

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**

**Summer Institute  
on the  
Teaching of Reading**



**Grade 1  
Reading Curriculum  
Selections  
Summer 2016**



Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017  
Building Good Reading Habits

## A User's Guide for *Building Good Reading Habits*

September/October

Benchmark Reading Level: D/E

### Introduction

*Building Good Reading Habits* is a tried-and-true unit that has launched the first grade reading workshop for years. However, you won't want to rely on muscle memory to teach this unit! While the drive of this unit remains the same, a lot of thoughtful and important changes have been made. This write up will help you zero in on many of these revisions so you can start your year on the strongest possible foot.

Launching the year is always a challenge because you are balancing the work you need to do to help foster a welcoming classroom community as students get to know one another, along with teaching important routines and expectations for the start of a new school year. Remember, it may be the start of a new school year, but your kids will already know a lot about readers and about reading workshop. This unit positions students as readers who already have good habits—things they do without needing any reminders—and your first string of lessons reminds them of many of these reading habits, holding them accountable for transferring all they have learned from kindergarten.

### Prerequisites/What to Do If Students Aren't Quite Ready to Start This Unit

Don't worry if you have students who did not participate in a reading workshop last year! This unit won't marginalize them, since you'll position your teaching as habits students already have, while still offering explicit instruction to review key strategies. However, if most of your students are brand new to reading workshop, you may benefit from thinking about the management structures you'll want to establish from day one. You can read Chapter 8, pages 89-102 of the Guide book to learn more tips for managing the workshop that you'll fold into your teaching across this first unit. For example, at the start of the very first minilesson, you may choose to explain how each day you'll gather in the meeting area for a lesson before moving quickly and quietly to a work spot to read independently. You may also make a big deal about how well a group of children move seamlessly to their tables to begin reading, or how a student browses quickly through a shared table basket before choose a book to read first, or how two tablemates position their chairs back to back to help themselves stay focused on their own reading before partner time. Avoid the tendency to make each of these its own drawn-out minilesson, and instead tuck these points into each day's workshop, celebrating approximations and positive behaviors. Kids will take the hint! Meanwhile, your minilessons will steer the bigger work of the unit, giving the whole of your class more ambitious goals to strive toward.

At the start of a new year, it's tempting to give into pressures to assess every child immediately. Of course, matching children to just-right reading levels will be critical, but consider the advantages of devoting your time across the first few days to keeping your finger on the pulse of your room, getting to know your children's interests as readers, and ensuring expectations are clear around

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017  
Building Good Reading Habits**

volume and stamina to iron out any issues around management. Use any data you have from last year to make your reading assessments more efficient, starting with the child's independent level at the end of kindergarten to measure any gains (or losses). Make plans to have students matched to a just-right reading level and an ability-based partner by the end of the second bend.

### Materials/Getting Ready

Each teacher will need his or her own units of study books unless your school is following a different curriculum, in which case this User's Guide won't be helpful to you. The essential materials that you need for this unit are described in detail in the Getting Ready section of the unit's Orientation on pages xii through xv.

Again, using last year's data when possible, you may want to put baskets of books together that offer a range of levels, such as a few fiction and nonfiction books from levels C through E for readers at benchmark, with a separate basket of books at levels E through G for readers above benchmark, and another for readers below benchmark that may also include a few emergent storybooks that will be familiar to students, such as *The Carrot Seed* or *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. Then, temporarily seat children at tables by level so they can share from the table basket until they have all been matched to a current just-right level and supplied with a book baggie to shop for a personal set of leveled books.

You'll also want to prepare reading mats for each student. This tool is especially helpful for boosting reading volume and stamina and serves as a first grader's daily reading log. Read more about this tool on page 21 in Session 3 of the unit.

### Insights Gleaned From Other Teachers Who Have Taught This Unit/Special Concerns

Before you go any further, you need to think about pacing for the first reading and writing unit. We have too often seen teachers taking two months (or longer, *EEK!*) with these two units—and that will ignite a chain reaction for the rest of the year.

The beginning of the year often gets bogged down with procedures and establishing systems and routines. Don't put off the launch of this first unit! Get started right away, tucking most of the work you do establishing expectations into the actual unit—and you'll find that a lot of it is already there! Turn to Chapter 6 of the Guide book for tips on assessing students so that you avoid spending weeks doing this or waiting until the whole class has been assessed to launch.

Know that the minilessons in all the unit of study books are written to be no more than ten minutes in length, and each session is one day. If you find that your lessons are lasting longer than ten minutes, you may choose to cut some of the stories or examples in the connections that can take up more time (although are also often engaging to kids). The mid-workshop teaching is sometimes unnecessary—you'll sometimes see that this teaching provides opportunities to repeat and extend

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017**  
**Building Good Reading Habits**

work from the minilesson. If you can't always tuck them into the workshop, you may choose to skip them rather than breaking the sessions into two days.

You might be wondering if you're "allowed" to do guided reading during reading workshop. The answer is a resounding yes! But you probably won't be doing guided reading every day, or with every reader. Instead, you'll use guided reading as one method of small group instruction to help move readers up levels. You might be wondering when to start guided reading. We suggest starting guided reading during independent reading time once you have matched your readers to just-right levels, as early as Bend 2! In Session 9, on page 48, you'll find guidance on how to structure your guided reading lessons. Read more about guided reading and other kinds of small group instruction on pages 32, 42, and 48 in *Building Good Reading Habits*, as well as in Chapter 9 of the Guide book on pages 103 to 112.

In Kindergarten, readers are taught to mark pages to share with their partner with a Post-it. Some first grade teachers have found this helpful for readers who need to stop and think about what they are reading. You may want to teach readers to stop and mark places with a Post-it, and perhaps jotting a quick word or sketching a symbol as they reread their books. Watch out for students who get preoccupied with using Post-its when they should be devoting their time to the work of reading, not writing.

Many teachers have had questions about when to do the shared reading and read aloud sessions. They are meant to be taught alongside the unit, typically inside of the first week of the unit, at a separate time of day than your reading workshop. Don't let those plans get lost at the back of the book, and don't wait until the end of the unit to teach them! Further, these sections have been written so that they are replicable and you can use them to plan more shared reading and read alouds with other books.

## Bend 1

The gist of this bend is that you teach kids that readers have habits before, during, and after they read. You'll remind kids to preview each new book, studying the cover and a few of the pages before reading, as a way to establish some sense of meaning before working to read the words. You'll also encourage kids to linger with the book when they're done, rereading or retelling before moving on. Meanwhile, children will be working to solve hard words and understand their books. Your conferring work will coach readers to draw on all they know to problem solve. In the next bend, you'll review and build on children's print strategies, so avoid bogging down your teaching with these reminders now. The larger goal across this first bend is to encourage kids to draw on all they already know—the habits they already have as readers—and to work with greater independence right from the start, reading more and more each day.

Expect that readers are moving quickly from one book to the next. A reader at benchmark (D/E) will spend about 2-3 minutes reading one leveled book. Your goal will be to stretch readers' stamina toward 30 minutes, including time reading with partners. This will require that children have access to a lot of books! Be sure table baskets are filled with enough books to sustain longer stretches of reading, and rereading. Once kids are reading from individual baggies, you'll want to allow children to shop for as many as 10 leveled books to support volume and stamina.

