

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**

**Summer Institute  
on the  
Teaching of Reading**



**Grade 6  
Reading Curriculum  
Selections  
Summer 2016**



Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading Curricular Calendar, Sixth Grade, 2016-2017  
Turn Every Kid Into a Reader – and a Character Analyst

## Turn Every Kid Into a Reader – and a Character Analyst

*September - October*

### Welcome to the Unit

Your incoming sixth graders bring with them a huge range of interests, of personal histories with reading, and of skills. Figuring out who your students are—what makes them tick, what delights them and stumps them—this is the challenge and the joy of September as a sixth grade English teacher. This unit will help you accomplish some crucial early goals: assessing your sixth graders' reading strengths and needs; lighting a fire of passion for reading in all of your students' hearts; and using character study as an introduction to the analytic interpretive work that is the cornerstone of middle school reading.

This unit drives home two simple but absolutely essential truths: 1) Reading gets more awesome when you do it often and well. & 2) You can improve dramatically at it by putting in the work.

For this instruction to work, you have to believe that it is possible. In middle schools across the nation, we see some classrooms where all students become readers and others where kids hardly read at all. How that falls out is directly related to how the teacher talks and acts about reading. When kids tell you "I don't like reading," or "Reading's boring," remember, that's code for "I find reading hard." Your job is to know what they're really telling you, which is that they struggle with reading or haven't had access to great books until now, and to help them get past these surmountable obstacles. You will also have students who already love to read, and your job is to deepen and expand their reading lives, showing them how to become avid, expert, lifelong readers.

The emphasis in the first half of this unit will be on teaching students to find the books that get them excited to read, internalize real reasons to read, and widen the scope of what they are reading. By October, you'll be ready to show students how to dig into the books they are reading (hopefully in chunks of hundreds of pages a week!), and to think, talk and write to analyze characters and character relationships. This will set the stage for the more complex analytic work of the next unit, Social Issues Book Clubs.

You will, in this unit, help students begin to develop systems for monitoring their reading, teaching them to ask themselves if they understand what they are reading, is the book making sense, and is their reading rate satisfactory? You will see an emphasis on helping readers choose books more purposefully so that they set goals and strive to meet them as readers. So you'll get them reading, you'll inspire them to work hard at reading, and you'll help them develop their own systems for keeping track of how reading is going for them. Reading partnerships and whole class shares will help your class settle into their new reading community.

Moving into character analysis will support their reading deeply, not only into the fictional characters' lives in their novels, but into their own and their peers' actions, words, and situations as well. Kylene Beers, in a recent closing keynote at TCRWP's March Reunion, reminded us that reading literature is one of the best ways to develop empathy—something all entering middle schoolers will need in spades, for themselves and their peers! This interpretive work will serve

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students well as they revise their personal narratives in writing workshop to uncover themes that are true for other adolescents, real and fictional.

## Overview

**Essential Question:** *How can recharging my reading life and thinking deeply about characters impact my life and relationships?*

- **Bend I: Readers put themselves in a growth mindset, building a positive relationship with reading and setting ambitious, feasible goals.**  
*How can I develop a growth mindset in regards to reading, one that will help me to envision myself becoming ever more powerful as a reader? (approximately one week)*
- **Bend II: Readers develop reading ‘work’ that will take them to the next level as readers.**  
*How can I develop reading work that will take me to the next level as a reader and will increase my knowledge, power, creativity, and worldly awareness? (approximately one week)*
- **Bend III: Studying Characters and their Complexity**  
*How can I develop ideas not just about the main characters in a novel but also about the minor characters, and justify those ideas with evidence from across the text? How can I analyze factors that influence and complicate the central characters, such as the significance of the setting, and the pressures that are exerted on characters? (approximately two weeks)*
- **Bend IV: Studying Characters to Reveal Bigger Meanings**  
*How can I read in such a way that I discern the issues, lessons, and themes that characters suggest, and develop theories about how the author develops those issues, lessons, and themes? (approximately two weeks)*

**Anchor Texts:**

- A collection of text excerpts (see Session I)
- “My Side of the Story” by Adam Bagdasarian, from *First French Kiss*
- “The Fight,” by Adam Bagdasarian, from *First French Kiss*
- “Inside Out,” by Francisco Jimenez, from *The Circuit*

## CCSS/LS Standards Addressed in this Unit

- **RL.6.1** Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- **RL.6.2** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
- **RL.6.3** Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.
- **RL.6.10** By the end of the year read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, at the high end of the grades 5-6 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

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## Getting Ready

### *Plan for access to tons of books*

Before this unit begins, you'll need to carefully plan out all of the materials you'll need to sustain and grow the enthusiasm which you are going to instill over the next few days. While some great read aloud options are recommended on the following pages, we encourage you to bring your own life-changing or attention-grabbing books to the unit.

You'll also want to think carefully about what books you have on hand for kids to read. We strongly encourage you to have high interest series in fiction and nonfiction, including the realistic fiction and fantasy series' most beloved by sixth graders, and the accessible nonfiction that will get them reading fast. Kylene Beers writes about how pivotal series reading can be, and if at all possible, you'll want to hook your readers on a series right from the start!

(<http://kylenebeers.com/blog/2012/05/15/lifetime-reading-and-series-books/>) You want to launch your readers into the habits that will sustain them, including devoting themselves to series and authors so that they get a lot of reading done, and keep moving through books rapidly. In classrooms where we see kids getting a lot of reading done, and choosing books purposefully and wisely, the books are usually organized in baskets by series and authors, and there are stickers for the bands of text complexity (see Middle School Overview for more on this) on the book and basket, so it's easy for kids to choose books they're sure they'll read fluently.

Remember that students need to read a lot—many pages per day both in school and at home! (See Richard Allington's *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers* and this study [<http://www.palmbeachschools.org/imlms/documents/growthinread.pdf>], both of which document strong correlations between students' reading performance and the amount of time they spend reading each day.) Many teachers have found that planning for page goals versus time goals is productive, as it helps to curb students' desire to pretend-read books that are too hard. If students set the reasonable goal of about a page per minute, they should be planning for 20-30 pages of reading in school and 30+ pages of reading out of school every day. For kids reading at levels below R, this will mean they will need even more books to read, as the books tend to be shorter at these levels.

Some of you will find that you don't have enough books for kids to read. Don't regard that as *your* problem, alone: share it with the students. If students help acquire books, they will be more invested. If you have some money for ordering books, instead of doing the order the day before school starts, hold off a day or two and get the kids to help you select the titles. Ask them to add persuasive letters encouraging the publisher to speed along the shipment. Get them to write to parents, asking for some particular favorite titles. Have a bake sale and use the money to buy used books. Consider asking parents or donors to buy used Kindles and load them up through Amazon (you can put 5 kindles on one account, so each time you buy a book, it goes to five). Take students to go with you on a class trip to the library. Every kid brings back 3 books—that is 90 books per section. You also might consider writing your own DonorsChoose.org grant; many teachers have beefed up their libraries through the generosity of others. If your school is just getting started with

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reading workshop, you may want to invest in starter classroom libraries. TCRWP has just developed these with Heinemann, and you can find out more about purchasing them by visiting their website at [www.heinemann.com](http://www.heinemann.com).

***Prepare for literary centers***

Centers have figured prominently in the RWP's work around content area, as well as during test prep. Centers are a powerful method of instruction which allows for intensive content and skill knowledge while also maximizing student collaboration and independence. This year we again offer three to five prepared centers for each of the major units of study in reading. Typically, centers are organized in baskets or some other receptacle (in some cases, this might be a cluster of laptops or a desktop computer), spread around the room. Students go to a center with a small group of other students. At each center there is a task card, which lets students know the work they can do at that center. Any additional materials are also provided. Students typically rotate through centers so that by the end of a set time period (a few weeks, a few days of a period) they will have visited most if not all of the centers.

Centers are a highly engaging way to dump a lot of content or skill knowledge in a short amount of time, while also freeing the teacher up to do focused small group work or coaching into the content. For this unit we are imagining using the centers as a way to teach students some terminology around author's craft in narrative, and give them opportunities to practice analyzing author's craft. You, of course, might want to create and plan your own centers, or forgo them entirely. We have also created ready-made centers that you are welcome to use. For schools that contract with us throughout the year, these can be found in a separate folder on the curricular materials thumb drive and on Treasure Chest. You can print out the task cards and any related materials. Then you will want to gather, or have students gather, any additional materials such as artwork, texts, video clips, or art supplies.

***Think through the kinds of goals you want kids to set***

Similarly, think through the expectations you plan on laying out for your students. What are ambitious but feasible growth goals, volume goals, and character analysis goals? Think carefully about goals that your students will rally around. Perhaps you will help set them up on Goodreads.com, a social networking site dedicated to bragging about books completed, sharing recommendations with friends and plotting out what will be read next. Doing this sort of work will generate a shared commitment to reading.

Whatever you decide to employ, make sure that the game plan is something which excites you. Recognizing that student enthusiasm for reading can only follow yours, there is no element more important than your own excitement over your students' upcoming growth as readers.

You may want to think through how you'll use anchor charts, as well, to document your teaching for students, and develop a tool for them to refer to across the unit. Here are examples of two possible charts for this unit:

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**We Turn Ourselves Into More Powerful Readers by...**

- Recognizing the many different reasons we have to read
- Developing a growth mindset
- Seeking and finding books by all possible means
- Setting ourselves thinking work to do as we read
- Trying to achieve the ‘reading zone’ as often as possible
- Using records to reflect on our reading lives
- Doing everything possible to maximize our reading time
- Finding friends to read with, to support us, to share with
- Monitoring how reading is going, and noticing when it’s not going well
- Writing, charting, and/or drawing to hold onto questions and theories and think through big ideas
- Applying ‘fix-it’ strategies when the book stops making sense
- Celebrating our progress and our community often

**Readers Analyze Characters’ Complexity by Paying Attention to...**

- The details the author includes about the characters
  - how details suggest character traits
  - how details suggest characters’ strengths and flaws
  - when details suggest the reader needs to revise his or her thinking about the character
- How characters are affected by the setting
- The problems characters face
  - how troubles multiply or get worse
  - how characters respond to trouble
  - How problems are resolved
- How characters change
  - indicators of change
  - the lessons they learn
  - the lesson they teach

## Assessment

When teaching sixth grade, especially, it is important to know if your kids are really moving up reading levels. There are still several levels to master to maintain grade-level reading status this year—even if they enter on grade level (which would be reading at a Fountas & Pinnell level V in September), they will still need to move up levels to end the year comfortably reading at level X. You’ll want to know where students stand in September to see how far they will have to journey to get to that goal in ten months. It’s possible you want to enlist all ELA teachers to concentrate on assessing sixth graders, or ask for some release time to get this important work done quickly. Once you know your kids, you’ll be able to do later assessments faster, as you might simply listen to them as they read their independent book, or use a guided reading group, or a conference, as your data. There is also a form on our website for assessing children in their own books, and if they are well matched to books, this will help you.

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In an ideal world, you will have enough time to evaluate every student, conducting individual running records or similar assessments of what level of texts your sixth grade students comprehend, and what skills they bring to that comprehension. You could do this work using a Fountas and Pinnell kit, or a TC Quick Assessment, or another running record assessment. If you are able to do this, the existence of levels and the constant effort to move students up the ladder of text difficulty will provide an infrastructure to your entire reading curriculum. Especially in schools where students enter reading below grade level, we've seen that where growth has surpassed the highest of expectations, every person in the building is invested in this growth, with even principals taking part in Fountas and Pinnell running records in order to make sure this data is collected and used to maximize student achievement. Certainly you'll want to assess incoming sixth graders who didn't pass your state test, so you can set reading goals and monitor progress.

If your schedule makes it too difficult to assess students individually, some teachers have found that they can print out three levels of our TC reading assessments for sixth grade—levels R, V, Y, and have the students choose a text that feels right for them, read it and answer the questions in writing, and if that felt easy, do another one. If you have a lot of children who read below grade level, you might need to insert a P level text as well—and you don't have to offer them the V and Y. The point is, you and your kids will have a rough baseline so you can double check your library—will there be enough for the kids to read? And you'll be able to monitor progress over the year from this starting point. Just keep in mind that sometimes it takes almost as much time to glance over written responses as it would have to listen to a kid read one hundred words and answer a couple of questions.

