201360&Session=2600)

SB 1614, Restrictions on Adjunct Teachers (Sen. Seifried)
SB 1614 makes targeted changes to Oklahoma's adjunct teacher policies by requiring all adjunct teachers to hold at least a high school diploma and prohibiting them from serving as full-time mathematics or English language arts teachers in grades 1–5. The bill aims to strengthen instructional quality in early elementary grades, particularly in core literacy and numeracy—while still allowing districts to use adjuncts in other subjects or upper grades. In addition to these instructional protections, SB 1614 updates statutory language to reflect current accrediting and oversight bodies and includes an emergency clause so the changes take effect immediately upon enactment. (http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=sb1614&Session=2600)

HB 3022, Adjunct Teacher Qualifications (Rep. Lowe)
Imposes broad restrictions on the use of uncertified adjunct teachers across elementary schools. The bill prohibits adjuncts without traditional certification from teaching core subjects math, English language arts, science, or social studies in grades PK–6, whether part-time or full-time, and requires districts to implement stricter qualification standards. It also directs the State Board of Education to establish salary guidelines for part-time adjuncts, clarifying expectations and tightening oversight. Overall, HB 3022 represents a comprehensive effort to limit reliance on non-certified adjunct instructors in foundational grade levels and core academic areas. (http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb3022&Session=2600)

Section IV: Teacher Recruitment, Student Well-being, and Parental Rights

SB 1546, NEXT-ED Program (Sen. Pugh)
Renames the "Inspired to Teach" program to the New Educators for Excellence in Teaching and Education (NEXT-ED) Program and increases the financial incentives for future teachers. The bill increases scholarship awards to $2,000 per year for the first three years of college and $5,000 for the final year, raising the maximum scholarship total from $5,500 to $11,000. Upon graduation, participants who fulfill a five-year teaching commitment in Oklahoma public schools are eligible for an additional $20,000 in employment incentive payments ($4,000 per year). In total, a student who completes the full program and teaching requirement will receive $31,000 in state support. (http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=SB%201546&Session=2600)

SB 1776, Teacher Retention Tax Credit (Sen. Pugh)
Offers a $10,000 refundable tax credit for certified teachers entering their 8th consecutive year of service. (http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=sb1776&Session=2600)

SB 1617, SPED Teacher Stipends (Sen. Pugh)
Increases the stipend for Special Education certified teachers from 5% to 10% above the prevailing wage. (http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=sb1617&Session=2600)

SB 1337, Education Paid Paternity Leave (Sen. Pugh)
Expands current paid maternity leave to include six weeks of paid paternity leave. (http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=SB%201337&Session=2600)

SB 1720, Parental Presence at IEP Meetings (Sen. Pugh)
Clarifies that parents may bring any individual of their choice to IEP/504 meetings without school interference or retaliation. (http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=sb1720&Session=2600)

HB 1493, Growing Minds, Active Kids Act (Rep. Rosecrants)
Mandates 30 minutes of daily recess for grades PK-5; recess cannot fulfill PE requirements; recess cannot be taken away for academic or punishment reasons.
(http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb1493&Session=2600)

SB 1481, Recess Requirements (Sen. Seifried)
Requires public schools to provide 40 minutes of daily unstructured play or recess for elementary students which can be split across two twenty minute periods; recess cannot fulfill PE requirements; recess cannot be taken away for academic or punishment reasons.
(http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=sb1481&Session=2600)

Section V: A Closing Invitation

As educators, families, and literacy leaders continue navigating the evolving landscape of reading legislation in Oklahoma, staying informed is most manageable when we do so together. The work of understanding policy, and translating it into meaningful support for students, is strengthened through collaboration, shared knowledge, and the collective commitment found within a broader literacy community. Organizations such as the Oklahoma Literacy Association offer opportunities for connection, continued learning, and mutual support as we work to ensure strong literacy outcomes for all learners in our state.

We encourage readers who wish to engage more deeply in this ongoing conversation to consider becoming members of the Oklahoma Literacy Association. Membership information is available at: https://www.oklahomaliteracy.org/membership-sign-up.html. We also invite you to join us at our upcoming statewide literacy conference hosted at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma (USAO). Conference details and registration can be found at: https://www.oklahomaliteracy.org/annual-conference.html#!event-register/2026/2/27/oklahoma-literacy-association-2026-conference-literacy-for-all

Through continued collaboration and shared purpose, we can promote stronger understanding, broaden access to reliable information, and ensure that Oklahoma's literacy landscape continues to grow in ways that support students, educators, and families alike.

Dr. Dana Oliver is an Associate Professor and Literacy Director at Southwestern Oklahoma State University as well as founder of Literacy Solutions, a consulting and professional literacy tutoring clinic. She serves in leadership roles within the Oklahoma Literacy Association, the Oklahoma Higher Education Reading Council, the Oklahoma Tourette Association, and is an active reviewer for the International Literacy Association. Dr. Oliver is a recipient of the Association of Teacher Educators Distinguished Dissertation Award and the Davinci Institute Fellowship Award. Favorite professional activities include collaborating for positive literacy change, providing professional development for school districts and conferences, and advocating for readers' rights, libraries, and support for students with neurological differences.

OKLAHOMA LITERACY ASSOCIATION

A Chapter Affiliate of the International Literacy Association

Call For Papers

The Oklahoma Reader is seeking papers for our next issue.

Rolling Submissions Accepted

Theme

This issue will have an open theme. Any topics which are relevant to teaching literacy in a K-20 environment are welcome.

Consider topics such as

- Leveraging Literature in the Content Areas
- The Role of Reader Identity and Motivation
- Advocating for Neurodiverse Needs in Literacy Teaching
- Use of assessment data to guide tiered instruction & intervention

Important Information

Author Guidelines

Attend to author guidelines for formating and submission process.
tinyurl.com/OKReaderGuidelines

Articles & Columns

- Original Research Articles
- Research Literature Reviews
- Teacher to Teacher Articles: *descriptions of literacy practices for the classroom*
- Literacy Columns- short & quick columns
  - Off the Shelf (book reviews), Celebrating Literacy, Diverse Learners, Tech Talk, Policy & Advocacy.

Timeline

Rolling Submissions

Year-Round Submissions Accepted. Calls for papers are emphasized in spring and summer.

Initial Editor Look

Late Summer & Early Fall- Editors preliminarily review and prepare for peer review.

Peer Review Process

Mid to Late Fall- Manuscripts are provided to peer-reviewers with specific criteria for evaluation for publication recommendations.

Editors & Authors Coaching

Early Winter- Editors select manuscripts based on the peer review process & provide feedback and mentoring to authors to edit or revise & resubmit.

Publication

Mid to Late Winter- The completed issue is provided to authors with a small window for final edits before website publication & dissimentation.

Submission Link
tinyurl.com/ReaderSubmit

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ATTEND WITH US!

KEYNOTE SPEAKER:

Colby Sharp is a co-founder of the online community Nerdy Book Club and its off-shoot conference, Nerd Camp, two popular monthly Twitter chats, #Titletalk, #SharpSchu, and The Yarn, a podcast about bookmaking and the creative process. He's also a fifth grade teacher!

OKLAHOMA LITERACY ASSOCIATION

OKLAHOMA GUEST AUTHOR:

Annie Davis is a Professional Development Coordinator for Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom, and the author of the picture book "Flat" and the chapter book "Flat Aggie and Annie."

2026 CONFERENCE

Literacy For All!

DATE
February 27, 2026

TIME
7:30AM - 3:30PM

Location
USAO Campus - Gary Hall & Ballroom
1727 W. Alabama, Chickasha

REGISTER HERE:
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