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017**  
**Building Good Reading Habits**

To teach bend one of this unit, you will want to rely not just on *Building Good Reading Habits* but also on the *Guide to the Reading Workshop* and especially to Chapter 8, which overviews ways teachers have found to manage workshops. We suggest you think about the management of each part of the workshop: minilessons, independent work time, conferring and small group work, mid-workshop interruptions, partner time, and the teaching share. It will be important to pay extra attention and time to any management needs at the start of the year, in order to pave the way for a successful year.

Don't wait to start partnerships! There are countless advantages to linking kids into long-lasting partnerships, but at the very least, partnerships can double the amount of time kids read. They will come to you knowing lots of ways to work with a partner from Kindergarten, so hold them accountable! You might start by having a quick conversation, in which you celebrate everything your students already know about working with reading partners. You can read about partnerships in the Guide book on page 93.

In response to what we know about first graders' stamina at the start of the year, the transition to partner time is meant to happen halfway through the workshop, shifting children from reading alone to reading with a buddy, and in turn keeping their eyes on print for longer stretches of time. Keep your eye on the room, and be sure to transition your kids just before the wiggles and squirminess take over. Likewise, end the workshop and bring the class back to the meeting area for the teaching share when partners' stamina is tapped.

At the start of the year, you'll link children together informally—putting table neighbors together, or establishing social pairs, until you have every child matched to an independent reading level and can match kids who are reading at the same (or close to the same) reading level. This way, readers can both access the same books when they work together during partner time. Teachers often partner children with different students for writing workshop.

## Bend II

The second bend, like every second bend across the reading books, shifts to a focus on foundational skills, and in this instance, decoding strategies. You'll help kids tackle hard words in their books, teaching them the habits readers have when they get stuck. By taking a formal shift to focus on the work readers do to solve words, across the next two weeks, you'll help kids more easily follow the logic of the unit, so the larger theme—readers have habits—isn't lost in a laundry list of reminders, or a random sequence of teaching points. It's so easy for our teaching not to stick when we throw one strategy after another at kids. Instead, the bigger work in this first unit is to help kids hold onto a few lasting principles: that readers do something before, during, and after they read, that they try something when they get stuck on hard words, and that partners can help each other. The bullets that come under these boxes will come. Your goal now is to make the boxes!

The print strategies across this bend encourage kids to search and cross-check all three sources of information. First, you'll remind readers to think about the story and use the picture to search meaning. The "sneak peek" work students learned to do to preview their books before they read supports meaning-making so that readers can have a sense of the whole text when solving hard words. Then, you'll teach a string of lessons that encourage readers to be persistent and flexible

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017**  
**Building Good Reading Habits**

word-solvers, searching visual information across the whole word, including being flexible with vowel sounds. This is some of the big work readers at levels D and E are working to do as they tackle more complex texts. You may want to think about the levels in your class and study several books at these levels. What kinds of words do you see? What word study work seems pertinent? This light research can help you make decisions about small group word study lessons you'll want to lead with various students. For example, you might consider pulling a group of readers to do some work with long and short vowels, perhaps sorting a few words (and pictures) by listening to the vowel sounds they hear. You might choose to do a small group to review and build students' high-frequency word vocabulary. Using a small copy of the class word wall and dry-erase materials, you can work with children to practice writing and reading several sight words, before locating them in their own books.

If you have students who are reading far below benchmark (D/E), make it your goal to get them matched to just-right books and reading from individual book baggies as soon as possible. You'll want to plan a series of small groups to move them out of these emergent levels as soon as possible. You might choose to administer the Concepts About Print assessment to check that they have these basic concepts, such as directionality, the distinction between a letter and a word, and 1:1 correspondence. If these fundamentals are weak, you may want to consult Unit 2: *Super Powers* from the Kindergarten reading series. You'll find lessons you can teach in small groups or conferences to support readers' early concepts. You might specifically study Sessions 2, 3, and 4 to learn ways to help readers match spoken words to the words on the page.

Your aim should be to move these readers into Level C books immediately, offering book introductions and support through guided or shared reading. Consider the difficulty level of the C books you introduce, since there is quite a significant range at this level. Easier C will still feature a heavily patterned structure and picture support. Harder C books are written as stories, often featuring dialogue and a group of characters.

You'll probably lead a series of strategy lessons and shared reading lessons to coach kids to cross-check the picture (and story) with the first letter or group of letters (e.g. blends, digraphs) to read with accuracy. You can consult Unit 3: *Bigger Books Bigger Reading Muscles* to learn more about the work you can do to support readers with the print strategies necessary to tackle these new challenges. Specifically, you might want to read Sessions 9, 10, 13, 14 and 15. Borrow these books from Kindergarten teachers now! They won't need them at the start of the year.

### Bend III

The final bend focuses on the habits partners have for working together, echoing the habits readers have before, during, and after they read. After all, partner time is an extension of the work you're guiding children to do on their own. By this bend, you'll want to have given each student a level-matched partner. Expect these partners to stay together for a while, and in some cases all year! By establishing long-term partnerships, you'll give children a buddy with whom they'll develop a rapport, which can help management greatly! Of course, you may find that your initial pairings don't all work perfectly, and so you'll switch partners up as needed—but do so sooner than later, so you can concentrate on strengthening the repertoire of ways partners can work together, rather than fixing behavioral issues.

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017  
Building Good Reading Habits**

The conferring and small group work you do in this final bend will help you make plans for goals and next steps you'll carry on into the next unit. After all, when one unit ends, the work continues on, giving kids lots more time and ways to practice. (More reason to end the unit and launch the next before another week goes by!) Consider readers' stamina and volume now, as compared to the first day of the unit and celebrate even the smallest degrees of progress. Think about readers who may be ready to move up a level (yes, already!) and check back in with an informal running record to push them up the ladder. Think about the readers who seem stuck and make plans to meet with them in a series of small groups, including guided reading, strategy groups and small group word study lessons. In the next unit, *Word Detectives*, you'll give your class a ton of support with reading process to boost the work early readers need to do to monitor, problem-solve and check their reading, as well as build a larger bank of high frequency words.

The habits you've helped establish in this first unit are meant to be carried with readers all year long (and forever!) Don't skim on the celebration at the end of this unit. Make a big deal about the habits that readers pride themselves on having. Post them on the wall, make posters, or design bookmarks! Whatever you decide to do, the point is, you'll want children to see themselves as the kinds of readers who have these good habits, and with that, use them always.

Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017  
Word Detectives

## A User's Guide for *Word Detectives*

October/November  
Benchmark Reading Level: F/G

### Introduction

In October, your class will begin a new unit, *Word Detectives*, devoted to strengthening children's decoding skills and adding to readers' high frequency word banks. During this foundational unit, as the bulk of your class moves into reading books at levels E, F, G, with new and challenging words at the turn of every page, you'll support children in solving hard words in a way that feels playful and exciting! You'll turn to your students and say, "Let's play Word Detectives!"

First graders are moving into reading texts with increased complexity and they need to face these challenges with determination and grit. *Word Detectives* sets out to motivate kids to take on this hard work by engaging them through a series of word detective "missions," partner games, and the use of special tools. While this is a unit about reading process, you won't want to resort back to an extensive list of print strategies, or pull out a poster featuring Stretchy Snake and Chunky Monkey. Instead, we hope you'll dive right into the world of this unit, playing word detectives alongside your growing readers, and moving through this sequence of carefully laid-out teaching points.