Regardless of how you decide to assess, you'll want to waste no time getting your students matched to books that they can read with accuracy, fluency and comprehension, and matched to partners who can read books at similar levels. If your students have been in reading workshops prior to this year, and you have clear feeder systems from fifth to sixth grade, hopefully teachers will have sent along the levels of text difficulty that students were reading at the end of fifth grade. Many students will know those levels themselves, and can simply tell you. You can then channel them to start reading books at those same levels, and observe to see whether these levels seem right. Talk to children or survey them to learn about their summer reading, because once you locate those who read a lot, you'll want to expect that they may well be able to read books that are a notch higher than those they were reading at the end of the previous year. Those who did not read at all in the summer will probably have lost ground, and may well need to begin sixth grade reading below where they left off. You will want to talk to children about the fact that the good news is that they are now back in school and can read up a storm. Move heaven and earth to get these readers reading again (try reading first chapters aloud to them) and explain that you and they can talk in a week and see if by then, they'll be ready to progress up a level.

We also suggest that you institute reading logs, or reading records, so students will be able to self-assess how reading is going for them. Whether they keep paper calendars, lists of books read, or use the calendar app on their iPhones, it's important for readers to be able to give a partner a tour of their reading lives, and to have artifacts that let them reflect on how reading is going for them, how it has been going, and when and why reading goes better.

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***Prepare to move readers up levels and schedule end-of-unit assessments to check on progress***

Once you have baseline information on your students' reading levels, rate, fluency and comprehension, you'll want to act quickly, especially to make intensive game plans for students reading below and well below expectations. We've seen teacher upon teacher turn these situations around in weeks flat, but it requires immediate action. With a bit of concerted effort on both your and the student's part, he or she will get to the June reading level you aim for (and hopefully a bit beyond). We recommend beginning by setting a clear goal for each and every student—a goal for each student to move at least one (if not two) levels during this unit, and helping them choose the books that will achieve these goals—series will be best as they can choose a lot of books at a time. Ask parents to help students find these series if needed—it will make a huge difference.

So, you will want to study the calendar for the school year and think about where you want each reader to be in January, in March, and each step of the way. If a reader enters your sixth grade classroom at R, for example, you might think to yourself, *"I want him to be ready to move to S by the end of this unit and working on books that are leveled at S/T during the next unit."* For readers who begin the year reading several levels below benchmark, it will be especially critical that you are setting up progress monitoring plans (likely as part of an RTI plan) so that you schedule time to assess at the end of the unit and see who has and has not made requisite growth.

**Bend I: Readers Put Themselves in a Growth Mindset, Building a Positive Relationship with Reading and Setting Ambitious, Feasible Goals**

Wherever you teach, you have some students who love reading and others who have not had great experiences with reading. Perhaps they are embarrassed by their reading level and are disengaged; perhaps a few or even quite a few have an antagonistic relationship with reading because they have felt unsuccessful at it their entire lives. This unit, and this experience which is kicking it off, is designed to engage all your readers with becoming ever more excited about reading—and it gives you a chance to get to know your readers.

***Bend I, Session One: Finding reasons to read***

We suggest that for this one day, you teach students that readers have many different reasons to read, and those reasons are different for everyone. We also suggest that you break the mold of usual workshop structure in an effort set up enthusiasm for this work. You might begin with a warm up question. "Let me ask you something," you might say. "Why does it matter that you—that people—are good readers?" Inevitably, students will cite traffic signs, bill payments, or other documents that they have seen their guardians forced to read through. "Sure," you'll tell them - "but I didn't decide to teach English because I wanted you to be good at your taxes. I appreciate your effort, but no. That's absolutely not why I read."

**"Today I want to teach you that readers have many different reasons to read; and those reasons are different for everyone."**

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This is your hook—your moment of, “Wait, that’s what you think reading is? Oh no, THIS is what reading is.” Now that you’ve caught their attention, it’s time to hit home unit goal #1: reading can be awesome and it only gets better as you get stronger at it. Below you will find passages meant to stir up your children’s interest. By the end of your reading, you want kids clamoring to get the book you just read, and when that happens, we encourage you to use that spark to fire up independent reading.

We suggest that on this first day, you read aloud snippets of a range of favorite texts, some funny, some serious, each aimed to hook a different kind of reader. Then, invite kids to engage with a partner, talking about which of these books seems interesting to them...which makes them want to read. Gather them back, reiterate that readers have many different reasons to read; and those reasons are different for everyone, show them how the same range of kinds of books are available to them, and have them choose books that they think will help them like to read and get a lot of reading done.

As students choose books and begin reading, keep an eye on which kids get started quickly and which seem to hesitate. Watch for who turns pages and gets into a reading zone, and who seems distracted. That first day data will help you figure out which children you may need to assess, and who needs extra encouragement. You might keep your conferences to informal quick conversations about why they chose that book, and “oh, I’ll love to hear tomorrow about what happened in that book—your favorite parts,” so that you are spending most of your energy encouraging kids to actually read the books they take home that day. We’ve listed some predictable conferences and small groups for these first few days, in the Appendix.

Kids will probably get to actually read for about fifteen minutes this first day. Your share at the end of the lesson might invite children to note how many pages they read in fifteen minutes, and then ask them double that number of pages as a *minimum* reading goal for that night. Have children turn to the child sitting next to each of them, and share their reading goals - how far they expect to get in their book by the next day. For now, that student can be their reading partner. Your sixth graders may not know each other yet, and you don’t know them as readers, and so they can simply partner with whoever sits alongside.

***Bend I, Session Two: Building a growth mindset***

As students come to the minilesson on this day, have them first share with their ‘partner’—whomever they sat next to—how reading went for them the night before. Did they read as many pages as they had hoped? Did they get into a ‘reading zone?’ Have students show what page they got to, and listen in as students show how far they got, offering encouragement, finding out who is reading yet and who isn’t, and who thinks reading 6 pages is a lot versus who is already reading 40 pages. Jot down some notes, as this is important data on your new readers, and you’ll already be able to think about how some kids might mentor others, or who might get paired up as partners.

After setting students up in session one by igniting a newfound enthusiasm in reading, it’s now time to shift the biggest misconception middle school students have about reading: the belief that because they might struggle with reading right now, they are doomed to struggle with it for the rest

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of their lives. This, which Stanford Psychologist Carol Dweck calls a fixed mindset, needs to be corrected.

You will aim to explicitly cultivate what Dweck calls “growth mindsets” —the belief that with effort; you can improve at anything greatly, including growing your intellectual level. With your leadership and strong belief, this mindset can be taught, breathing new life into readers who were previously discouraged. Ultimately, this will conclude with ambitious goal setting for volume of text read and amount of reading progress, but first they need to believe that goals are actually worthwhile—that by doing work, they will achieve results.

**“ Today I want to teach you that readers develop a growth mindset, which means they focus not on where they are, but on where they are going, and how they will get there.”**

Today, therefore, you’ll teach your students that readers develop a growth mindset, which means they focus not on where they are, but on where they are going, and how they will get there. Then you might demonstrate by writing down a book that you are reading now, and the kind of book that you want to get to, and plotting what you’d have to do as a reader in order to get there—and kids can do the same. Or you might demonstrate by reflecting on a time in your life when you had a growth mindset about another endeavor, such as soccer, and what you did to get better. For the active involvement, kids can do the same, and then you chart the work of finding mentors, hard work, practice, building a vision of what you want to accomplish, celebrating small steps, charting progress, that are part of a growth mindset, and think with them of what that might look like in reading. Then send them off to read with an increased awareness that they are reading in order to get stronger at reading, as well as falling in love with their stories.

As your sixth graders read, they should have their noses in books, be flipping pages steadily, be concentrating. You’ll already have a sense from their body language, of which readers need extra encouragement. You might pull alongside one child, ready to create a ladder of texts that the child might read, and invite others nearby to listen in as you work together, asking them to think about how they might do the same work. Try to arrange texts in a pretend order that a student might go through. Perhaps you’ll have some kids on extremely low levels and you’ll start at the bottom with Judy Moody and Flat Stanley. Perhaps your kids are higher and you’ll start with level R series like Gary Paulsen’s *Hatchet*. Or perhaps you’re helping a strong reader move toward more complex texts, and you’ll start with *My Sister’s Keeper* or with *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Either way, you will arrange books from easiest to hardest, showing kids where they will end up if they read as much as they possibly can.

For your mid-workshop teaching, you might set kids up to be prepared by the end of the period to retell what’s fascinating about the story they’re reading, so far, to their partner. Remind them that readers can’t retell the whole story page by page so they may want to think about one aspect that would be interesting for someone else to hear about—perhaps hearing about a strong character, or an interesting place, or the big problem the characters face. You’ll be able to listen in to these conversations, and you often can tell just from listening to snippets, who is matched well to their books.

Meanwhile, ask kids to go back to reading, do what you can to try to get two or three assessments done, starting with any child who didn’t pass the state test in fifth grade. Your immediate goal is to

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make sure you actually have enough books for those children to read, so you need to zoom in on their reading levels fast. For now, don't worry about the kids who have their noses in books or who have chosen harder texts and seem to be moving through them.

For your share, prompt partners to talk about their books. Circle around, thinking about which partnerships are working, and which you might change the next day by moving kids' seats. Listen for any readers you're worried about, as those will be the ones you'll assess next.

***Bend I, Session Three: Taking ownership of our reading lives by collecting books and finding the books that will turn us all into readers***

Any teacher knows that it is easy to teach reading when the room is full of books that kids find fascinating. It's almost impossible to turn kids into powerful readers without that resource. By now, your students have thought a bit about what they want to read. Ideally, they are planning to get going in a series, reading from the beginning straight through to the end! Now you want to teach them that readers collect the books they want to read, seeking and finding them by all possible means, so that the whole community can be turned on to reading. You'll simply never be able to have in your room all the books kids want to read—and they need to learn how to get books, from libraries, used books, each other.

**“Today I want to teach you that readers collect the books they want to read, seeking and finding them by all possible means, so that the whole community can be turned on to reading.”**

Here's where you'll invite kids to take ownership over the library and their reading lives. You might demonstrate by showing one week of your reading log, when reading went really well for you because you were in a series you loved. Have them talk with a partner about what they notice about your reading life - the high volume, rapid rate, moving from book to book. Then show them another week of your reading life, when reading did not go so well, and have them do the same—notice the slow rate, lots of rereading, very low volume, book abandonment. From there, you'll reiterate that for reading to work, readers have to find the books that will keep them reading.

That means that students should take stock of what they want to read, and what's actually in the library, and make plans to get the books they want. Have them develop action groups - one might set out to write letters to parents, one might help make book orders lists for when the school does get funding, one might find out when the public library is open, and write to make an appointment for the class. Then set up a schedule for when kids might come up at lunch to help with this work, or who might do some outside of class. Talk about Dr. King, talk about Gandhi, talk about the girls in Afghanistan who are getting beaten for going to school and still go, talk about any activists you admire and they'll admire, and reiterate that not much happens for people who sit around doing nothing, and everything is possible when we help each other and have agency.

On this day, kids do more 'working to get books' than actually reading, but we promise you, kids read more ultimately, when they're engaged in the hard work of getting books. The enthusiasm you've created needs books to survive and we know that we certainly can't always count on districts to supply the resources needed! If we wait, so do our kids, making interest quickly wane. The great news is that there are hundreds of ways to collect books, and the more you enlist them in collecting the, the more excited they will be. After submitting a letter and collecting class wide

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requests on Donors Choose, we have seen formerly hesitant readers cheer, pumping fists in the air. You might consider asking students to list favorite texts or topics after giving them options and letting them decide and place a Scholastic order, you might hold a book drive where kids bring in books they no longer read at home, perhaps you set every child up to a Goodreads account where they can log the books they have finished, and rate and review them to their friends online, perhaps they can pick 3 student magazines to subscribe to as a class, or comic books to fire them up. The point is, do whatever you can to make sure your kids have enough books to read whether it be comics, graphic novels, adventure series, nonfiction texts, or historical fiction. Keep in mind that the more involved they are in the collection and selection process, the more invested in reading they will be. Know also that the final class period of this unit closes out with a reading marathon of all the new resources your class has put together, so you need some materials to be delivered by then. Shamelessly ask your own friends to give you their copies of *Sports Illustrated*, their comic books, the copies of *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* that you know they have.

