

Let's Work Together Teaching Guide

Dear Educator,

Elementary school teachers often organize reading instruction around guided reading groups, and groups read books that meet the instructional needs of members. However, like most of you in middle and high school, I have used one novel, biography, or informational text for an entire class. And, in doing so, I soon realized that up to half of my students couldn't read and understand the assigned text.

While it's true that accommodations such as reading the book out loud or having students listen to an audio book are terrific ways of engaging reluctant and striving readers, students need to improve their reading skills by reading books every day. This leads to an important question you and I should consider: *If students don't read, how can they become better at reading?* The answer is easy: they can't.

Using a core, required text and related texts addresses the reading issue in three ways: (1) Since you can select related texts at diverse reading levels in your classes, students can and are reading them; (2) Selecting inclusive literature becomes a window offering all students' opportunities to learn about diverse cultures and lifestyles, to understand their world, and to become global citizens; (3) Equally important, inclusive literature is a mirror for your culturally diverse students who can see themselves in stories that have relevance to their lives.

You don't have to read all the related books. Instead, you'll use your core text to model how to think about and discuss related books as well as provide open-ended suggestions for students to write about their reading in notebooks. By doing this, students increase reading volume and gain the practice needed to improve their reading skill.

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Using Core Text and Inclusive Literature to Build Students' Reading Skill

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THE CORE TEXT: YOUR COMMON TEACHING TEXT

These suggestions enable you to set the stage for discussing related books.

Have students:

- Read and discuss the core text in chunks of three to four chapters. They can discuss with a partner by simply turning-and-talking.
- Use literary elements to discuss the core text: protagonist and problems, antagonists and how each works against the protagonist, minor characters and how they affect the protagonist and plot, settings, conflicts, point of view, symbolism, themes.
- Identify themes in the core text.
- Identify the personality traits of the protagonist and support with text evidence.
- Show how other characters and events change one to two of the protagonist's personality traits, beliefs, or values.

TIPS FOR USING INCLUSIVE LITERATURE RELATED TO THE CORE TEXT

Students can read one to three related texts. Depending on the length of the unit, everyone will discuss at least one related book with a partner or in a small group as well as complete notebook writing. If your unit spans an entire semester, students can read and discuss two and even three related books. Encourage all students to read additional books that interest them.

You'll need 4-5 copies of each related book in order for students to have choices. You can easily book talk each one by reading part of the first chapter or snippets of the information on the back cover or inside flap.

- Display the related texts at diverse instructional reading levels.
- Give students choice when they select books.
- Introduce related texts when you've completed half of the core text.
- Have students divide related texts into three to four chunks. End each chunk before a new chapter begins. (Do this for younger students.)
- Have students place sticky notes at the end of each chunk. On the sticky note students write: "stop to think".
- Set a deadline date for each chunk with students' input.
- Have students read their core books at school if your literacy block has enough time. Otherwise, they can read at home. This opens the chance for students forgetting to bring the related book to class after completing each chunk. To prevent this, on the chalkboard note reminders of the date books need to come to school and periodically call students' attention to the date.

SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDENTS TO DISCUSS THEIR RELATED BOOK

After students complete a chunk, set aside part of a few classes. Have pairs or small groups of three to four students choose two to three prompts to discuss:

- Select two themes you identified in the core book and show how each one connects to your related book. Provide specific text details to support your choices.
- Identify personality traits of the protagonist in each chunk and give text evidence that shows why you thought of the trait.
- Think about how the protagonist changed after you finished the book. Show two changes and explain why the change occurred by showing how other characters, events, or coping with problems led to each change.
- Reflect on what you learned about a different culture or lifestyle. Discuss these and point out what you and the characters have in common and how your lives differ.

TEN OPEN-ENDED PROMPTS FOR DISCUSSING RELATED BOOKS

Students can select and discuss these prompts that apply to any text.