### Prerequisites/What to Do If Students Aren't Quite Ready to Start This Unit

Designed for classrooms where a large number of the children are moving into reading levels E, F, and G, this unit is all about supporting your children's word-solving skills. You will likely want to teach the unit fairly early in your first grade year after setting up the routines and structures laid out in Unit 1, *Building Good Reading Habits*. This book will be helpful if you have many students that would benefit from additional instruction in foundational reading skills such as learning to monitor their reading; developing efficient word-solving skills that consistently use meaning, structure, and visual information; expanding their knowledge of phonics and its application in context; and strengthening fluency. And frankly, we trust this is true for nearly all first graders.

Readers will then be well prepared to move on to reading nonfiction texts in the next unit, *Learning About the World*. They will have the opportunity to once again be in a unit focused on the reading process later in the year, during *Readers Have Big Jobs to Do*, this time returning to foundational reading skills at a transitional stage, when most of them will be reading books at levels H, I and J.

Considering this is a unit focused on word solving, running records will be one of the best methods of assessment to help you understand your readers' strengths and needs when it comes to doing this work. Study recent data carefully, paying attention to what students do when they encounter trouble in their reading. As you analyze their running records, you'll want to keep several questions in mind, including:

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017**  
**Word Detectives**

- Do they notice when something is wrong in their reading and stop to fix the problem?
- What are they doing (and not doing) when they encounter trouble?
- Are there signs that they are self-monitoring (rereading, pausing, searching the page for clues)?
- Do they make attempts?
- Do they check their attempts?
- What sources of information do they use?
- Do they use meaning, structure, and visual information equally, or do they lean more heavily on one information source?
- Are they able to break words into parts, using what they know about letter combinations and word parts?
- Do they recognize known words with automaticity in continuous text?
- Do they understand what they have read?

As you study the data, you will be looking for patterns in individual children's reading, as well as across your whole class. This will help you set up some initial small groups, as well as shape the teaching you will do in the unit.

If you haven't done so already, you may want to check to see which high-frequency words most of your students know (and which they still need to learn). This will let you know what words you can work on during word study and how students are building more automaticity in reading words in a snap.

### Materials/Getting Ready

By now, your students will all have individual book baggies and will shop weekly for as many as 10 just-right books from your classroom library. Check that children are shopping appropriately and that your leveled library bins are well-organized and accurate. It's easy for books to get mixed across bins when children swap out their titles and for children to quickly grab new selections without checking that they feel just-right. You'll want to include a basket for "lost books" so that children have a place to put books they don't know where to return. The start of each new unit is also an opportune time to take inventory of leveled baskets that are no longer needed, as well as baskets that you'll want introduced to your library as kids enter new levels.

In this unit you will continue to use tools that you set up in *Building Good Reading Habits*, such as reading mats, but you'll also add a few other items to support new learning. After inspiring your children to become word detectives, you'll give them each a "Word Detective kit," which is a Kraft envelope, labeled "Top Secret," to hold a few tools to remind students to look closely at words, including a hand lens (perhaps borrowed from science supplies) and finger flashlights (either ordered online or made more simply from cardstock and popsicle sticks).

You'll launch the unit with a knock at the door and a mysterious envelope! Play this up! Ask a neighboring teacher or aide to leave the delivery waiting in the hallway with three loud, distinct raps at the door, before quickly disappearing! You might even send a student to go investigate and retrieve the envelope. Imagine the excitement that will ensue! The envelope will include a special letter from the Super Secret Detective Agency, and five special missions, all described across the

Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017  
Word Detectives

first bend and included on the Online Resources. Don't underestimate the power of engagement. So much of the success of this unit relies on how you draw kids in from day one. Read the letter with bated breath, inviting children to hang on every word.

## Bend I

You will find lots of ideas for ways to support struggling readers in the conferring and small-group sections throughout this unit and across this series. Don't be afraid to pull support from other units of study. For example, if you have a group of readers still reading in patterned texts, you can find useful suggestions by looking at some Kindergarten units, most notably *We Are Super Readers* (designed for readers in levels A and B), and *Bigger Books, Bigger Reading Muscles* (designed to move readers out of patterned texts and into levels C and D). You can also refer to the chapter on differentiation in *A Guide to the Reading Workshop*.

If you have a group of readers who are reading well-above benchmark (D/E) and consistently solve words with efficiency and accuracy, then your priorities will shift when planning small group instruction for these students. Perhaps, you'll work with these students on monitoring that they understand their reading, stopping to work on unfamiliar vocabulary, figurative language, or build meaning when reading longer stretches of text. Just as you'll work to remind readers to self-monitor for accuracy when solving words, you'll want to coach readers to monitor for meaning, making sure they always understand what they are reading.

The focus of this first bend is on having students monitor their reading by locating difficult words, using what they know to try solving those words, and then checking their attempts before either trying again or moving on. Don't rush this critical first step: monitoring. So often, we jump to do the monitoring work for kids, saying, "Wait! Check that" or "Go back. Fix this word." Then, the teaching centers around the strategies readers can use to solve the problem. The work kids need to do, instead, has to start with noticing there's a problem to solve, in the first place.

You might play a game with readers, enticing them to notice the problem before you do. You might tally "points" whenever a child stops to work on a hard word rather than mumble past it, or whenever **she** **goes** back to reread and make another attempt at a word. When you notice the problem before the child (with reasonable wait time, of course), you get the point! This game can motivate readers to rack up more points than the teacher, or their reading buddy, and begin to self-monitor regularly. Similarly, you might use a familiar checklist of monitoring questions: *Does that make sense? Does that sound right? Does that look right?* to coach kids to cross-check as they read hard words to independently notice their own miscues. Then, your work with readers can shift to the next step of solving those problems—reviewing and teaching effective print strategies.

## Bend II

In the second bend, you continue the playful theme by letting your students know that they are now ready to become full-fledged word detectives and that this requires them to draw on their previous knowledge. The focus of this bend is on high-frequency words. You'll teach your children how to

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Reading User’s Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017**  
**Word Detectives**

increase their bank of high-frequency words—and also to use the words they know to help solve unknown words.

Take a moment to reflect on your classroom word wall.

- Is it in a place that kids can easily access when reading and writing independently?
- Is it organized alphabetically?
- Does it feature words that readers will encounter again and again in their books?
- Does it include words that writers are frequently spelling incorrectly?
- Are you adding 3-5 words to the word wall every week?

You’ll want to ensure that your word wall is a place not for vocabulary or concept words, but for sight words—words that readers and writers will use often. Keep words that pertain to science curriculum, or holidays, or character traits in another place. You’ll also want to interact with this word wall frequently. It shouldn’t be a bulletin board of words that starts and ends the year without any change. Your word wall should be empty on the first day of school and grow with your readers and writers. Further, the words you add across the year should be introduced and taught explicitly. We return to the work of Patricia Cunningham to teach sight words. You can read Session 9 of the unit to learn more about how to teach children new words, before adding them to your word wall.

You’ll also help readers collect new sight words from their books, teaching themselves recurring words to add to their own personal “word file” before teaching these words to a partner. The work across this bend helps readers recognize words with greater automaticity, and then use known words to identify parts and spelling patterns in new and unknown words, to decode with more efficiency. As children move into higher levels of text complexity, you’ll want to coach them to look left to right across words to use known parts rather than solving words letter by letter. A larger bank of sight words will help children devote their energy to the challenging words on the page, and help them more strategically solve those words.