## Bend II: Readers Develop Reading Work that Will Take Them to the Next Level as Readers

Students will now have begun to settle into reading workshop, so it's a perfect time to make sure they don't get too complacent! This bend pushes readers to be honest about their thinking and reading habits, and to set ambitious goals and tracking systems so that they are all reaching for challenges, both in terms of the quantity and quality of the reading they're doing in school and at home.

***Bend II, Session One: One way readers develop reading work is to consider what thinking work they'll do as they read. For instance, readers often notice the emotions of the characters, and what causes them, and they think about when and why the reader and the main character have different perspectives and emotions.***

In this session, you'll return to read aloud, to entrance your readers, introducing a story this time that you'll read in its entirety. We suggest "My Side of the Story," from *First French Kiss*, by Adam Bagdasarian. Other great choices include stories from *Tripping Over the Lunch Lady and Other School Stories* collection—or any favorite, highly engaging, accessible short story that you adore. We like the Adam Bagdasarian story because it helps with the series motif and is in first person, serving as a possible mentor for personal narrative as writing as well. If you like Bagdasarian's stories, and prefer to stay with these rather than switch to "The Circuit" for Bends III and IV, that will be fine, as the collection tracks the same main character and can serve as a model for reading across a series. The stories in *Kick Me* serve the same purpose.

Your overarching teaching on this day is that readers consider what thinking work they'll do as they read. For instance, readers often notice the emotions of the characters, and what causes them, and they think about when and why the reader and the main character have different perspectives and emotions.

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**“Today I want to teach you that readers consider what thinking work they’ll do as they read. For instance, readers often notice the emotions of the characters, and what causes them, and they think about when and why the reader and the main character have different perspectives and emotions.”**

Read this favorite story, and invite readers to notice and describe the emotions in pivotal moments, of the main character, and what causes those emotions. You might also demonstrate how the reader sometimes feel differently than the character does. For instance, when Will is getting hit by his father, the reader mostly feels pity, though the character feels fear, and anger. You might demonstrate how you begin some Post-its or a notebook page to keep track of your responses as you read, to introduce writing about reading in a small way.

For example, you could make an emotional timeline of the character’s emotions across pivotal moments of the story—one method for how readers keep track of these moments, and notice the character’s emotions and perspectives. This work will lead your readers to not only read a lot, but begin to analyze what they’re reading, and will set your readers up to begin jotting Post-its and reading notebook entries.

As your kids read, you might interrupt them to say you’re going to be studying not just their reading, but what work they’re doing as they read. Are they keeping track of how many pages they’re reading? Are they jotting any responses on Post-its or in a notebook? Many of your readers, we hope, come from fifth grade classrooms where they knew a lot about reading response. Alert your kids that over the upcoming days, you’ll be researching how they use writing about reading to deepen their responses to books. Then actually do that research. Some kids may already have strong habits that you can use as examples. Others may simply need a quick reminder. If you find out that many of your students don’t know much about writing about reading, it will help you plan your next unit of study in writing and reading with this information in mind. If they do know a lot, you can lift the level of your teaching.

You might reinforce this by creating a share out of several students’ responses as a way to show that there is more than one way to document thoughtful reading, but that you expect students are finding *some* way to do this.

***Bend II, Session Two: Readers set goals and check on their progress frequently***

You will want to continue to coach into students’ self-assessments and goal-setting. Some of this can and probably should be quantitative. You might quote Atul Gawande’s advice from his book *Better*, which is: “Count something!” In this case, convince students that counting pages—of reading and of reading responses—is a way of being specific about how much they are practicing reading and thinking about reading.

There is much research documenting the relationship between reading rate and reading success - it is going to help your students to read at a proficient rate, around a page a minute—and rate is directly related to volume.

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**“Today I want to teach you that that readers set goals to stay in a reading zone, that is, they have in mind the number of pages they want to read each day, because rate and volume matter a lot. Reading is just like anything else— like soccer, or piano—the more you do, the better you get.”**

For sixth grade, a reading zone for the very beginning of the year might be 40-60 pages a day (about 20-30 pages in class and another at home. Remember that if most kids read between  $\frac{3}{4}$  page to 1 page per minute, in 30 minutes they'll read 20-30 pages.) In the next unit of study you'll want to increase to 50-70, which will get them through a novel a week. For now, this zone should build a feeling of success and attainability, while still teaching them to work hard).

You'll want your students to sustain systems for keeping track of reading volume. Just as anyone who is immersed in becoming better at something keeps records, readers need a way to keep some statistics so they can see how reading is going for them. In this unit, we're interested in teaching kids to develop agency over their reading life. Therefore, we'll teach them to make choices about their reading logs—whether to use their phones, paper, or an online system—and to develop a sense of self-discipline in this work. It's expected that they'll make some mistakes along the way, and your job will be to coach them into better choices.

In general, we've found that middle school students do well with limited, negotiated choice. That is, a classroom won't function that well when every reader uses a different system, and the teacher and the other readers have to figure out individual systems for each reader. At the same time, when readers have agency over how they record their reading, they tend to be more accurate, honest, and engaged. And kids, like adults, tend to like different systems. In sixth grade classrooms where kids keep reading logs well, we've tended to see three kinds of logs in play, including:

- A simple calendar, and each day the kids mark the total number of pages they read (including school and home). Every time they start a new book they write the title on that day, and when they finish it they write 'Finished.' The advantage of this system is it makes it easy to see how many books a reader has read in a week, and in a month, and how many pages the reader is tending to read. Often, readers will use stars to mark the days when they are in the 'reading zone,'—which for sixth grade is usually 40-60 pages a day at the start of the year (this would be 20 in school and 20 out, which is not high. Kids won't get anywhere by reading 13 pages a day). It's up to you if you want them to mark minutes as well—it depends if you and they are tracking reading rate. In general, what really matters it that they read a lot of pages.
- A table that includes a column for date, title, pages, minutes, level or band. Some readers like to differentiate pages read in school and pages read at home. Again, putting a star whenever the reader has been in the reading zone that day can be very helpful.
- A digital system—either the calendar app on their phone or if kids are reading on Kindles/iPads it's easy to mark the books that have been read, and how far along the kids are in those books. Advantages of that system are that it's similar to what adults do.

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For your demonstration, you'll need a brief filled-out log that includes one week in which you got a lot of reading done, and at least one other week when sometimes reading didn't go as well. The important part of the demonstration, however, is not showing when you were in the zone, it's thinking aloud about what you'll do to get back in the zone when you weren't—choosing different books, closing your door to find reading time, staying at school for a bit to read, and so on. It's really important that your own reading log (you'll be introducing these documents soon) show an authenticity and honesty that you want your kids to show. Show them days when you didn't get to read, so they can commiserate and plan with you how to improve. Show them days when your book was too hard. What you want to show is how readers get into trouble and then get out of trouble, not that reading is always easy.

We push number of pages more than minutes. While some teachers tell students that they need to read for 30 minutes a night, we quote Gerrit Jones-Rooy, who tells kids, "You need to read as much as humanly possible." You have to tell the truth to kids, and the truth is that the more they read, the better. Tell them that 30 minutes will be the bare minimum to stay in shape - and that every minute they keep reading will accelerate their growth. Tell them to finish the chapter, finish the book. For readers who read slowly, then they need to read longer, as later, in high school, they won't be assigned fewer pages. Push stamina.

As your kids go off to read, you'll need to keep going with assessments. But you might squeeze in some quick checks of reading volume. Ask students to make a quick log of what they've read since school started. Have them put a star on any day they were in the reading zone. Invite them to share with a partner what conditions help them achieve the zone. Listen in, and share those publicly.

You may need, as well, to confer with kids who have chosen books that are too hard. If it's the second week of school, and any child is still reading the same book he or she chose that first day, chances are that either the book is too hard or the child is struggling to find time to read. Here's where you might replicate that conference where you make a ladder of texts, from easier to harder, leading up to the book the child is reading—and then move them to a book that is comprehensible and quickly read, with the goal of moving up that ladder by reading a lot and getting a lot of books read.

As you put kids into appropriate levels, know that it really helps them if you introduce a book that is at that level. There are a few other methods you might consider for moving students up levels, too:

- Read aloud the back cover and beginning of the text with (or to) the student or partnership and involve them in thinking along with you and discussing the text. Remind them to keep these conversations in mind as they continue to read.
- Mark a few parts at the start of students' texts with a few things you especially want them to pay attention to (parts that begin to reveal a character's complexity, for instance), gather them to discuss these parts, why they are important, what students have learned from reading them, and then ask them to continue to mark and think about these sorts of parts as they continue to read.

For a share, you might encourage partners to do a similar kind of quantitative tracking of their writing about reading. How many Post-its or notebook pages have they created so far? What would

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be a reasonable goal to get more in for the next week? Given that you will not have the time to collect reading notebooks weekly and check for volume of responses, you will want to build in systems of peer accountability where students help each other stay committed to documenting their thinking, and where they use their reading notebook work to fuel conversations with partners and others so that the work has an audience other than you!

***Bend II, Session Three: Readers get good at the work that lets reading happen - so they set goals to improve at structures and routines to maximize time to read***

You'll also want to consider structures that students can get good at which will help kids get more reading time. You might teach the simple lesson that readers get good at structures and routines to maximize time to read, and then have students come up with what those routines and structures are, such as choosing books quickly, finding more than one book at a time, sitting near a reading partner to have someone to talk to, coming to your meeting area and returning to reading spots quickly, finding places to read that help them focus. Have them problem solve with partners about how to maximize reading time outside of school as well.

To finish, set partners up so that every week, they can meet to give a tour of their reading logs, and reflect on how reading is going. If they haven't done so yet, have them decide what kind of reading log they'll keep—a calendar, or a list, on paper, on their phone or iPad—and have them fill in what they've read so far this year.

**“Today I want to teach you that readers get good at structures and routines to maximize time to read.”**

Time is precious, but it is especially precious when it comes to middle school reading. Research suggests that students need to be reading about an hour and half per day, and you'll work towards that this year (across home and school). We have set them up to read at home, on the bus, in other classes and after school, and it still is a fight to get enough minutes for our kids to have adequate time to grow. For this reason, your class will not work if minutes are wasted, so routines and structures must be consistent and enforced respectfully, but ruthlessly. Five wasted minutes of reading time per day could cost students an entire reading level or more by the end of the year. Plan out the pattern that you want to follow every day, so that students can start work without any direction or confusion. Perhaps you have students silently read for 5-10 minutes before the mini-lesson even begins to give you a chance to check reading logs. Perhaps they silently assemble in the meeting area within the first 30 seconds so that you can launch a lesson and jump into independent reading time as quickly as possible. Whatever you opt to do, stick with a plan that gets students in the habit of beginning right away, saving precious minutes which add up quickly.

You'll also want to make sure your kids are familiar with your library. Perhaps you decide that nobody is allowed to get up during reading time and they need to have enough books in their bags to read all class. Perhaps you create a signal where students have silently finished their books and are now allowed 1 minute exactly to grab a new book and begin their work again. Some teachers have put getting books entirely into kids' hands, asking them to come each day to class with a book, ready to read. Make sure that you explain the expectations, connecting it to the importance of their goals.

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As kids read, you should see that most students are on their second or third book by now. Be alert to those who aren't. Double check kids' comprehension quickly, by asking them how the ending of the book related to the beginning, or who the main problem was solved, as a way to listen to their understanding. Keep these conversations quick, as you need to check on lots of readers. Once you're sure your kids are choosing books well, you'll have all year for deeper conferences.

***Bend II - Final Session: Literacy centers, first rotation (optional)***

Today may be a day to launch the centers for this unit. As this will be the first go-round, you might take some time to go over the logistics, expectations, and the centers themselves. But, even then, it will be better to talk less to the whole group and instead leave any lingering explanations for when you go from center to center coaching and fielding questions.

You will likely want to have the centers already organized and placed around the room. Usually when teachers introduce centers, they report the best success when students are gathered all in one spot (like the meeting area), and the teacher moves from center to center, a la Vanna White, as you talk, letting the students look to see the location and materials of each center.