- Evaluate how a character responds to a specific situation. Describe the situation and the character's reaction.
- Predict what you think will happen next and find evidence from the book that supports your prediction.
- Identify a problem and explain how the character solved it.
- Identify a decision a character made and evaluate whether it was a good or poor decision. Use text evidence to support your positions.
- Choose two antagonistic forces and show how each one worked against the protagonist.
- Show how another character or event changed the main character and explain the change you observed.
- Identify two characters who like each other and have a good relationship or two who don't get along. Use text evidence to explain the causes for the positive or negative relationship.
- List four to five significant events in the book in sequence or the order in which they happened. Explain why each event was significant. To do this you can link the event to a character's decision, to a problem, conflict, a solution to a problem, or a setting.
- Choose a setting you consider important. Use text evidence to explain why it was important to the protagonist, antagonists, a problem, decision, or conflict.
- Identify two big problems the protagonist solved. For each one, explain the actions the protagonist took and the outcome—whether the problem was or wasn't solved and why. Use text evidence to support your position.

NOTEBOOK WRITING FOR PRE-K TO GRADE 3

These students use drawing as writing. Model what this looks like by showing how you draw the protagonist and a problem faced or an event that changed the protagonist, etc. Encourage students to write about their drawings. Some will use invented spelling, others a mix of invented and correct spelling. By third grade, many students will write and omit drawing.

TEACHER MODELS NOTEBOOK WRITING FOR GRADES 4 AND UP

Build students' mental model of your expectations by showing them how you complete a notebook entry. Use the core text to think-aloud and make your process visible.

Step 1. Head your notebook page and write the title and author of the core book.

Step 2. Choose a question/prompt you discussed or a literary element and jot notes about it, explaining that it's helpful to think and collect ideas before writing.

Step 3. Cold write in front of students and show how you turn notes into complete sentences.

Step 4. Explain how having the notes made writing the sentences easier.

STUDENTS COMPLETE NOTEBOOK WRITING

In addition to the questions/prompts that follow, ask students what they would like to write about. Tapping into students' ideas can let you know what students found important and compelling about the reading. Moreover, it offers them choice!

- Invite students to select a question/prompt they discussed and complete a notebook entry based on your model.
- Ask students to connect a theme, problem, or conflict in their related book that was similar to one in the core book. Then, ask students to explain and show similarities.
- Invite students to choose one or two of the questions/prompts that follow for notebook writing. Remind them to jot notes before writing.
 - How did this book make you feel? Identify two emotions and explain what in the story caused them.
 - Did you relate to or connect with a character? Explain why.
 - What do you have in common with the protagonist? The protagonist's problems? Relationships? Conflicts? Be specific and explain using details from the core and/or related texts.
 - Explain three things you learned about his or her culture that you didn't know before reading the book.

POSSIBLE FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS

Confer

Schedule short conferences with each student and discuss the related and core books. Note that the first question is open-ended, so you can better understand how a student thinks about a book. You'll follow up with more specific queries if necessary. Here are possible questions to ask:

- How did you feel when the book ended? Explain why.
- What part did you enjoy most? Summarize the part and explain why you enjoyed it.
- Did this book change your thinking? Explain in what way.
- What did you learn about the protagonist's family and/or friends?
- How is the protagonist's life different from yours? The same as yours? Give specific examples.

Notebook Writing

- Ask students to place a sticky note on a notebook entry they want you to read. Then choose an entry at random to read.
- Read both and, on a sticky note, jot the strengths and progress that you observed. Then, set priorities and ask students one or two questions about areas they need to review and refine.
- Invite students to set a goal in their notebooks for new entries.

Students' Self-Evaluation

Have students review several notebook entries and respond to these questions in their notebooks:

- Are my entries more detailed? Give an example.
- Do I include text evidence to support my thoughts? Give an example.
- Do I jot notes before writing? Why does this help?
- Am I writing more to show my thinking? Give an example.

Teacher's Observations and Notes

Jot important behaviors and actions you noticed that informed your teaching as well as reminders to yourself of any adjustments you wish to make.

TEACHER'S NOTES:

This image shows a full page of a document template designed for handwritten notes or journaling. It features a series of evenly spaced, light gray horizontal lines across the entire width of the page. The background is a solid off-white color. There are no margins, headers, footers, or other markings present on the page.