### Bend III

Finally, in the third bend you will focus on ways to use visual information effectively. You’ll teach your readers that word detectives look closely at words. You will show children how to apply their phonics knowledge to solve words in continuous text.

Consider your word study curriculum and the principles you are studying outside of the reading workshop. The bulk of your class will be moving into texts that feature blends and digraphs, common inflectional endings, syllable breaks, vowel combinations, common spelling patterns, contractions, and compound words. You’ll want to think about opportunities to teach these features both inside and outside reading workshop, working with words in isolation and in context.

Chapter 11 of the Guide talks more about word study opportunities you’ll want to tap into during small groups and conferences. You might also consider ways to use interactive writing to highlight reading and writing connections, using known words and features to spell words. The share of Session 6 and 7 of the unit offer examples of how this can go.

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017**  
**Word Detectives**

We've learned from Marie Clay (2005) that one of the most effective ways to help children understand how to use visual information is to have them first practice a strategy on a word that is well known. For example, when teaching a child that a word can be broken into parts, you might make take a familiar "snap word" from your word wall such as *play*, and show children that you can separate the /pl/ from the /ay/ and then put the parts back together. You could then channel children to try out this same strategy on a word that is new to them.

To celebrate the hard work readers have done throughout this unit, you'll culminate with a final mission. Kids will construct a secret message left by the "detective agency," which will read: "A surprise is waiting for you outside the classroom door." You'll want to decide what will be waiting for your own special group of word detectives. No matter what you choose, you'll want to encourage children to carry their extra sharp detective skills with them into the next unit and all year long.

While most of your strategy charts will come down to make room for the work that anchors the upcoming unit, your word-solving charts will give kids a lot of mileage. Consider the benefit of keeping these on display during reading workshop. If you can't hang them up in your classroom, perhaps you'll make table-top versions for students to access whenever they read independently.

The foundational focus of Bend 2 in the next unit, *Learning about the World*, will review these strategies and remind readers to use them to solve hard words when they read nonfiction, too!

### Insights Gleaned From Other Teachers Who Have Taught This Unit/Special Concerns

A word-solving unit named Word Detectives has been around for many years, so it's easy to assume that this is the same set of teaching points you've previously taught. And of course, it would be much faster to pull out those old plans, or even to just fall back on your favorite ways of teaching words and decoding strategies. We strongly urge you to take the time to read this newly, revamped unit since so much has changed.

One of the biggest changes is the added layer of play. We worked hard to engage readers (and teachers!) by making the work of decoding words feel fresh and exciting. This work can often feel very dry and repetitive, but it's critically important to shaping children into proficient readers. Therefore, the challenge is to make this foundational work match the excitement children feel when reading about amusing characters or learning about fascinating nonfiction topics. We hope you'll think this unit does just that!

You'll also notice that from the very start of the unit, the theme is threaded across each and every session. It's not enough to call a unit "Word Detectives" or to mention the phrase here and there and expect kids to buy in. The teaching you'll do from the first day until the last invites kids to play detective, starting with a series of "training missions," followed by the award of official detective badges and an invitation to start the job. Then the BIG work begins as readers become word collectors, working to solve mystery words in their books. In the final bend, you'll challenge readers

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017  
Word Detectives**

to sniff out unusual words in their books, like contractions and compound words, and to use more complex strategies to decode trickier words.

A foundational unit, like this one, will be particularly important for your readers below benchmark. You'll want to make strategic plans to meet with them frequently across this unit to monitor their reading processing and help them apply strategies to problem-solve. You'll need to monitor these readers closely, taking frequent and quick running records at the start of each small group lesson or conference. Study any patterns and make plans to focus on specific needs. Our inclination is often to try to "fix" everything at once. Children will be far more successful with clear, focused teaching around a particular goal. Teach a strategy explicitly, and look for evidence of this teaching when you follow up with the child, before moving to a new skill. If you taught a child to look carefully at the start of a word and say the first part before thinking about what makes sense, you should see evidence of this. If not, coach the child in doing this work while reading, and look again for evidence of this learning in the coming days. Remember that young children need repeated instruction and many opportunities for practice.

Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017  
Learning About the World

## A User's Guide for *Learning About the World*

November/December  
Benchmark Reading Level: F/G

### Introduction

*Learning About the World* is a very accessible unit for kids reading at *any* level. In this unit, kids will push themselves to “get super smart about nonfiction topics”, learning ways to deepen their comprehension and improve their fluency while reading information books. A unit geared toward reading nonfiction is a great way to engage readers and help build stamina and volume in the first half of the year. Kids who struggle to develop strong reading identities will often latch onto the idea of reading to learn. This unit also supports the reading habits and foundational readings skills readers have been developing across the first two units, *Building Good Reading Habits* and *Word Detectives*.

One of the biggest challenges with this unit can be finding the right books. Primary classrooms often struggle to build a rich library of leveled nonfiction, but you'll want to take the steps necessary in order to provide accessible information texts for your students. Resist the tendency to allow this unit to become one where kids are browsing the pages of high-leveled nonfiction, doing “look-book reading”, rather than the important strategy work kids need to do at their own independent, and instructional, levels.

Meanwhile, your read alouds will expose students to high-interest, more complex nonfiction texts and support them in the thinking and talking work you'll want them to do as independent readers. You'll find a video of an Interactive Read Aloud of *Bugs! Bugs! Bugs!* by Jennifer Dussling in the Resources section of the TCRWP website that will give you a vision of how to do this work with your kids.

### Prerequisites/What To Do If Students Aren't Quite Ready to Start This Unit

It is best if your kids have participated in the launching unit, *Building Good Reading Habits* so that they are familiar with the structures and routines of reading workshop and to have built some stamina before turning to a unit centered around deepening comprehension and conversations about books.

Collect and study running records to consider the next steps you'll take. You will want to notice how students are integrating sources of information to solve words. You can then use this information to sketch out a few possible small groups to help move readers up levels. You can read more about the kind of work you might do in these small group lessons in Sessions 4 and 14 of the unit.

You will also want to research students' fluency as you take running records, or while you listen to kids read during conferences and shared reading. See Session 17 of the unit for ways to support this work.

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017**  
**Learning About the World**

You may also decide to do an informal read aloud assessment to consider the comprehension work students need. As you read aloud a nonfiction text, plan to prompt kids in 2 or 3 places. For example, you might prompt students to explain (or jot) what a section is mostly about. You might also prompt kids to talk about the meaning of a key word. Then, after the read aloud, you might prompt readers to retell. You can find small group ideas to support this work in Sessions 10. Refer to Session 5's Conferring and Small-Group Work section on page 32, for ideas on how to support kids' retelling and recall skills.

## Materials/Getting Ready

It's important to have your demonstration texts for minilessons, shared reading and read aloud books ready to go. *Hang On, Monkey!* By Susan B. Neuman and *I Want to Be a Doctor* by Dan Liebman are referenced across the unit, but these are interchangeable with other nonfiction texts of your choosing.

You might choose to separate your leveled library into fiction shelves and nonfiction shelves. Search your library for the best books you have and run with those. If you model excitement to learn about the topics you currently have, kids are bound to get on board. Kids should be shopping for 10-12 just-right books each week. If you don't have enough nonfiction books at each level, turn to page xiv in the Orientation to the Unit section of the unit for ideas about how to work around a growing nonfiction library.