Depending on your students and their experiences with centers, you might want to set up a few simple guidelines. One school had these written on a chart:

1. Go to center with your group and sign in
2. Read the task card
3. Complete a task
4. Put materials back the way you found them
5. Apply what you learned with your independent reading book right away

You might want students to be in centers with their partners, partners grouped into clubs, then grouped again, or perhaps another configuration. You will also want to decide ahead of time if there is a set time for how long students have to work at a center, or if they can stay at the center for the entire duration of the center work (which will likely be about half of the class time). Additionally, since students will ultimately transfer this work to their independent reading, you might want to decide if students will stay at the center to do their reading after they have finished the center work, or if it would be better for them to go back to their regular seats.

Once you have done a quick (30 second) introduction to each center and its materials, you can send the students off to work. Expect that at first there will be a bit of confusion as people take turns reading the card, deciding how to best complete the task or tasks, and generally figure out how to navigate this new activity. Once the students are fairly settled, you'll want to rotate around yourself, giving lean prompts to keep them going, taking notes on the work they are doing, sharing important information as needed.

Today's work could either feel as if you're not teaching at all, or conversely, you might end each of your class periods covered in sweat because you feel like you've been working so hard. Ideally, we'd like to hope you feel like something in between!

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### Bend III: Studying Characters and their Complexity

Now that you've got students into some habits that will allow for sustained reading over time, documenting thinking in Post-its and notebook work, and talking with a partner to reflect on ongoing goal setting, you'll want to move kids into more analytic reading. This bend launches more in-depth character work than what they're likely used to, prompting them to consider how characters are presented in complex ways, how characters compare and contrast with each other, and how they help us access multiple themes across the story.

***Bend III, Session One: Readers rely on their knowledge of how stories go to engage deeply and alertly - they have expectations as they read***

We suggest that to launch this third bend, which will focus more explicitly on digging into characters, you involve them actively in this work through interactive, instructional read aloud, where you read parts of a text, prompt their thinking, engage them in partner talk, and give them calibrated feedback. This read aloud will take longer than a minilesson would, probably about twenty minutes. You'll want to spend some time showing your sixth graders how reading with agency means drawing on all you already know to read with more power. You might gather students and say, "Today, I want to teach you that one way you can read actively and with agency is by relying on your knowledge of how stories go. Because you know a lot about stories, you know it is important that as you read, you get to know characters through the details the author includes, and look for the problems they face, including the nuances or parts of these problems. You also know you need to be aware of how problems are resolved and how characters change or create change." Then alert students that you'll be reading and they will be comparing their thinking with a partner. For now, these partnerships don't have to be formal, leveled ones, as you are probably still figuring that out. Students can partner with individual students sitting next to them—but be sure that it is mostly actual partnerships, not triads or larger groups. During turn and talk times, it's critical that there are (mostly) one-to-one conversations to ensure full participation.

**"Today, I want to teach you that one way you can read actively and with agency is by relying on your knowledge of how stories go. Because you know a lot about stories, you know it is important that as you read, you get to know characters through the details the author includes, and look for the problems they face, including the nuances or parts of these problems. You also know you need to be aware of how problems are resolved and how characters change or create change."**

You might begin to demonstrate this work by reading aloud the first part of the story in *The Circuit* titled "Inside Out," and showing students how you actively work to construct the story, by using what you know of how stories go. First, you might give a *very small* introduction—remember that the goal is for students to do the work of figuring out how details suggest meaning, so you are just getting them ready to read—and in this case, perhaps equalizing their knowledge. For instance, you might say, "This story is from a series of stories by a writer called Francisco Jiménez. The collection is called *The Circuit*, and all the stories are told from the perspective of a boy named Francisco, the narrator, who is a Mexican-American immigrant living and working with his family in California. This story is called 'Inside Out.'"

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You might prompt your readers: “I’m going to read the first part of the story aloud. Let’s use what we know about stories to be really active participants in making meaning as we read this story. So, hmm..., what do we know about stories? What thinking work should we do first? Well, I’m thinking that first maybe we should get to know the characters—in fact, like the title; we should get to know them ‘inside and out!’—so let’s be really alert for the smallest details that give us information about them.” You might begin to read, stopping after the second paragraph “*I had to repeat first grade.*” Then prompt students, “readers, you should have figured out a lot about these characters already—or at least have some strong first ideas based on the details you heard. So right now, compare your thinking with your partner—what have you learned about these characters? What seems important so far?” Listen to what your students say, and most likely, you’ll want to suggest that it’s important to reread the beginning of the story quickly, as authors layer detail that matters, and yet readers are often barely alert yet. So you might reread quickly, prompting partners: “See what you pick up this time, that you missed the first time—then compare with your partner.”

Each time, give partners just a few minutes to talk—at this point, you want to keep up intensity, and you want to cut them off while they’re still dying to keep talking. Rather than call on them, you probably want to sum up their main points—noting that so far, readers have learned that the narrator is this young boy, Francisco, and that it seems he’s about to go to school for the first time and seems a bit nervous—and say out the actual lines in the text that are evidence for this idea. Readers should also have figured out that Francisco’s brother Roberto has been to school before, and that Francisco sees him somewhat as a mentor—and again, you should name the specific details in the text that support those ideas. So already, readers have three ideas—that Francisco is nervous about going to school, that he looks up to Roberto, and that Roberto is more knowledgeable than he is.

You’ll have to decide whether or not to focus on the more subtle details yet—such as Roberto’s repetition of first grade, and his angry tone when discussing school. As you listen to your kids talk, you may feel like they are ready to pay close attention to even the smallest detail. Or, you may feel like they need to first do stronger work figuring out who is telling the story, and the relationships, and you’ll return to the more subtle details in a later rereading.

Now you’ll want to read some greater swaths of the story, so that students have more material to infer with, and can do more work. Before you begin reading, you might alert your readers, saying something like, “readers, you already know that you should be alert to the problems that characters face—and we’ve seen some already, like that Francisco is anxious about starting school, and that Roberto hasn’t had a great experience in school. So as we read, be alert and gather more evidence of those problems. In a lot of stories, the characters face more than one problem, or the problem has parts—so powerful readers probably want to be alert to details that give you clues the characters face more than one problem. You may want to do some jotting as you listen, to keep track of the important details. You have reading notebooks for that work, so have those at hand.”

Then you might want to read to: “*Papá always wore a cap and I did not feel completely dressed for school without it.*” Invite your partners to compare what more they learned about the characters, and how their theories about the problems characters face have grown. Again, listen in. If one partnership is ready to model, you might help them rehearse so they do so efficiently. Or, you might decide to model yourself, asking students to compare their thinking with yours, as you say something like, “See how your thinking compares with some of what Rosa, Emily and I were talking about. We think we’re finding out more about the difficulties Francisco will face—but the narrator

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also shows us how he does not feel the same way as his brother Roberto about school, and in fact doesn't take Roberto's advice. So while he asks Roberto for advice, he doesn't always take it—so maybe Francisco is more independent than he seemed at first..."

You might stop here and then read through to the top of page 20 ("Arthur avoided me whenever she was around."), letting students construct the story with you now, letting them stop and talk and fill in more of the gaps. You can remind students that constructing stories is active work and they need to be this active when they read their own stories as well and send them off to read with agency. Remind them to use all they know about inferring about characters and problems and setting details, in addition to other strategies to be active readers.

Before sending students off to read for the rest of the period, you might invite them to compare the main character in their book, to Francisco. After all, the reason you're doing this interactive read aloud is not just for them to do this work in "Inside Out." It's for them to do this work in whatever text they read, so some quick comparison, just for a minute or two as a mid-workshop, makes a good transition into independent reading.

As students work on this day, you might make sure that every table basket has some Post-its, and that students have reading notebooks where they can jot. Remind students that they should be drawing on everything they already know about characters and reading literature. You'll want to see them pulling out Post-its, jotting ideas about characters, marking text evidence to support these ideas, and reading nose in the book. These are lessons your students have had in previous years. You will want to set the expectation that reading with agency means remembering and drawing on all you have already learned.

Take a few minutes to watch your students working and consider how much they are showing that they are drawing on past learning. You will likely see that there are lessons you will need to review; work that students will need to help them strengthen prerequisite skills to the work they will do this year. This is a time you might have the *Building a Reading Life* document in your hand and survey your whole class quickly. Do students hold books close? Do they widen their eyes as they read an exciting part, almost subconsciously? Or do they get up to sharpen pencils and flip pages with many a glance at the clock? If your class as a whole seems to lack independence and engagement, that's a red flag situation, and you'll definitely want to support essential reading habits before anything else.

At the end of the day today, remind students that their Post-its or notebook entries are not busy work—they don't need to record what is happening in the story. Instead, their entries should reflect the ideas they are developing—and their Post-its will probably either note evidence for those ideas, or otherwise help them keep track of important thinking. Alert students that the next day, you'll collect some of the writing about reading they do that night on their own books, and that you'll be curious to see how they are noticing details and theorizing about characters in those stories, just as they did in "Inside Out."

***Bend III, Session Two: Knowledgeable readers pay attention to how troubles multiply, and how characters respond to trouble.***

You might continue read aloud today, moving forward with more of "Inside Out" and the reading work you launched there. You might begin by inviting partners to look over the jotting they had

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done the last time you read, and compare what seemed most important so far, and why (and this is a good time to remind students that this kind of jotting helps a reader remember what he or she was thinking about, as they return to the story). Then you might quickly summarize, focusing not on everything that happened, but on what seems important, why, and how you knew. Then, you might teach your readers that experienced readers expect that troubles often multiply or get worse before something changes, and that readers learn a lot about characters by how they respond to trouble. Invite them to be extra alert, to think and jot, and again, to compare their thinking with a partner. Prompt them to say to each other “what in the text makes you say that?” when they offer opinions, and to back up their ideas with specific evidence.

**“Today I want to teach you that as readers go on in stories, they expect to pay attention to how troubles multiply or get worse, and they learn a lot about characters by how they respond to trouble. Often readers can support ideas about character traits, by looking carefully at the thoughts and actions of characters in moments of trouble and using this text evidence to support their thinking.”**

If you’d like to assess your class as a whole, this would be a good opportunity to ask your readers to jot their response on paper for you to collect. Prompt them to identify a character trait they discern about Francisco or Roberto, and to back their thinking up with evidence from the text so far. Then you can collect the work each reader did that day (with the child’s name on the work) and sort it. You’ll want to ask yourself, “Who is particularly strong at this, and what exactly did those strong readers do?” and “Who seems to struggle with this, and what do those students tend to do when asked to do this work?” Once you begin to identify the qualities that make work effective, you can explicitly teach those qualities. This sort of work needs to accumulate in a student’s reading notebook and be juxtaposed with similar work the student does several weeks later. We also highly encourage you to keep a class reading notebook. Your class notebook can be a co-construction with your students from the class read aloud—full of Post-its, larger entries, flash draft essays, sketches, maps, charts, and so on.

***Bend III, Session Three: Readers develop ideas about multiple characters***

This lesson is an excellent opportunity to teach using inquiry as your method. Invite students to note their big ideas about more than one character, as you revisit the story “Inside Out.” This time, however, give students a copy of the text as you read, and invite them, as you read, to jot in the margins whenever they have a big (or small!) idea about one of the characters—especially about characters other than Francisco. You might begin, by modeling a bit from the start. For example, in the first couple of pages, you might notice how the author shows how Francisco and his brother have different attitudes about school at the start of the story. You might say that one way to pay attention to multiple characters is by noticing when it’s clear that one character or one group is having a different reaction or feeling from other characters or groups. Suggest they underline or star evidence in the text which supports those ideas—but alert them that what you really want to find out, today, as a class, is what’s important to pay attention to when you are developing ideas about multiple characters.

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**“Today I want to teach you that just as most of us have more than one person who is important in our lives, so too in stories more than one character will be significant. Readers, therefore, develop ideas about multiple characters, by paying attention to a lot of small clues in the text.”**

Then, read a bit, give students a chance to jot, read a bit more, and then pause and ask students to work in small groups, with a sheet of paper and a colored pen, to jot their ideas about what’s worth paying attention to when they are coming up with ideas about multiple characters. Tell them you’ll research and collect their ideas as they work (this lets you use some of their language, but also elevate it as you make a ‘master’ chart of their inquiry findings. Don’t give them tons of time—they’ll probably come up with three or four ideas in each group. You can also give the kids some tips, to add to their work. Chances are, you’ll be able to create a chart that looks something like:

**Readers develop ideas about multiple characters by....**

- Noticing when a character or group is separated or isolated from other characters or groups, and reading carefully to consider why this separation is happening
- Studying a character’s actions, especially how he or she responds to trouble
- Getting inside a character’s head and seeing what makes him nervous, afraid, or excited
- Comparing a character’s inner thinking and dialogue, to see if what they think and what they say is sometimes different, or if they tend to be consist
- Studying patterns to distinguish traits from emotions
- Considering the cause of character’s emotional responses
- Noticing how characters react to each other and treat each other
- Studying the choices characters make, and comparing those with other possible choices
- Thinking about lessons characters learn or teach

Of course, you’ll already have these thoughts in mind so you can guide readers to consider them, coach into table work, jot hasty notes, and then “create” a much better one after the lesson, that you revisit the next day.

