

## **Research-Based Curriculum**

# ***Teacher Created Materials Leveled Texts***

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# Overview of Best Practices

The goal for every teacher should be to have academically successful readers who will also take pleasure in reading and learning for life. “It is likely that students who are capable of understanding a wide range of texts choose to read independently for their own enjoyment” (Guthrie and Wigfield 2000). The proficient reader, either consciously or instinctively, engages in active thinking strategies throughout the reading process in order to gain comprehension. To help students become proficient readers, today’s effective teacher must have a variety of teaching strategies, exceptional resources, and quality reading materials readily available.

Access to a large and varied collection of texts allows teachers to be precise and flexible when selecting texts. Artful teachers purposefully choose texts based on one or more of the text traits listed below.

Text Traits	
genre	vocabulary/word choice
text type	author style
text features	content
text structure	reading level

Digital texts can be used to create robust text collections. Without concern for space or printing costs, huge volumes of texts can be curated. Additionally, digital features and tools can help teachers and students navigate a digital text collection to search for texts that fit a specific interest, instructional need, or reading goal.

*Teacher Created Materials Leveled Texts* brings over 1,000 engaging, complex texts to the classroom in the most flexible way possible. The accompanying index lists all the texts and can be sorted by reading level, genre, or content area to support text selection.

## Gradual Release of Responsibility

Research shows that direct instruction of comprehension strategies improves understanding of text, especially when students are taught and given practice in actually using the strategies themselves (Pressley 2001). Students need ample opportunities to practice skills and strategies while reading. “Engaged reading is strategic and conceptual as well as motivated and intentional” (Guthrie and Wigfield 2000). Students need the chance to work toward independence and confidence in their

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reading capabilities. This process is referred to as The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Pearson and Gallagher 1983). Teachers begin by giving direct instruction for a certain reading strategy. They model the strategy and then provide multiple opportunities for students to practice using the strategy. The students are offered guidance and then transition to the independent practice of the strategy while reading in a new situation.

## Active Reading

Students may think of reading as a passive activity, especially if they struggle with gaining meaning from reading text. However, research points to reading as an active process. Good readers are very active when they read (Pressley 2001). They often instinctively engage in active thinking strategies during reading to gain comprehension. Experts agree that students benefit from explicit comprehension instruction using the “good reader strategies” (Duke 2005; Duke and Pearson 2002).

Reading short texts with students and applying the strategies good readers use is an effective method for teaching comprehension strategies. The text should be a good fit for the strategy and provide students with multiple opportunities to practice the strategy. As students explore reading, the following strategies arm them with the tools necessary for unlocking challenging texts, thinking critically, and discussing their understandings with others.

During shared and guided reading, the teacher first models the use of the strategy, then students practice together in teams or pairs guided by the teacher, and finally the students work independently. Later, the shared text is referred to when students encounter the strategy in other reading experiences. Shared texts help students internalize the use of the comprehension strategies. The goal is for students to transfer use of the strategies to their own reading.

*Teacher Created Materials Leveled Texts* includes model lessons and lesson templates that build routines around the following comprehension strategies:

- establish purpose for reading
- generate questions
- make/confirm predictions
- create mental images
- make connections
- make inferences
- evaluate details
- synthesize information
- monitor comprehension

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## Close-Reading Strategies

Douglas Fisher has defined *close reading* as follows: “It’s a careful and purposeful rereading of a text. It’s an encounter with the text where students really focus on what the author has to say, what the author’s purpose was, what the words mean, and what the structure of the text tells us” (2012, interview). He also points out how these focuses align with what research tells us about teaching reading. However, reading skills are not to be taught in isolation but rather in the context of texts being used in a unit of study (Fisher n.d.). Fisher goes on to say, “In a close reading, we... give [students]... text-dependent questions that require that they go back into the text to look for answers. ...Text-dependent questions require students to read carefully and produce evidence in their verbal and written responses.”

## Supporting a Balanced Literacy Approach

Since the term *balanced literacy* was coined over 20 years ago by the California Department of Education, educators have been working to implement this comprehensive approach to language arts instruction. Effective instruction in reading and writing brings together skill-based approaches in phonics and word study as well as meaning-based approaches, incorporating authentic tasks in language. With this knowledge, teachers employing the balanced literacy framework have seen significant growth in student achievement (Frey et al. 2005). The balanced literacy framework consists of the following key elements:

- Phonics/Word Study
- Read Aloud/Modeled Reading
- Shared Reading
- Guided Reading
- Independent Reading
- Shared Writing
- Interactive Writing
- Writing Workshop
- Independent Writing

In her book *Creating Strategic Readers: Techniques for Supporting Rigorous Literacy Instruction*, Valerie Ellery offers educators research-based techniques to support the implementation of comprehensive literacy instruction. Curriculum, assessment, and instruction (CAI) are the foundation for comprehensive literacy (Ellery 2014). This resource is included with the *Teacher Created Materials Bookroom Grade-Level Collection*, and educators are encouraged to reference it for support in implementing a balanced literacy framework.