Regardless of the number of nonfiction leveled books you have in your libraries, kids in this unit will be reading (and rereading) a high volume of books at their just right levels, moving them from one side of their reading mat to the next just like in previous units! Help children transfer prior learning into each new unit, and set goals to outgrow themselves as readers.

*Owls* by Mary Dunn (Level H) is the shared reading text and *Super Storms* by Seymour Simon (Level L) is the read aloud text that you will need for the first week of this unit. Shared Reading and Read aloud sections at the end of the book are meant to be taught alongside the unit. You will want to conduct these sessions in the first week of the unit and not wait until the end of the unit. These sections have been written so that they are replicable. Be sure to use them to plan additional shared reading and read aloud lessons with similar texts across each bend of the unit.

## Bend I

In this bend, you'll teach kids to "squeeze all the knowledge they can out of the books they are reading." You might find, at this point in the year, kids are doing one of two things when they read nonfiction--either flipping through books to locate weird animal snouts and naked butts, or robotically churning through sentences, tackling hard words, without displaying a lot of curiosity about the topic. Your aim will be to help balance the work of solving hard words with helping readers explore (and love) nonfiction to learn a lot.

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017**  
**Learning About the World**

You'll teach kids a few simple strategies for understanding nonfiction, with an emphasis on how much information you can glean from every page, especially the picture! Watch how kids move through their books. You'll want to coach kids to linger on each page, studying the information in photographs and illustrations, as well as reading smaller print, like labels and captions. You'll also want to help kids leverage what they know from the beginning of the year, remembering to take a sneak peek before they read, as well as consider the kinds of things they can do at the END of a book.

Even students who are reading at lower levels will be able to do this comprehension work. Check out the sidebar on page 9, for an example of how even a child reading at level A can access this work. In Session 5, the kids will come back to a focus on fluency and you'll hear lots of whisper-reading as kids work to read more smoothly, with expressive teaching voices. For all your students, your shared reading of *Owls*, and other books you choose, is critically important to give kids lots of guided practice with this work.

Don't neglect to tap into the power of reading partnerships during in this unit. Kids will be most successful in developing these comprehension strategies when they have time to talk about their books with a friend. Watch for partners working together to teach each other the information they are learning, moving their fingers across pictures in their books, opening up to read and talk about particular pages, asking questions, and using keywords to talk about the topic. The share on page 27 gives some tips on how to use a fishbowl (a partnership in the middle of a circle of kids) to help students learn how to do this work better. You might also quickly videotape some of the best partner work you see in your classroom and showing it to kids to give them a crystal clear vision of what great partner talk looks and sounds like.

A final word on the importance of reminding kids to use the tools and charts in the room to promote continued independence: Remember that if you don't teach kids to use the charts, they become wallpaper, losing their power. Even complementary writing charts you may have up from the All About unit will prove helpful. The share in Session 3 highlights this work.

## Bend II

Keep tabs on the pace of the unit as you move from session to session. You should get to the second bend just a week and a half after you start the unit. Bend two will also last about a week and a half. In this bend, you'll build on the strategies learned in the first unit. Since our goal in first grade is to move kids up levels quickly, it is crucial to support readers' word solving process.

The five-day shared reading plan should be used again during the second bend of this unit. By now, you'll have used the plan at the back of the book to prepare a second shared reading lesson with another text. Make sure you are practicing all of these word solving strategies along with fluency and comprehension in an engaging nonfiction text of your own choosing.

Session 10 on learning new vocabulary is especially important. You can tuck this work into shared reading so kids learn HOW to learn new content-specific vocabulary in nonfiction books. The goal is to support students in understanding what the word means. The students will be building context for the word, not just stating a definition. Pay attention to Session 10's share. You'll play a game that

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017**  
**Learning About the World**

kids can play over and over again during partner time. Our instinct, usually, is to explicitly teach kids new vocabulary. However, 90% of language is acquired. In this session, students will be participating in meaningful conversations using the new content-specific words. It is critically important for the kids to infer and learn these new vocabulary words on their own!

If you are noticing kids are writing Post-its that just copy what is in the book or that kids are spending more time writing than reading, teach them to sketch or draw symbols so that they are reading and talking more. Readers should be using Post-its to mark pages they want to reread or talk about with a partner.

A focus on keywords will be important in partnership work so that kids can TALK a lot - just dipping a toe in and we will strengthen this work in Bend III. Take a deep breath if you don't think they've chosen the most important keyword, listen to how they talk about the word. You might be surprised! Don't focus on kids picking the "right" keywords because there are lots of keywords.

The Shares at the end of each bend are super exciting! They keep the energy going and keep the purpose of reading nonfiction books alive—the big idea is kids are LEARNING about topics!

### Bend III

In this bend, your students will continue to strengthen their comprehension skills in nonfiction books and attend to not only what they read but *how* they read. Fluency will be a large focus as kids learn to read with attention toward craft and structure. Session 17 teaches kids to bring the book to life by acting out information. This will help kids synthesize new ideas and learn more about the topic. Include opportunities to act out key details during your read alouds and shared readings across the unit, so by the time you teach this lesson, this isn't brand new work. (Remember to check out the video of *Bugs! Bugs! Bugs!* to see kids doing this work.)

Expect to see partners engaging with their books by acting out information. The more kids can practice reading aloud and getting feedback from their partners to do this work even better, the more teachers you'll have in the room. The share on page 107 gives some great tips for how to coach kids in giving kind and powerful feedback.

Throughout this bend, you'll continue to support kids with all aspects of the reading process. Plan to meet regularly with guided reading groups, coaching readers to orchestrate all they have learned to read with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.

### Insights Gleaned From Other Teachers Who Have Taught This Unit/Special Concerns

In any nonfiction reading unit, there's a common misconception that you have to teach every text feature, naming what it's called and what it does. While you will certainly point them out and talk about common text features, like the table of contents or glossary, or captions, your teaching will center around ways readers can learn more and more from their books. You'll focus mainly on

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017**  
**Learning About the World**

helping students linger on each page to study the pictures closely, adding to the information they learned from the words on the page. Your small groups and conferences, with readers above benchmark, will likely include some strategies for navigating the text features they are more likely to encounter in more complex texts.

One big question is the use of Post-its in first grade. *How many should they use? How often should they use them? How much should they write?* In Kindergarten, students are taught to mark pages they want to share with partner with a blank Post-it. Many first grade teachers continue this work, teaching readers to mark pages with Post-its, and perhaps jotting a quick word or two, or sketching a symbol as they reread their books. For example, students might mark surprising parts with a surprised face shown on page 87. In this unit you will introduce Post-its (if you have not already). Use Post-its to push students' thinking, not fact collecting. You will want to make sure that your students are not spending too much time writing during reading workshop. Having students sketch symbols instead of words on Post-its is a good way to ensure that students' reading time is wisely spent.

Some teachers teach kids to jot key words and meanings on Post-its. See examples on pages 64, 71 and 72 of the unit. You might teach kids to do this kind of work on index cards or on word rings. Students will mark interesting things to share (using the charts as a guide) as they plan read alouds. Session 6 of the unit also teaches students to use Post-its to record attainable goals. Expect that kids will make approximations when using Post-its as a reading tool. Celebrate positive behaviors and teach into needs as they arise, using mid-workshop teaching, table conferences, and shares to reinforce your expectations.