In your link, you’ll want to remind your readers to keep doing this work in their own stories, and send them off to do that work.

In conferences and small groups, you will likely want to coach in to students’ tracking and analysis of more than one character. When you find students developing innovative systems or insightful ways to think/write about this, be sure to take note and share out as a mid-workshop and/or share.

***Bend III, Session Four: Readers are alert to characters’ inconsistencies—when they act out of character—and they revise their thinking in response to new details***

You’ll likely want to remind readers that that there are times when a character acts out of character and that it is important to be alert to these times—this will often mean that the reader’s initial theory about the character wasn’t complex enough. You might decide to begin a new story from “The Circuit” today - such as “Learning the Game,” modeling some of this work then offering a bit more of the story and inviting students to give it a try either in the part of the text you show, or by thinking across what they’ve learned so far in the two stories.

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**“Today I want to teach you that readers revise their thinking about characters—there are times when a character acts out of character and it is important to be alert to these times. This often means that the reader’s initial theory about the character wasn’t complex enough.”**

You might point out to students that, just as in life people are not totally flawed or purely good, neither are characters. You might start by saying something like, “I want to emphasize that it is important to keep in mind that characters are complicated; they are not just one way. And here’s a key point: To grow nuanced and complex ideas about characters, it helps to think deeply about times when you find yourself reconsidering a character. For example, how you initially thought Francisco mentored himself to Roberto, and then you realized their relationship was more complex—he wants to learn from him, but he also sees the world differently. You might also give kids a tip—that it’s often worth looking at times when a person acts ‘out of character,’ or acts or thinks in different ways in different parts of the story.” Then you might read page 93, where Francisco takes a stand so that Manuelito is allowed to play in the game. Francisco is not letting Carlos run everything here; instead, he stands up to Carlos to make the game more fair. What has driven Francisco to this strong action? Throughout much of what we’ve read he has not been one to seek out conflict...

Continue in your conferences to help students get settled, if possible, into same book partnerships, or at least same series. By now, you know your readers—you’ll have at least a rough idea of their reading levels, and some idea of their habits and interests. Each day, set yourself the goal of getting a few more kids partnered and choosing books together, and definitely make sure that kids have chosen series that make sense for them—a good choice will help them do lots of reading and higher level thinking, and accelerate their movement up levels. If you need to assess a few more kids whose reading levels you are now questioning, tuck in a quick assessment to make sure you don’t have any kids wildly mismatched to books!

When students are thinking about character change, they are apt to begin with simplistic accounts or theories, such as: “He just decided to be different now,” or “I don’t know—she just kind of went crazy.” Small group work and conferences may focus on seeing connections between parts, coaching in with prompts like “Usually changes happen for a reason. What reasons might this character have for changing or responding in a surprising way? What clues did the author give before this moment?” Flow charts can help here, too, starting with a key moment circled at the center and prompting for students, in partnerships or groups or individually, to fill in events or emotions that led to this character action or change, as well as the consequences for that character and others.

***Bend III, Session Five: Readers often compare and contrast how characters are affected by the setting***

It will also be important to coach students to compare and contrast characters within and across stories (especially in a series). You might begin by teaching them to consider how the characters are affected by the setting, asking themselves: are they affected in exactly the same ways? Do they fit in or not in the exactly the same way, or is it slightly different? Do adults and children seem to experience the setting in the same way? Males and females? Do characters fall into any groups? What clues in the text might account for these differences or patterns?

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**“Today I want to teach you that readers often compare and contrast characters. One way to do this work is to compare how characters are affected by the setting, asking: are characters affected exactly the same, or is it slightly different for some? What clues in the text might account for these differences?”**

The main thing you want to be alert for is not just how students respond during your minilesson, but how they do this work in the series books they are reading. You might need to study some of those books, and make sure that kids *can* transfer what you are teaching. If you have some lower level readers, for instance, who are reading *Amber Brown*, the work you are teaching about how the setting affects the characters isn't going to play out in that series. That means you can either make extra sure that these readers are practicing this work repeatedly in your class text, or you might see if, with a guided reading group, you can set them up in a series in that band of text complexity where they can do this work, such as *Dragon Slayer's Academy* or *Spiderwick Chronicles*. Be alert to your higher level readers as well. If they are reading *The Golden Compass*, there will be a host of characters that play important roles. You may want to consider with these readers how they are using their notebook as they read, to track these characters.

For a mid-workshop, you might remind students that readers don't only look at how the setting affects different characters differently. They also look at how different characters respond to trouble—and what troubles characters face. Invite them to think carefully about how they'll use their notebook to compare and contrast characters, and perhaps let them know that the next day, readers will have an opportunity to show off some of their notebook work.

***Bend III, Final Session: Literacy centers, second rotation***

Today, if you choose, you may give students a chance to return to centers, rotating to a center they didn't get to last time.

**Bend IV: Studying Characters to Reveal Bigger Meanings**

This bend focuses on thinking about the big picture of stories and novels: the lessons and themes that character choices and relationships help readers to consider. While getting “big” is the goal here, you will also not want students to forget that these ideas are usually best delivered through “small” details. The third session will bring them full circle back to focusing on those key details that work wonders in stories. For more on close reading to support this, *Falling in Love with Close Reading* (Lehman and Roberts) and *Notice and Note* (Beers and Probst) are excellent professional resources.

To support students in this work, you may introduce a third story, (we recommend “Moving Still,” another from *The Circuit*), but also look back to the stories you've read so far in this unit—all three stories (if you choose this route) will help to bring into focus what Francisco's dilemmas and responses to those dilemmas might have to offer readers. What new thinking does Francisco's story offer about what it means to be young? What it means to be an outsider? What it means to love people who aren't perfect? To want things that seem impossible? These are questions to

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foreground, as they are applicable to all of the novels students will be reading, to any literature they will read in the future, and, perhaps most importantly, to their lives the minute they walk out of your classroom at the end of the period.

If you are teaching the Personal Narrative writing unit of study at the same time as this unit, this will be an excellent time to make explicit connections—invite students to see if any of the life lessons or themes from the literature they’re reading might be possible to pop out in their own life stories. You might also begin to bring some of their narrative writing into reading workshop—as a share, you could ask partners to read one person’s personal narrative draft through the lens of a theme they’ve discussed in their independent reading, or vice versa: to take a theme that is emerging from a sixth grader’s personal narrative and look for traces of it in the novels the partners are reading.

***Bend IV, Session One: Readers consider the lessons that characters learn and teach by the end of the story***

In an interactive read aloud, if you choose this story, you’ll begin this bend by thinking back to what we already know about Francisco and his family from prior read alouds: that they are migrant workers, which means they spend harvest seasons picking fruit and cotton; that this means they have interrupted schooling, entering the school year late and then moving around during the summers; that they are of Mexican heritage; that Francisco values his time in school and dreads the moving and the hard labor of their summer lives. In this story, the family returns to a town they’ve lived in before, and there seems to be some hope of more consistency: Roberto, Francisco’s older brother, in tenth grade, decides he wants to get a job in town so that he could stay there permanently. This hope trickles down to Francisco, who we know would love to have more stability. In the background, we learn from their father that the immigration police (*la migra*) are always a danger—and in fact, this threat becomes real in a devastating conclusion to the entire collection of stories. Interwoven throughout the story is Francisco’s attempt to memorize the first lines of the *Declaration of Independence*, and there is much to be made of the way those lines (“all men are created equal” with “certain inalienable rights”) resonate with this family’s plight.

As you listen to students respond to prompts, you will want to coach them to ask how Francisco helps us see some truths that are close to universal for human beings. Some ideas that you might chart include: people want to feel included; people crave order and predictability. And how Roberto also helps us see other truths: what we want doesn’t always come true in the way we want it to; people don’t judge others fairly; despite working hard, life doesn’t always offer rewards. Charting some of these big ideas will pave the way for students to start to find these same ideas, along with others, in the novels they’re reading as well. Add to your anchor chart as well, as a tool for students.

**“Today I want to teach you that readers pause at the end of story or a book to ask: what life lessons could I learn from having read this book?”**

As students turn to their own novels for reading workshop time, you’ll want to remind students that the various people we meet in our books are not actual people, no matter how real they seem; that characters are deliberately crafted by the author to advance certain ideas. Invite readers to think about which characters are giving them similar ideas, and which characters offer different ideas, perhaps about the same topic. For example, Roberto’s school experience might teach us the

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lesson that school can be a place of isolation and cruelty; whereas Francisco’s experience teaches that school can open new worlds, even to the very marginalized. Whether you chose *The Circuit* or another text to read aloud, the stories the students know already ought to provide plenty of opportunities for such analysis. In *The Circuit*, for instance, Francisco Jimenez has created his cast of characters to stand for so many things: they are strangers in a new land; they are a close-knit family whose bonds pull them through hard times; they work hard but are disappointed by the response of the world around them.

Of course, as students begin this harder thematic work, they may go back to simpler ideas, such as “Francisco learns that fitting in is hard.” While for some students this may be an appropriate goal, for others we will want to go back to the prompts and partnerships that help students to think in more complex ways. Note that if a student tends to simply name a topic, rather than a lesson or theme you may teach students to ask themselves, “What lesson does the character learn about (the topic)?” If a student is beginning to identify a more complex lesson in a story you may teach them to keep an eye out for multiple lessons in a story. And, of course, as students determine themes, you’ll likely continue to need to push them to ground their thinking in text evidence. You may need to help students to see that some details (those that relate to the central problem, for example) are most important in determining the theme. Here are some questions that you might teach students to ask themselves and others:

- What is the character’s central conflict across multiple scenes? How does that relate to theme(s) of this story?
- Which of the details about \_\_\_ seems most important to the reader’s understanding of her? How do those details help convey theme(s)?
- Which detail in this scene best helps to show a theme of this story?
- How do the author’s choices about how different characters respond to conflict teach the reader possible lessons about life?

***Bend IV, Session Two: Characters’ lessons often offer multiple themes in a story***

Importantly, readers can carry theme work across characters, and think about how different characters may be pointing to different themes within the same novelistic world. You might structure this lesson as a guided practice, prompting students to try this out for the whole of the teach/active engagement part of the lesson. You could prompt students to consider a different character in *The Circuit*, for example, Francisco’s father, and think about themes that the father’s perspective offers. Or, to make a more direct transition to their own reading, you could ask them to take on a secondary character’s perspective within the series they’re reading, and think about what different themes come through when considering those perspectives. If students are in clubs now, you might have them sit together during the lesson and have a club turn and talk for the active engagement, taking on one secondary character as a group and pushing themselves to think about life lessons they’ve learned from that character’s point of view. Coach into their using the language of theme: this is a general lesson because... this applies to most people because. Also coach into their contrasting secondary characters’ lessons from the main characters’ lessons: “Francisco’s father offers a more despairing outlook from Francisco himself.”

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**“Today I want to teach you that readers push themselves to think about lessons that other characters may have learned as a way to think about different possible themes that the same story offers.”**

By this point in the unit, students should have read enough within a series to be able to discuss recurrent themes or lessons across characters. These themes will be more cliché and simplistic in books at lower levels—but the students reading these books are not (cliché or simplistic!). For these kids, then, interesting small group work might include some critical literacy work around determining how realistic or meaningful the themes are in their books—or which characters offer the most convincing perspectives. This allows for students reading well below grade level to engage in grade-level complex work (critical evaluation of themes and perspectives) while keeping their eyes moving across pages of text they can read with full comprehension.