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*Teacher Created Materials Leveled Texts* can be used in different forms to support a range of reading instruction formats including a Balanced Literacy approach.

**Read Aloud:** Project a text for whole-group instruction.

**Shared Reading:** Project a text on a screen with a small group of students.

**Guided Reading:** Distribute a text to a small group of student devices.

**Close Reading:** Print and distribute a text for annotating.

**Paired Reading:** Distribute different texts to student devices based on the needs of each student pair.

**Independent Reading:** Distribute a selection of texts to each student device based on student interest and instructional needs.

**Writing Instruction:** Project a mentor text to analyze text features and author choices.

## Benefits of Using Short Texts

Short texts add value to any classroom library. They support student motivation, wide reading, and multiple reads. Short texts offer flexibility because they require less commitment in terms of time and prolonged engagement compared to traditional books or anthologies. Teachers and students can nimbly move across genres and topics while applying consistent instructional routines.

## Student Engagement

Short texts are motivating to students who are intimidated by the demands of reading. They are seen as a short sprint instead of a laborious marathon. Teachers can prompt students to fully engage their cognitive resources for a short period of time with the satisfaction of reading the full beginning, middle, and end of a text. Short texts are also ideal for practicing key reading skills multiple times to achieve mastery. As topics change, students get a fresh reading experience even as they practice the same skill again and again. Alternatively, a group of students can practice the same reading skill using different short texts simultaneously. This allows the teacher to achieve an instructional goal and students to enjoy texts related to their interests. Imagine practicing the skill of generating questions. One student may generate questions while reading a text about sharks while another generates questions while reading a text about the history of soccer.

The passages in *Teacher Created Materials Leveled Texts* span a wide range of topics, reading levels, genres, and text structures. This empowers teachers to choose texts for each student or group of students according to instructional need or student interest.

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## Wide Reading

There are many benefits to wide reading, including an increase in vocabulary development. Reading widely also increases listening comprehension and contributes to increased reading comprehension. It can be done through independent reading or through teacher read-alouds. Short texts allow readers to have short, focused experiences with many different texts.

Part of reading widely is the exposure to a wide range of genres and types of texts. Each type of text introduces students to specific text features, styles, and purposes that strengthen different reading muscles.

**Informational Texts:** Students acquire new vocabulary and content-area information that explains the world and how it works.

**Narrative Fiction Texts:** Students engage with literary elements, which include characters, settings, problems, and resolutions.

**Persuasive/Argumentative Texts:** Students learn to be critical readers by evaluating evidence and asking questions.

**Poetry:** Students attend to word choice, rhythm, and the aesthetic impact of language.

**Technical Texts:** Students become nimble, real-world readers who interact with different formats and features.

**Content Area Texts:** Students apply literacy skills to math, science, and social studies content.

## Multiple Reads

Marilyn Jager Adams (2009) writes, “To grow, our students must read lots, and more specifically they must read lots of ‘complex’ texts—texts that offer them new language, new knowledge, and new modes of thought” (182). Students must reread the same texts to focus on the different components that make it complex. Fisher and Frey’s (2012a; 2012b) body of research discusses the fact that to comprehend complex texts, students must read the same text multiple times with multiple purposes. Their research suggests that those purposes include reading for meaning, structure, language, and knowledge. Within these four purposes, teachers scaffold each of the multiple readings through questioning, collaboration, discussion, and writing. When discussing meaning, teachers must assess what the theme or main idea of the text is, whether there are multiple meanings of words or concepts within the reading, and whether the overall text will be understandable to the reader. This is also the time where the author’s purpose is included in discussions.

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The complexity of structure depends on the genre, organization, and features of the text. This could come in the form of formatting issues, such as word placement on the page, graphics and captions, dialogue, or bulleted and bolded information. Vocabulary and language used in texts sometimes requires rereading to understand. Speech patterns, dialect, sentence structure, syntax, the use of figurative language, and academic vocabulary sometimes confuse the reader and must be addressed before another read is attempted. Comprehension research for teachers by Keene and Zimmermann (1997) and Harvey and Goudvis (2007) also addresses the fourth purpose of multiple reads: building schema and background knowledge for understanding. If readers do not have the cultural knowledge or background experiences for the text being read, they may need multiple reads. When rereading texts and using close-reading strategies, a student comes to a deeper understanding of the meaning of what he or she has read, whether through individual persistence or scaffolding done by a peer or teacher.

The brevity of the passages in *Teacher Created Materials Leveled Texts* provides students the opportunity to read the same text multiple times for multiple purposes.

## Theory into Practice

*Teacher Created Materials Leveled Texts* is a flexible digital product that supports reading instruction across multiple formats. It brings short, carefully-curated texts to the classroom for instruction, practice, or test preparation. As literacy instruction becomes increasing dynamic and responsive to student needs, digital text collections will play an important part.

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