This is not a reading club unit. Kids will be reading just right books on a variety of topics. Use this unit to explore the genre and establish strong partnerships before entering a club-based nonfiction unit. You'll probably choose to do a second nonfiction reading unit later in the year, namely, *Reading Nonfiction Cover to Cover*, found in the *If...Then... Curriculum* book. In this later unit, kids will read across a topic and work with a club to accumulate information across texts, and talk and grow ideas about their reading.

Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017  
Readers Have Big Jobs to Do

## A User's Guide for *Readers Have Big Jobs to Do*

February/March

Benchmark Reading Level: H/I/J

### Introduction

*Readers Have Big Jobs to Do* is a critical unit for first grade as it builds on *Word Detectives* and continues to build the foundational skills that are so important for early readers. Be sure to go into this unit with fresh data on your kids—running records and conference notes that will guide your teaching. First grade readers tend to grow by leaps and bounds at this time of year and keeping track of where they are is crucial for getting the most out of this unit.

This unit supports students who are moving into H/I/J/K but will also provide plenty of appropriate support for your readers below benchmark. Bend I is incredibly useful for all readers as it rallies kids to make sure they are moving through the reading process smoothly, taking charge of their own reading.

The biggest challenge many teachers have with this unit is learning how to make their prompts lean and efficient, supporting kids to develop what Marie Clay calls, “self-extending systems.” Often when a student is struggling with a tricky word, we want them to get it right, doling out prompts that lead them to the right answer but don’t necessarily help them take action with the next tricky word on their own. The unit has the opportunity to help you improve your prompting and coaching of developing readers. Carry the charts with you, practice the language and always keep in mind, our goal as teachers is to make ourselves obsolete. We want kids to develop the skills and strategies to do this work on their own. Pages 41-47 in *A Guide to the Reading Workshop* highlight the challenges for readers across G/H/I and J/K/L/M and will be a valuable resource to set yourself up for this unit.

### Prerequisites/What to Do If Students Aren't Quite Ready to Start This Unit

It is best if your kids have been through the earlier foundational unit *Word Detectives* as you'll find this unit builds on these skills as kids move into higher levels of texts. The second bend of *Learning About the World* also teaches key foundational skills so your kids will benefit the most from having had both of these units earlier in the year.

Because this unit focuses on the foundational skills of reading, you'll find that updated running records will be particularly important. You'll want to have fresh eyes on which skills kids will need the most work with. This is also a great time in the year to do a deep dive on your struggling readers, making sure to pinpoint exactly which skills are holding them up and make a plan for instruction across the unit to get them moving up levels. Additional assessments like the sight word lists and spelling inventory can be helpful in understanding kids reading significantly below benchmark. The Assessment chapter of *A Guide to the Reading Workshop* provides great support for analyzing running records and page xii in the Overview of *Readers Have Big Jobs to Do* includes a list of helpful questions to ask yourself when studying readers.

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017  
Readers Have Big Jobs to Do**

## Materials/Getting Ready

As always, planning your read alouds and shared reading texts for the unit ahead of time is critical so that you can give kids lots of guided practice in the work of the unit. You'll want to read the demonstration text used in Bend I, *The Dinosaur Chase* before the unit begins so kids are familiar with it and you can keep your minilessons tight. It's a short book so it shouldn't take long. Across Bends II and III, you'll use *Zelda and Ivy: The Runaways*, an episodic chapter book. We recommend using it as your read aloud text in Bend I so that kids are familiar with it before you reach Bend II. If your kids are reading just below benchmark, you might choose a lower level demo text for Bends II and III such as *Katie Woo, Katie's Lucky Birthday*.

Be sure to have your word-solving chart, *Good Habits for Solving Tricky Words*, front and center. In Bend II, you'll revise and add to this chart to lift readers' word-solving skills. Giving kids mini versions of some of these key anchor charts can be really helpful. Session 4 of the online resources includes a small version of the *Tools for Solving and Checking Hard Words* chart. It's labeled as a checklist and kids will use it in this session to self-reflect and set goals. You might also consider making smaller versions of the other charts, especially if you have readers who need to work on reading process in Bend I or the deeper comprehension work in Bend III.

Bend IV includes a really fun project as kids become audiobook readers. We've found this work really powerful, especially when you can use simple technology so that kids can actually record themselves reading. Start early to make a plan for how you'll accomplish this. Many teachers have found the voice record app on an iPad is an easy way to do this, and apps such as Qrafter Pro and Seesaw are helpful.

## Insights Gleaned From Other Teachers Who Have Taught This Unit/Special Concerns

Carrying mini versions of the charts can help keep your prompting consistent in conferences and small groups. Referencing the charts in your shared reading and read alouds also helps teach kids how and when to use charts so they don't become wallpaper in the classroom. Many teachers have found that the *Tools for Solving and Checking Hard Words* chart really helped them monitor their own prompting of kids. In thinking about the three cueing systems (meaning, structure, and visual), many teachers have found that they prompted in one area, more often than another.

Spy on yourself. For example, do you tend to prompt children to search the letters or parts of a word, rather than think about what's happening in the story and a word that would make sense in context? Set goals for yourself as a reading teacher! When a child is searching the parts of a word, but still having difficulty, nudge her to search another source. For example, you might say, "Stop and start at the beginning of the sentence to take a running start. What would make sense and sound right?" Or, if a child is checking the picture of substituting a word that makes sense but neglects to crosscheck with the actual word on the page, nudge him to do a slow check to look from left to right to check all the parts of the word. Balance your prompts to coach children to crosscheck all sources to read with greater efficiency and accuracy.

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017**  
**Readers Have Big Jobs to Do**

## Bend I

This bend is *super, super* important. Often, as teachers, we see that a child has made a miscue, and we jump right away to help her fix the mistake and *solve* the word. This bend supports more than just word solving, it helps kids learn to monitor themselves as they read, and to search, attempt and check to solve problems. As kids move into higher levels, some of those bad habits you addressed in the first unit (*The Mumble, The Freeze*, etc.) come back as kids encounter more challenging words. You'll want to rally your readers into becoming the boss of their reading to get even the toughest job done. Many teachers have found that kids have latched onto this idea, singing the song taught verse by verse across the first bend again and again, like a theme song to the unit. Many teachers have said that this theme ("Be your own reading boss!") has reinvigorated their reading workshops, giving kids new purpose and excitement.

The work of this bend can also guide your assessment. As you confer and teach small group, study kids' reading behaviors. Which kids in your room are not stopping at the first sign of trouble? Which kids don't attempt anything when the words get hard? Which kids come up with attempts but neglect to check them when they are uncertain? Before you jump into the work of solving words you'll find kids who need these ideas as their goals.

During the reading workshop many kids will be moving into beginning chapter books and episodic books like *Frog and Toad*. Take note that kids reading at level J should be reading about 100 WPM which means it shouldn't take a reader at this level much more than 10 minutes to read a *Henry and Mudge* book. Kids should also be reading at least 30 minutes with stamina and vigor.

Another important idea in this bend is bringing kids back to old charts to revise and celebrate student growth. The share on page 15 revisits your partner chart, removing behaviors kids shouldn't need reminders about any longer and making space for new work. The share on page 23 helps to revise the *Good Habits for Solving Hard Words*, removing the "Double Check" which has now become the "Triple Check" and reorganizing the strategies into categories. This structure will help you and your students make sure that when solving tricky words they are drawing on not just one, but all three cueing sources: meaning, structure, and visual.