***Bend IV, Session Three: Not all details are created equal: Some details pop out themes more eloquently/vibrantly/memorably than others***

You will likely want to circle back to looking closely at details at this point in the unit. It’s easy for students to get caught up in theme work, as it encourages them to connect to real issues and big ideas about life and the world—but the trick is to keep that level of heady engagement, while tethering it back to the specifics of the text. Today’s lesson, then, might focus on hunting for the details that really evoke the themes that are in play in the novel. Remind students that authors are purposeful, and that if readers are considering a theme, it’s likely because there are textual details that point to that theme. Some details do this particularly well, and it’s wise as a reader to notice these and to re-read for them.

For demonstration purposes, you might return to the story “Moving Still,” especially because it is full of such significant details, across many story elements and many different authorial techniques. You could teach by demonstrating a detail that is not so significant, like a piece of dialogue that is just forwarding the plot, and then compare it to what Papa says to his family: “You can’t trust anyone, not even your best friends.” That line is followed by Francisco’s narration - he says, “I had heard those words so many times, I had memorized them.” The author is helping the reader see how important that line is—in case we missed how it could be a theme all by itself. You might then invite students to consider the lines from the Declaration of Independence that Francisco is memorizing, noting again that the author is choosing a famous passage and also making his main character memorize this - all red flags for the reader to take notice! How might those lines teach a thematic lesson? How does that theme connect to all the stories in *The Circuit*? How does it connect to Papa’s theme?

In your link, you’ll likely want to call on all the work that is coming together at the end of this unit: inviting students to read for themes and also hunt for the details that really pop out the themes. You might point back to the anchor chart to show how everything in the unit is supporting this work!

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**“Today I want to teach you that readers notice and re-read for those details that pop out themes. Some details do this more elegantly and vibrantly than others— it’s worth it to look out for them or re-read to find them as a way to fully explore how an author has treated a theme or themes.”**

In your small groups and conferring, this will be a great time to prompt students to more synthesis—really pulling together all they know about the characters and story worlds of their series books, and coming to some conclusions with evidence about themes and perspectives. You might ask students to take you through a tour of their thinking about a character or characters, coaching them to both consider bigger implications for theme while also requiring details at the level of a sentence or paragraph as evidence.

A share might introduce the final project that will take place across the last couple of days, prompting partnerships or clubs to decide on the characters and themes that most intrigued them. The project (described below) will involve synthesizing their best thinking and their most convincing evidence into a presentation for another partnership or club, popping out the themes and the characters’ journeys with the most fascinating and strongest evidence from across the series.

***Bend IV, Sessions Four and Five:***

On this day or days (you may decide to make this a bigger or smaller project based on your schedule and how much you want students to take on), you could invite students to plan for a partnership or group presentation to another partnership or group. This will pull together the work of the unit. The group will need to decide on key points that they want to share with an audience: they at minimum should present:

- A central character’s key traits and journey (including challenges, conflicts, and changes)
- More than one theme
- How that theme or themes was/were best popped out across characters and across the series

Rather than over-scaffolding with graphic organizers, if students are working in partnerships and groups, let them decide how they will present, including visuals, charts or diagrams, the staging or acting out of certain scenes, and popping out quotes from the book for their audience. This is not meant to be a weeks-long plan (though of course it could turn into that, so be clear that this is not that!), but rather an exercise in pulling their best thinking together and communicating that to an audience in the way they choose. They should plan on at most a 7-10 minute presentation.

You will want to have some materials ready for them, including blank paper and pens for creating visuals, lined paper for preparing their spoken parts, etc. Students may want to get more creative and bring in additional media—that will be up to you to monitor and decide if and how much of it you can support with your school’s technology, or if and how much you will allow students to bring in on their own.

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Your work will be to coach into students' planning, making sure that they are planning for a role for each participant, that they are considering an audience who may not know the series at all, and that they are focusing on the drivers of the task: character and theme analysis through examining story elements and key details.

**“Today I want to teach you that readers present their thinking to an audience, sharing their theories about the world of a series by explaining how key details and story elements developed complex characters and universal themes.”**

***Bend IV, Final Session: Literacy centers, third rotation***

This may be a day when you return to centers again. You might invite students to quickly review the logistics, expectations, and the centers themselves.

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**Some Predictable Early Conferences and Small Groups**

***Predictable conference/small group for readers who need to choose lower level books:***

You might say: *You know, I get what you're saying about some books feel a bit young for you. Because students can feel so alone here, this is the one time it's okay to tell a little bit of a lie. When I was a kid, I struggled with reading because I just hadn't practiced at it yet. I was upset that some friends were reading harder books that looked cooler. For a few weeks, to be honest, it kind of stunk. But the thing is that by reading a lot, I got much better pretty fast. So that's what you're up against right now. If you want, we can do some reading after school so you can catch up faster—and I can tell you're going to grow really quickly if you apply yourself.*

“I get what you're saying about wanting to read \_\_\_\_\_ book. You're right too; by the way, it's amazing. You will read it, but here's why I want you to wait. Since this isn't your level yet, you won't like it even close to as much as you will like it if you try in about a month or two (if you read a ton between now and then!). It will be better if we read a few books like \_\_\_\_\_, which will be challenging for you, but with work, they are books you can understand really deeply, *because reading those books with all your brain power turned onto high will actually get you to the level you need to be on.*”

In extremely limited cases, we've seen teachers privately make deals with students who are currently on a low reading levels to tackle a very tough book with the understanding that the child will read it with someone (probably at home) or will follow along with a book on tape, even if just for the first few chapters (you can even make that book on tape, or recruit another student to do so.) This only occurs when a student is particularly excited by a book and you desperately want to support that enthusiasm. This deal is made knowing that that book probably won't make the child into a better reader—only reading as much as humanly possible, books at the reader's instructional level (the highest level that a student can read with fluency, comprehension, and 95% accuracy) can do that. Giving a student access to that super-challenging book, however, can support enthusiasm, and enthusiasm is nothing to scoff at. Don't underestimate how proud a child can be to discuss a complex text, blasting past all labels of being a “struggling reader.” We generally recommend if students are tackling books that you know are too hard for them that in addition to arranging for some support, it is wise to set a finishing-date, as this makes sense for a week, not for a month. We suggest that if you do broker a deal with individual kids to yes, read a book that is a real stretch that it is best to keep this quiet or half the class will propose such deals. The far better way to give kids access to grade level complex texts is by rallying them to work like the dickens so they zoom forward in reading levels, getting to a place where they can actually handle those texts.

***Predictable conference to build reading identities:***

On that first day, if you set students up to talk about favorite titles, you can use the information you learn to help students develop identities as readers. You can immediately start recommending books which will help them build what Alfred Tatum called “textual lineages.” The concept behind this is that books are related to each other—by topic, by author, by genre—and when students read books that tie together and that are related to the reader, the reading is much more meaningful.

We recommend you try out saying things like this to readers. *Oh, you like that whale fact. Did you*

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*know that the author, Seymour Simon has written over 200 books on animals?! You should check them out! I was reading this one the other day on sharks that said the ancestors of great white sharks were almost 8 times bigger than the sharks are today. That's terrifying. Maybe you can help me choose more books like these to order from Donors Choose, or we can order some used books.*

Say that sort of thing loudly enough that other kids hear you. You are trying to create a buzz around reading. You want your hesitant readers to look around and think "Geez, everyone else seems to like this reading thing. I'll give it a shot." If you believe this will work, it will work.

*To another student, you might say, "Oh, I love that Hatchet plane crash book also! There are actually 4 different books in that series, they are all awesome! You should also check out Touching Spirit Bear. The story is similar, but he has been put in the woods to fend for himself because of his terrible behavior, then he is attacked in the wilderness and has to change his ways or die. It's unbelievable. Maybe we can get a copy from Scholastic magazine, they are super cheap!*

*Or, to another, Oh, you thought the Hamster squeaking was funny? Have you ever read Diary of a Wimpy Kid? How about Dork Diaries? Did you know you can order them for only \$1.00 on amazon.com!? I swear! It is totally cool.*

*Or, to another, That Nightjohn book is historical fiction but even though it is fiction, it teaches about slavery. Do you want to look up some other historical fiction books, 'cause I can probably track some down for you. You must be a historical fiction person.*

Note that later on in this unit, you will empower kids by putting them in charge of finding more books that they might like—as we know all people, and especially kids, appreciate things more that they have earned themselves. We will show them how to research great books on amazon, join Goodreads.com (a social network devoted to a love of reading), bring in books from home for each other, submit Donors Choose grants together, etc.

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Social Issues Book Clubs: Developing Critical Literacies

## Social Issues Book Clubs: Developing Critical Literacies

November - December

### Welcome to the Unit

At this point in the year, your students have begun to build a solid foundation for their reading work to come. They have been reading with high volume and engagement and they have studied the nuances of characters across books. Now is the time to give them a practical introduction to critical literacy, in this case focusing on reading to identify and study the social issues that are woven into the fabric of middle grade and young adult fiction, to consider how power, perspective, and positioning help to shape narratives' themes, and to learn how reading across genres can also help to develop a more researched view of an issue in society.

This unit works alongside (or ahead of) the writing unit *Literary Essays: From Character to Compare Contrast*. As such, the work you do here with your students will support the writing work that they will be doing in Writing Workshop. While your class will not necessarily be focusing on social issues in their essays, reading carefully to analyze the texts they may use for their essays will help them to focus more quickly on their writing work as they begin that unit.

Energy and engagement will increase exponentially in this unit if you are able to set your class up into same title book clubs. There is after all nothing an adolescent wants to do more than talk, even if their first choice would not *always* be to talk about books. In this unit we suggest beginning with short stories—first so that your students can study a whole text rather soon in the unit, and secondly so that they may read and analyze the stories that they will write about in the Literary Essay unit. Afterwards, we suggest getting your students into novels—again of their choosing and in clubs—so that they may work within a longer text while keeping up their reading volume. You will want to be sure that your students are reading as much as possible.

As you prepare, you will undoubtedly find it helpful to turn to Randy and Katherine Bomer's *For A Better World: Reading and Writing for Social Action*. You might also want to read Stephanie Jones's *Girls, Social Class and Literacy*, and Alfred Tatum's *Reading for Their Life*. This unit also draws from the work of the 5th Grade Units of Study in Reading book *Interpretation Book Clubs: Analyzing Themes*, by Lucy Calkins and Alexandra Marron.

Though published in the fifth grade series, many sixth grade teachers will find this a helpful resource to use as well.

As you sit down to plan this unit, you may wonder about the term "social issue." What is it, exactly? At a simplistic level, the term 'social issues' refer to issues that affect groups of people, not just the one character. A character may worry that she needs to wear her big sister's hand-me-down clothes. That is a personal struggle. But we can also think about her unique problem as a problem that applies to lots of people—like not having enough money, or fitting in—that is, as a social issue. Lots of people worry about money, and about peer pressure, so those are social issues. Poverty is a social issue, and so can be the fear that one's family is falling apart. Homelessness, joblessness, bullying, racism, and bias against old people are also examples of social issues. It is helpful for kids to see that by reading, we can watch characters dealing with social issues and we can learn to deal

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with those issues (and other issues) from books. This unit can make each child feel less alone. It can also give kids reasons to read (Alfred Tatum says that particularly for disenfranchised or reluctant readers to keep reading, the curriculum has to answer the question, “How can I live my life every day?”). You may also decide that you want to expand the notion of social issues, and look at social norms, and discourse—the way in which our everyday understanding of rules and regulations around, for instance, gender, are structured by language, by institutions, and by texts.

Critical literacy, too, is a term that might need some clarification. James Gee (1989) defines critical literacy as “socially-perceptive literacy” and, as such, you will ask your sixth graders to see that no text is neutral, to question what is presented as natural and to read against the grain— nothing will be taken at face value. This unit will transform them as thinkers and will position them, as Paulo Freire (1983) describes, to read the word and the world from a critical stance.

This unit is unabashedly aimed at teaching toward social justice. Get ready for it by wearing your own passions on your sleeve. All of us know that sometimes, when we read a wonderful book, we find ourselves welling up with a passionate commitment to everything we believe. Stories remind us that we care very much about justice and injustice, and about living lives of meaning and significance. You will be teaching children to take their books and their lives seriously. You’ll need to think, as you prepare, about what books have affected *you*—the choices you make, what kind of person you try to be, the issues you care about—so that you can talk about these books and your life with your students. Having students examine the dynamics of the world around them is one of the many focal points of the Common Core State Standards. Students in middle school are expected to be able to analyze, evaluate, and differentiate sources to help them understand what is going on in the world. When reading, students need to be able to gain knowledge from challenging texts that often make extensive use of elaborate diagrams and data to convey information and illustrate concepts. In short, students need to gain insight from texts that will help them to understand complex situations in the world.

## Overview

**Essential Question:** *How can we read to be alert to social issues and analyze how authors develop perspectives and power dynamics in stories and other texts?*

- **Bend I: Reading thoughtfully to deepen interpretation**  
*How are social issues developed and dealt with in texts? How can I deepen my interpretation of texts by considering social issues, theme, and perspective?*
- **Bend II: Reading critically for power, perspective, and positioning**  
*How can I notice power, perspective, and stereotyping in texts that I read? How can I use my noticings to challenge texts rather than taking them at face value?*
- **Bend III: Reading to learn how authors craft stories to convey messages**  
*How can I develop ideas not just about themes of texts but also about how those messages are communicated through authorial decisions?*

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- **Bend IV: Reading across texts and genres to compare ideas and revise understandings**

*How can comparing texts in different genres affect our understanding? How does learning more about the real life implications of a social issue affect our understand of the texts we read and the lives we lead?*

**Anchor Texts:**

- “Raymond’s Run,” by Toni Cade Bambara, from [America Street, A Multicultural Anthology of Stories](#) edited by Anne Mazer.
- “Tied to Zelda” by David Rice, from [Tripping Over the Lunch Lady](#) edited by Nancy Mercado
- “Everything Will Be Okay” by James Howe
- A nonfiction article that relates to your critical lens

## Getting Ready

For the first bend of this unit, we suggest having your class get into groups or clubs reading the same short stories, stories they have had the chance to choose based on their interest and approximate reading levels. Some titles we have used, and that your class may then carry into their essay work, include “Thank You Ma’am” by Langston Hughes, “Everything Will Be Okay” by James Howe (the mentor text for the Personal Narrative unit), “Your Move” by Eve Bunting, and “The Necklace” by Guy Maupassant. If you’re looking for short story collections from which to pull stories, the [Guys Read](#) series (edited by Jon Scieszka) are great choices, as are [Baseball in April](#) by Gary Soto and [Every Living Thing](#) by Cynthia Rylant. Gather copies of these stories, or any others that you think would work for your students and this unit, and allow groups of similarly leveled kids to choose which story they would most want to read. By giving students appropriate choices, you engage them more with the work ahead. This short story work could support students’ literary essay writing. If you are teaching *The Literary Essay: From Character to Compare/Contrast* in writing workshop, you could do so alongside this reading unit, or you could teach bend one in reading, then move to teach the first bend of the writing unit, then teach bend two of reading, etc.

For the second bend of the unit, you will want your clubs to begin a novel they will read together. Some titles might include: [Rules](#), by Cynthia Lord, [Counting by Sevens](#), by Holly Sloan, [The Misfits](#) by James Howe, [Wonder](#) by RJ Palachio, [Out of My Mind](#) by Sharon Draper, [Fish in a Tree](#) by Lynda Mullaly Hunt, [After Tupac and D Foster](#) by Jacqueline Woodson, [The Crossover](#) by Kwame Alexander. Again, appropriate choice will be paramount here. For this unit, students may be reading any kind of novel to think about social issues: historical fiction novels, fantasy novels, adventure fiction—most literature that features characters will also present social issues to ponder.

In addition, the latter part of this unit teaches students to look across genres to learn more about the social issues in their novels, so you will need to have some poetry as well as nonfiction texts about common social issues available, and decide how you will allow for students to research to learn more about those issues. Have on hand copies of magazines such as *Junior Scholastic*, *Muse*, *Time for Kids*, and *New Moon*. In addition, plan for the technology that you have available to you - if you need to reserve the computer room for students to be able to get online and research, make that reservation in advance. If you need to get the laptop cart, make that reservation. Do some

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preliminary research yourself to identify reliable sources where students can look up articles about the social issues they will be researching. We recommend that your school subscribe to [teenhealthandwellness.com](http://teenhealthandwellness.com), a well-researched site that features articles verified by doctors about teen health and wellness issues. Search for other reputable sites that offer articles about issues such as racism, sexism, peer pressure, and others. In addition, you may look to Common Sense Media's work for educators for tips on how to teach students to research responsibly and effectively, if you want to make research a bigger part of the last part of this unit. See <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/scope-and-sequence>

In order for students to be able to hit the ground reading in session one, any organizational work—giving them choices for titles and getting the actual books in hand—should be done before the kickoff to the unit.

***If you wish, prepare for literary centers***

Centers have figured prominently in the RWP's work around content area, as well as during test prep. Centers are a powerful method of instruction which allows for intensive content and skill knowledge while also maximizing student collaboration and independence. Typically, centers are organized in baskets or some other receptacle (in some cases, this might be a cluster of laptops or a desktop computer), spread around the room. Students go to a center with a small group of other students. At each center there is a task card, which lets students know the work they can do at that center. Any additional materials are also provided. Students typically rotate through centers so that by the end of a set time period (a few weeks, a few days of a period) they will have visited most if not all of the centers.

Centers are a highly engaging way to dump a lot of content or skill knowledge in a short amount of time, while also freeing the teacher up to do focused small group work or coaching into the content. For this unit we are imagining you could use centers as a method for helping students to learn about and fantasy literary terms and traditions.

You'll find examples of centers, some of which will work for this unit, on the thumb drive for curricular materials, and also on Treasure Chest, available to schools that contract with TCRWP throughout the year. Social issues can be a great subject for centers work—the centers could provide students opportunities to explore issues across digital, nonfiction, poetry and fictional texts in short, intense, student-led experiences. If you develop additional centers and are willing to share, send them to [audra@readingandwritingproject.com](mailto:audra@readingandwritingproject.com).

## Assessment

Given where you are in the year, it's likely that your assessments will be brief and informal for the most part. Of course above all you will not want to lose sight of your readers—you will want to be clear that their reading lives must continue, that they must write about their thinking as they read from time to time (and in whatever way you have agreed makes sense). For the students about whom you worry, you will want to stay close to them during this unit, being sure to help motivate both their reading volume as well as their depth of thinking as they read.

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Most likely your main source of assessment during this unit will be the conferences and small groups that you hold with your students. Of course, in many ways this is the most meaningful assessment for you and your students at any point during the year. Check in with what work they are carrying forward with them as the year progresses—they have now had three units in reading workshop—all of which they could employ at different points in this unit. You will want to ensure that they are doing so - or at least that they have in mind that they should be trying to do so as they read. You will also want to be clear during your conferences that the work of the unit should be on the forefront of their minds as they read and talk about the social issues in their books. These conversations with students should serve to help you set goals with them for the unit. Speak these goals plainly to your students and make sure that you all agree. Then, as the unit progresses, check in on how they are doing with the work. This way your conferences and small groups can serve to act as a strong assessment for growth across this unit of study.

Similarly, you can use the writing about reading your students produce as powerful artifacts of what they are learning in your classroom. If you have your students writing their thinking on sticky notes, you can always collect a sample set of their best thinking on day one of the social issues unit. That way, you can compare their work at the start of the unit to their work as the unit progresses. Have students share with you what they are writing, collect their notebooks at least once, and you will have a good sense of how deeply they are taking in the work. Because of the sheer amount of students you teach, however, you also might want to spend some time helping your students to self-assess—to reflect on their work and how they are growing as readers during the unit.

The combination of thoughtful conferences, plentiful writing about reading and reflective goal setting should prove to be enough to help you answer that nagging question at the end of your unit of study: “What did my kids learn from this work?”

You will want to think about how students will share their work at the end of the unit. Though your students will likely be producing several literary essays during this time, which of course will show off some of their newly strengthened reading prowess, many teachers find it builds excitement and energy when they make it a point to end reading units with a bang, as well. This could be as simple as an in-class gallery walk to show off the best work clubs have done, or as elaborate as an opportunity for clubs to present their understandings of how social issues are presented in literature to an interested audience - parents, schoolmates, or others in the community. If you're able to make this work, many kids are savvy enough with setting up blogs, tumblrs, and wiki pages that they could also share their thinking that way, reaching a wider audience.

## Bend I: Reading Thoughtfully to Deepen Interpretation

***Anchor Text: “Raymond’s Run” by Toni Cade Bambara***

### ***Bend I, Session One: Anchor experience***

Today, you might begin the unit with a read aloud that helps students identify the issues that hide within the pages of books they read. Show them that readers notice when characters are dealing with problems that are bigger than themselves—problems that have to do with groups of people and uneven power relationships. These issues in literature are mirrors of issues in the world:

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readers think deeply about how characters deal with power issues as a way to think through the same issues in real life. Today you will teach students that it almost always pays off to think about power when reading literature: who has power, who doesn't? When does power shift in texts? Who is able to change their circumstances and who is not? This work will support students in using the lens of an issue to begin to interpret in more thoughtful ways right away in the unit.

**“Today I want to teach you that readers notice when characters are dealing with problems that are bigger than themselves—problems that have to do with groups of people and uneven power relationships. These issues in literature are mirrors of issues in the world: readers think deeply about how characters deal with these issues as a way to think through the same issues in real life.”**

We suggest using the story “Raymond’s Run” by Toni Cade Bambara for this bend of the unit. If you are teaching the Literary Essay writing unit of study simultaneously, the work you do in reading this story will support the work you do with this text as a writer. Also, this story is one a good one to model how a deeper dive into a text can reveal even more interesting ideas. The narrator has a strong personality and actively dislikes or is afraid of pretty much everything except running. But if you model careful reading, you can get the students to see more about Squeaky.

Stop early to model thinking through what we know about Squeaky’s attitude towards the other girls in her neighborhood. A lot of her attitude comes from the fact that she is defensive about being the best, and is sort of obsessed with not getting hurt first. So right away, we can tell that competition is an issue here—and that for Squeaky, she feels insecure in herself and so needs to win everything in order to feel ok. This could lead us to think that one main issue in this story is that “competitions can get people to feel inferior or superior to others.”

Read on, and stop after the scene where Squeaky and the girls confront each other on the street. Even though Squeaky is telling us the story, we should be aware that the author is trying to show us more about Squeaky and the other girls than she is letting on. For example it seems like one of the girls tries to be almost nice, and Squeaky just jumps down her throat! We watch as Squeaky escalates the situation, and even though we get her perspective, we can also see how others might see her—an angry, rude, almost violent girl who assumes everyone is against her. But we can also look for a deeper sense of Squeaky’s perspective—that she wants to protect her brother Raymond, who is differently abled and apparently often bullied for this difference. You might pause to think with your students, “So, I am wondering here if there is anything going on for Squeaky that is about power, or things that are unfair in her society and community.” Have students turn and talk and listen for kids who notice that some of her feelings and behaviors are due to a systemic problem: the way people treat differently-abled people, and how this affects family members. You may find here that some kids struggle to universalize in this way—they stay rooted to the specific circumstances of Squeaky and her story. If this is the case, prompt students to think in terms of the social issues within the story by saying, “Sometimes when we try to find the social issues within a text, we can ask ourselves if a character’s problems have anything to do with the group that they belong to. Like, we can wonder if what is happening to them has anything to do with the fact that they are a girl or a boy, or rich or poor, or black or white. This can help us to find social issues, not just personal problems.”

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Keep reading, pausing at critical scenes, like when Squeaky is getting ready to run the race, her conversation with Mr. Parker, and then the events of the race itself, being sure to repeat this work of looking closely at everyone’s perspective in the scene, and using that sharpened focus to describe ideas about the social issues you see in the text.