## Bend II

The second bend, just like in previous units, focuses on strategies for solving words. You've been doing this work all year with your growing first graders, and now you'll fill their toolkits with new strategies to support them with more complex word solving. You'll also lift the level of the strategies they've already learned to use, such as, "Check the picture!" Now, you'll prompt readers to think about what's happening in the story to search meaning, since the picture has become less supportive for solving words in the text. It's important to notice that the lessons have been carefully sequenced across the bend, starting with strategies that guide kids to draw on meaning, then to structure, and then to visual strategies for word-solving.

The minilessons in this bend teach kids the new strategies they need to solve words, but it is in your prompting and guided practice in shared reading and guided reading that kids will really carry these strategies to independence. Keeping your prompting language consistent, using the same prompts from the chart, will be absolutely critical to helping kids do this work without you there to help them. Before

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017**  
**Readers Have Big Jobs to Do**

using this unit, some teachers relied heavily on strategies pulled from popular websites, prompting kids to use “stretchy snake” and “chunky monkey” to solve words. No need to do this anymore! We urge you to use the prompts from the book! Keeping the prompts you teach kids in minilessons consistent all the way through the workshop will go a very long way.

Finally, a crucial element to making this bend work, will be a devoting a portion of your day to word study instruction. Make sure that the phonics knowledge you are teaching in word study matches the demands of the levels at which your kids are reading. When prompting kids to look across a word part by part, it's important that they have been learning some key parts in isolation through your word study work. Chapter 11 in the Guide book provides great support for word study and Fountas and Pinnell's *Continuum of Literacy Learning* helps connect word study to book levels.

### Bend III

Bend III of this unit turns the focus back to comprehension, making sure that we don't only channel kids to only pay attention to solving and saying words. At this point in the year many of your kids are moving into levels with big changes—books are becoming longer, scenes are shifting from one location to another, dialogue is more complex and pictures are less supportive.

As students become more proficient in word solving, teachers often begin to feel at a loss with how to coach or what to teach in a conference, wondering how to check in on comprehension effectively. Just like your prompts for word solving you'll want to keep your language consistent. Carry the chart you'll build across this bend with you during small groups and conferences. Use it as a checklist to research if kids are making movies in their minds and rereading whenever comprehension breaks down. The read aloud Post-it notes are also a great resource. In read aloud, you'll use clear prompts to guide students to do important thinking work. You can use these same prompts in your small groups and conferences, teaching kids to ask themselves these questions independently as they read.

It can also be helpful, as kids are moving into higher levels, to study books yourself. You may want to pull a range of books at levels G-K and study what you notice changing. How do things become more complex? Noticing these shifts for yourself can be a powerful way to make your teaching more effective.

Session 15 revisits an important lesson from *Learning About the World* reminding kids that as they read, they will encounter words they may not know. Nonetheless it is their responsibility (as reading bosses) to use everything they can to infer the meanings of these words. This is an important lesson and an idea you'll want to carry across every unit with kids. At these levels, kids may encounter unfamiliar phrases (*Frog was down in the dumps*). So you'll want to help readers monitor for meaning, noticing how authors use words and phrases to paint a picture.

A final tip: Across these levels, some books are episodic containing several chapters of individual stories, like in *Frog and Toad*, while others are true chapter books telling one continuous story. You might mark the series bins in your library to clue kids into which kind of books they are choosing.

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017  
Readers Have Big Jobs to Do**

**Bend IV**

This final bend is quick—just 3 lessons and it brings attention to fluency. During independent reading time you'll likely set up a station where kids can go individually to record an audiobook. Don't worry about this being a big complicated affair. You simply want kids to have a chance to record themselves reading orally both of a celebration of what they've learned and also as a way to hear themselves read and think about how to make it better.

Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017  
Meeting Characters and Learning Lessons

## A User's Guide for *Meeting Characters and Learning Lessons*

April/May

Benchmark Reading Level: I/J/K

### Introduction

You might think about *Meeting Characters and Learning Lessons* less as a unit on character, and more as a unit on story. That is to say, in this unit, you're helping readers get to know the story well—to understand it, to retell it, and to talk about it. Your aim is to support children's reading comprehension, starting with helping students build a strong literal understanding of the story. Then, you'll layer on inferential thinking work to push readers toward growing ideas about the characters and the lessons learned.

This is not a series clubs unit. Kids will be reading a lot of different stories, about a lot of different characters, rather than getting to know one character well. However, children are bound to be naturally reading inside of favorite series, so don't discourage this. When you hook a child on a series, you hook them onto a love of reading, for life!

The book provides a carefully laid-out sequence of teaching points that move children from building meaning to digging deeper, so we urge you to follow the lessons as they are. In each bend you'll highlight a specific story element (or two) and use that as a guide to help readers strengthen the comprehension work they do before, during, and after they read—starting with plot and setting, then character, and finally theme.

### Prerequisites/What to Do If Students Aren't Quite Ready to Start This Unit

While this unit is geared toward readers climbing into longer, more complex stories, like those at levels I, J, and K, it is a unit that will work for all readers! You'll want to support any readers below benchmark with a series of small groups that aim to accelerate their reading progress and move them up levels. Choose a few instructional-leveled texts and introduce each across several small groups, starting with small group shared reading and guided reading. You can read more about differentiating your instruction with small group work in Chapter 9 of the Guide book.

It is best if your kids have participated in units that emphasize word-solving and strengthening children's reading processing systems. Readers at this time of year should be consistently monitoring for accuracy, efficiently solving unknown words, cross-checking, and self-correcting as needed. While that doesn't mean their reading should be spotless, it does mean that their energy should now be devoted to the work of reading longer and more complex texts. If there are one too many tricky words to decipher, comprehension suffers.

Collect and study running records to consider the next steps you'll take, sketching out a few possible small groups you'll want to target early on and often to reinforce word-solving and help

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017**  
**Meeting Characters and Learning Lessons**

move readers up levels. You can read more about the kind of work you might do in these small group lessons in Sessions 6, 7, and 10 of the unit.

You'll also want to use your running records to think about the comprehension work students need. Study the way children retell stories.

- Are they retelling in sequence?
- Do they retell big events or small details? Accurately?
- Do they rely heavily on the text to recall details? Require lots of prompting and support to move through the parts of the story?
- Do they move beyond a summary of events to include how characters feel/change?
- Do they grow ideas about the story? Reactions? Lessons learned?

This data can help you think about the lessons from the unit that will be especially supportive and the strategy groups you'll want to meet with to offer additional guided practice.

If the bulk of your class is far below benchmark, the fluency and inferential thinking work won't be your top priority. You may, instead, abbreviate this unit, in order to have time to cycle back to another print strategy unit or devote a series of minilessons to revisit important foundational work with your readers. But, you'll want to do so in a way that makes sense for students. These units are crafted in a way that upholds an overarching theme and storyline. So, avoid popcorning from one session to another.

You might consider teaching the first bend in its entirety—supporting the literal comprehension work all readers will benefit from—followed by some of the character work inside of bend two, such as Sessions 6, 7, 8 and 9. Then, you might add a bend that teaches a series of sessions on word-solving, drawing from *Word Detectives* or *Readers Have Big Jobs to Do*. You might also draw from suggested teaching from the If/Then unit, *Readers Get to Know Characters by Performing Their Books* that supports fluency and comprehension work at earlier levels.

## Materials/Getting Ready

You'll want to choose a few demonstration texts at Levels J or K to use across your minilessons. We suggest a title from series such as *Iris and Walter* and *Mr. Putter and Tabby* because they feature many of the challenges your students will face as readers of early chapter books.

Print the materials available on the Online Resources! There are a few tools that are introduced across the unit that are meant to engage readers in setting goals for themselves and to practice strategies independently and with partners. For example, a "Retell Book" is introduced in Session 3. Simply put, it's five cut-up pieces of blank, white paper stapled together to make a tiny booklet that kids can use to touch and say aloud the big events of a story. This isn't meant as a place for children to write down their retell, but instead as a tactile tool to help kids in sequencing and determining importance as they retell longer stories. You'll find that this process mimics the planning work writers do when generating their own stories, touching each page of their writing booklet to say the big things that will happen. To support this retell work, some teachers provide a few transitional phrases to help kids move through the parts of the story, such as, "At the beginning...", "Then..."

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017**  
**Meeting Characters and Learning Lessons**

*"After that..."* and *"Finally..."* You might also consider using a problem and solution plot structure to help kids retell, with phrases such as, *"At the beginning, the character wanted..."* *"But..."*, *"So..."* *"Finally..."* And eventually, perhaps, *"The character realized/learned..."*

There are also tools meant to help readers think more deeply about the characters. In the share of Session 7, on page 44, you can introduce a talk tool that readers can hold up next to pictures of the characters in their books to imagine what else those characters might be saying or thinking in each scene. You'll also leave behind strategy cards after conferences and small groups that push readers to think more about what's happening as they read. Keep these clear and kid-friendly, offering a simple visual or a thinking prompt. You'll find an example of one on page 49.

### Insights Gleaned From Other Teachers Who Have Taught This Unit/Special Concerns

You will continue to provide your readers with Post-its to mark pages using a simple sketch or symbol. You'll find a few examples on pages 15 and 27 of the unit. In Session 3, readers can use Post-its to mark the important parts to help them retell the story. As readers move to levels H-J, some teachers move kids from jotting symbols to words (see an example on page 57). This can help you to assess comprehension and teach ways to deepen their thinking. Teaching kids to make quick jots with symbols or a few words helps push thinking but limits the amount of time readers are writing. Don't let your reading workshop turn into a writing workshop! It's not about making Post-its stronger, it's about lifting the level of kids' comprehension and strengthening their ideas. Post-its are a strategy, not a skill. Help kids use Post-its to think more about their reading when you see some predictable problems, such as plastering every page with a Post-it, writing way too much on each Post-it, or jotting literal details from the book rather than responding to the story with ideas and questions. Model how you stop and think as you read and then capture that thinking in quick ways on a Post-it, leaving it on important pages so you can go back to reread those parts or talk about them with a partner. You might leave an example of how Post-its might look and sound on a class chart or do some shared writing on a Post-it during a read aloud.

### Bend I

The first bend highlights the story elements of setting and plot, while supporting readers in building a literal understanding of the story. You'll help readers build meaning before, during, and after reading, echoing the work you began at the start of the year in *Readers Build Good Habits*. You'll remind readers to take a "sneak peek" preview before they read. Children should already know that it helps to study the title, cover and the first few pages. Now, you'll teach them to also preview the blurb and chapter titles (if there are chapter titles) to construct the gist of the story. You'll also help readers connect the pages together as they read, noticing how parts fit with the title of the story, or the title of the chapter, or the details from the blurb, or the big problem in the story. All of this, in turn, will help readers begin to determine importance, separating big events from tiny details.

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017  
Meeting Characters and Learning Lessons**

Expect that readers are moving through whole books inside of a single reading workshop, reading approximately one or two books similar to *Danny and the Dinosaur* or *Henry and Mudge*. At these levels, when word-solving is under control, students should move more fluently through longer stories. Keep your eye on stamina and volume, looking out for readers who are moving too slowly (or too quickly) through chapter books. There's no question that this will take a toll on comprehension. You'll also want to notice if readers are frequently abandoning books or popcorning between different stories. You'll want to identify these patterns as soon as possible and make plans to support these readers.

You'll encourage students to reread their books as well, returning to a story to notice details they missed the first time. Rereading will become less habitual as kids move up levels, so you'll want to nudge children to do so at these transitional levels as a way to support and deepen comprehension. Rereading will also help children more successfully identify the important parts of the story. Session 3 will be especially important. Children will use Post-its to mark a few (about 3-5) pages that represent big events in the story. Don't expect children to write on these Post-its, but instead to use them as flags to locate important parts. Then, they'll flip through the book from beginning to end, moving from one marked page to the next, to retell. Think of this as a temporary scaffold to support children with summarizing.

## Bend II

The second bend shifts to a focus on character. You'll help readers dig a little deeper. They'll move from more literal comprehension work to learn about the characters to inferential work centered around growing ideas about how characters feel and how (and why) those feelings change across the story.

This bend also folds in the foundational work of the unit: fluency. When readers think about how character feel, and read with intonation and expression, they are bound to grow a deeper understanding (and appreciation) for the story. So fluency and comprehension skills are working in tandem across these sessions.

Partners will work together to bring characters and stories to life, reading aloud to one another to rehearse scenes, thinking about tone and mood. Kids will play actor and director, reading aloud with gestures and changing their voices to sound like the character. You can find a simple "Director's tool" on the Online Resources that partners can use to give feedback to each other. You'll want to think about readers who need more support with other aspects of fluency, such as pace and phrasing. Use small group shared reading and strategy lessons to coach readers to attend to punctuation cues, read in longer phrases, and adjust their pace to slow down or speed up their reading voices. Your students may have practiced this work in an earlier unit, *Readers Get to Know Characters by Performing Their Books*. Here, you'll help children transfer those strategies to harder books, reading longer sentences with more print per page.

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading User's Guide, First Grade, 2016-2017  
Meeting Characters and Learning Lessons**

### Bend III

The third bend invites readers to consider the lessons characters learn, and the larger lessons readers can carry with them, like those left on a small strip of paper pulled from a fortune cookie. Readers will return to familiar stories from their book baggies and reread the ending, thinking, “What was the big problem? How did it get solved? Why does the story end this way?” You’ll help readers think about how the character changed from the beginning of the story to the end, and what the character may have realized. Expect and celebrate approximations. Kids are bound to make more literal interpretations about the larger lessons, such as, “Lily learned not to take her purple plastic purse to school,” before stretching toward more universal lessons like, “Everyone makes mistakes,” or “Treat others the way you want to be treated.”

Yes, this is a more challenging skill for readers. However, the books in readers’ hands at this time of year set kids up for success. Stories at these levels often set kids up to expect one of a few predictable themes (*Be a good friend, Honesty is the best policy, Be yourself, Try your best, etc.*) and sometimes even spell it out right in the text. Teach readers to read stories, thinking right from the start, “What lesson might this story want to teach?”

### Bend IV

The last bend of the unit is quick—just two sessions—and is devoted to celebrating the work readers did to discover the lessons in their books. Children will make and decorate paper fortunes that they’ll tuck inside a favorite story. Then, you’ll coach children to recommend those favorites, retelling the important parts and imparting words of wisdom as they pass along those life lessons to a friend.