After you have finished the read aloud work, you can broaden your scope of what social issues the class may look for in their own texts. Say to your class, “So if we understand now that social issues are usually issues that involve what group of people you belong to, and some unfair power dynamics because of that identity, let’s think for a moment about other texts we have read where it seems unfair that something is happening to a character just because of who they are? Like, I am thinking of “Everything Will Be Okay,” which we read earlier this year, and how it seems like the narrator is expected to just be tough and even cruel, just because he is a boy. See how that feels like a social issue? That you have to be a certain way because you are a certain thing? Take a minute with your partner and see if you can come up with some other social issues you have seen in books or in your life.” Have students talk with their partners to brainstorm issues that recur in the literature they’ve read, and in their own lives. Be sure that you are charting issues that come from unfair treatment and power inequalities, NOT personal obstacles that some people face due to their own circumstances. So for example, “Being an immigrant” is not a social issue, it is a personal circumstance. “Marginalization of immigrants in society” is a social issue because there is a power imbalance involved, and it affects groups of people. You don’t want to add to the personal challenges that your students face by naming their personal hurdles as “social issues.” If you hear students sliding into claiming that social facts are social issues, you could teach them about how “isms” are a way into social issues— “race” is not a social issue, but “racism” is. Having a disability is not a social issue, but “ableism,” or prejudice against the disabled, is.

Save some time - at least 15 minutes - at the end of this session for students to immediately move to begin their books. Right away, push them to read with social issues in mind.

***Bend I, Session Two: Interpreting texts through the lens of social issues***

On the second day of the unit, teach students that once they have an idea for what some of the social issues are in a text, their interpretations of texts can get stronger by thinking about what it is that the author might be saying about those issues. Teach your middle-schoolers that when we read with a lens of social issues, first we read for the story, for what happens, and then we read asking, “What does this story teach us about \_\_\_ [homelessness, bullying, losing someone, and so on]?” Students might ask such questions as: “Which issues seem important in this story? What are the characters’ reactions to these issues? How do the characters deal with these issues? What perspective does each character have on this issue? If the perspective is different, what explains the difference?” Have these questions up on a piece of chart paper, and then model how you think them through off of the story “Raymond’s Run.”

Teach your class that as social issue readers they should be able to read with these skills in mind, identifying social issues and scenes where they arise and then reading more closely to examine the points of view or moments of change in the text around those issues. For example, in Raymond’s Run, you could demonstrate how once I know I am reading with the lens of ableism as a social issue in the text, I look for scenes that seem to hold that issue—critical scenes—and then double down on my reading work on these scenes. Like in the scene where Raymond runs apace with Squeaky in the race, we can examine the points of view in the text, seeing that Squeaky’s is changing here, that all

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of a sudden she sees her brother—and everyone else—as having something to offer, not just demand of her. Her love for her brother comes through—and because she can feel the love for Raymond she can also—just for a moment—feel a bit of affection for Gretchen as well. Her point of view changes at the moment that she sees her brother not for what he isn't—but for what he is. This can teach us that when dealing with ableism it is too easy to see differently abled people as a burden or as a list of can't, but that the only way to live a rich and full life is to change our tune and to see everyone as having lessons to teach us.

You will want to set clubs up to read purposefully by making sure that clubs have a chance to make a plan before they dive into their reading. This might include naming a social issue they are starting to notice and want to study, and perhaps quickly checking in on what students agreed to read for homework.

In general, you will want to push your class to get as many thoughts about their reading down in a notebook or on sticky notes as they can. Sometimes we can help students set goals for their writing about reading work by simply asking them how many times they feel they should stop during the time allotted for reading that day and night. For example if they have 25 minutes to read that day, many students will say that jotting three ideas down—either as they read or afterwards would work. This way, your students make a bargain with themselves about the volume of writing about reading work they are ready to undertake. In any case, as students work and you confer, there should be an air of business in the room, a sense of urgency. If there isn't, if instead your class is lounging in their books like it is summer vacation, you might want to redirect their attention a bit.

**“Today I want to teach you that when we read to think about social issues, first we read for the story, for what happens, and then we read asking, “What does this story teach us about \_\_\_ [homelessness, bullying, losing someone, and so on]?”**

As a mid-workshop interruption, teach your students to get ready to talk to their book clubs by putting Post-its on moments when they see their characters first facing the issue, then struggling with the issue, then overcoming or not overcoming the issue. This integration, interpretation, and critique are cornerstones of the Common Core State Standards as well as the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). More specifically, the Common Core calls upon students to “determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details” (RL 6.2). It is the ‘how’ that is important in this textual analysis. Identifying themes is not the challenging work. Analyzing how these themes are developed across texts is challenging, and fascinating.

For a share at the end of this session, move students into their club formations. The goal for their conversation is to talk about the issue they are studying and to give evidence to their club from their reading about how this issue affects the characters. You may provide some sentence starters such as: “This issue first shows up when \_\_\_\_\_ says \_\_\_\_\_. This causes the character to feel \_\_\_\_\_.” Or “There is a character in my book who is really affected by this issue when \_\_\_\_\_. On page \_\_\_\_\_ it describes her this way:...”

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***Bend I, Session Three: Interpreting texts by studying themes in the text***

Many, if not all, of your students will have already learned how to think, write, and talk about themes in stories, and one strategy they may have learned to use is to name a problem faced by a character and then ask “What lessons does the character learn from that problem?” or “What might the author want me to know about that problem or issue?” They will also do similar work in the writing unit, *The Literary Essay*, when they tackle theme-based literary essays. If you notice students are good at this already, you might instead teach your students a strategy for making their theme ideas more compelling, or more universal, or teach a different way to get to a theme, like focusing on turning points. However, since finding and writing about themes in texts is such an important reading skill, it may feel more helpful to still teach this strategy, knowing that while it may feel familiar, giving kids multiple tries at a strategy, with feedback, can be an incredibly powerful teaching move. Know, also, that while there are many ways for readers to get at theme, thinking about times of trouble is a generative one because challenges and how people solve them often reveal something about the character as well as about the messages that an author had in mind.

**“Today I want to remind you that thinking thematically is a powerful way to interpret a text. One way to do this is to name a problem a character faces, and then ask “What lessons does the character learn from that problem?” or “What might the author want me to know about that problem/issue?”**

You might model this by asking students to talk with their partners, listing some of the problems or issues that Squeaky faces in the story. You can jot or name a few of the problems you hear, choose one, and then model asking yourself the questions in the teaching point — “What lessons does the character learn from that problem?” and “What might the author want me to know about that problem or issue?” You could then ask students to consider a second problem for active engagement. If you know that your students have some facility with thinking about themes in this way, you could instead opt to make this a guided practice lesson, replacing the teacher modeling with more chances for kids to talk with their partners and get feedback.

Push kids, as you listen to them in the minilesson and confer, to speak in the universal rather than the particulars of the story. If students struggle with this, you might offer sentence starters like “Sometimes in life...” Be sure not to overemphasize prompts and sentence starters, so that students see them as the helpful scaffolds they are, not as permanent fixtures of their theme work. You may also find students writing or talking about a single word topic, rather than an idea, and you might push these kids to continue asking themselves “What does the story teach about the topic?” until they reach an idea rather than a word. You also might find students who tend to use clichés as their themes; while some students are ready to be pushed past this, for others, this may be fine for now. Finally, you will also want to encourage students to remember that stories hold multiple themes, and to keep thinking instead of being satisfied with their first thought.

***Bend I, Session Four: Interpreting texts through the lens of perspective, thinking about how meaning would be different if the perspective were different***

In this session, we suggest you teach students to explore stories’ meanings by imagining alternatives. You might conduct this session by returning to your anchor text and engaging

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students in retelling snippets of the story from a different perspective, then using that experience to contrast the message in the retold version with the original message. In doing this, in noticing these contrasts and reflecting on why an author privileges the perspective he or she does, readers can come to a stronger understanding of the messages that the author is trying to convey.

You might begin by telling students: “Perspectives have power. You know that different perspectives tell different stories. Today we’ll step into the shoes of other characters, pretend that the story is told from their point of view, and see how the meaning of the story changes.”

**“Today I want to teach you that another way that critical readers can analyze messages in a text is to consider how the meaning would be different if the story was told from a different perspective. Readers can do this by retelling key scenes from a different perspective, seeing what that new perspective conveys that the original doesn’t, and then using that information to understand the story’s message better”**

Demonstrate with a scene from “Raymond’s Run”—the scene where Squeaky confronts Gretchen, Rosie, and Mary Louise on the sidewalk will work well. You might reread the scene, asking students to note when they see different perspectives, even when those perspectives are not developed or don’t get much time in the scene. In this scene, there’s Squeaky’s perspective as well as Gretchen’s, Rosie’s, Mary Louise’s, and Raymond’s. Follow the steps in your teaching point — retell the scene from another perspective, see what the new perspective reveals, then think about the message conveyed in the original story.

Your demonstration might sound like: “First I’ll think about the point of view the author chose. From Squeaky’s perspective we see what Squeaky sees; we see protectiveness and the need to keep up a reputation, and we hear her thinking about how tough Gretchen wants to seem. Next I’ll choose an alternative perspective that the author could have chosen — for example, the author could have chosen to tell this scene from Gretchen’s perspective. I’m going to retell this scene from that perspective, to see how it might be different. I know that Gretchen probably saw it differently. I imagine she was also thinking about whether they would have a fight, and probably also thinking about her reputation. But she didn’t actually say anything herself — maybe she didn’t actually want to fight, or didn’t want her friends to make comments to Raymond. Maybe she felt like Squeaky was being unnecessarily aggressive.”

You might continue, “OK, so now I need to think about the differences — what does this retell convey that the original doesn’t? And then, what message is the original story conveying? Let’s see, from Gretchen’s perspective, we maybe could learn how she gets along with Mary Louise and Rosie, or why she has been hanging out with them. We could maybe learn how she wanted the encounter with Squeaky to go. But we WOULDN’T know some things, too — and now I’m realizing that those things are really important to the message. Like, we wouldn’t know how Squeaky feels she has to be so protective of herself and Raymond. We wouldn’t know how she thought about avoiding the girls but steeled herself to face the confrontation. Did you see how I was able to think about the perspective the author chose, the perspectives she could have chosen, and then how that reveals more about the messages in the story?”

During the active engagement, ask students to pick another perspective and think through the scene again from the new perspective. As students talk, voice over reminders about getting into

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the shoes of the character and listen for students who are having difficulty with this work. You might notice these students oversimplifying the other perspectives or providing simplistic responses when talking about what the new story reveals or leaves out. If this is the case, you might nudge them to retell with more detail, using their narrative skill, or remind their partner to ask for elaboration to an idea. You may also need to structure this active engagement as a “double active engagement”, pausing all students part way through to nudge them to move from retelling the scene from another perspective to considering the question of what messages are conveyed. You could nudge them with prompting phrases like “What wouldn’t we know...?” “Maybe...”

As always, as you send students off to read, keep in the forefront of students’ minds that they have a whole repertoire of ways to think deeply about what they’re reading, not just this one. Keep an eye out also for students who are doing a great job with a strategy so you can highlight their work.

***Bend I, Session Five: Interpretive readers pay attention to the quality of their writing about reading and study other ways of responding.***

Keeping reading notebooks, and reflecting on them, won’t be new to your students, and this session will give you an opportunity to refresh that instruction and bring it back into play in your classroom. Of course, you might also choose to use this time to teach a minilesson that addresses a skill you’ve observed that your particular students need. But if you opt to teach this session instead, you might gather examples from your students that would be worth studying and perhaps imitating. Keep an eye out in particular for notebook entries that take a straightforward idea and extend on it in particularly effective ways. You could certainly also create some exemplar notebook entries to support this work. You then might demonstrate how you study someone else’s notebook entry asking yourself what the thinking is that the other reader is doing and how they expressed that thinking. During the active engagement you might ask students to study another notebook entry with their partners, or to have several different notebook entries available so different clubs or partnerships have different entries to look at. If you circulate quickly and listen while students are talking, you can jot a rapid list of “Types of Thinking and Jotting We Could Try” that you can share with students.

**“Today I want to teach you that interpretive readers pause to reflect on how they are writing about their reading and thinking. They study other ways of responding in order to find new ways to push their thinking.”**

Some teachers find that conducting a quick gallery walk as a mid-workshop interruption can build motivation and energy, filling students with the desire to go do the cool thing they spotted a classmate trying. This also puts a bit of pressure on students to have something interesting to show off, again relying on the social dynamics in your classroom to keep kids working and engaged.

Throughout this bend, you will want to look for signs of trouble, such as students who are continuing to simply name issues or instances of power in a text, without proceeding to reflect on the themes and messages being conveyed. If this is the case, you could teach students some additional ways to reflect on the message, such as noticing when a character thinks one thing and does a different thing, and using that to help determine the message that the author wants to convey.

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Additionally, throughout this bend you will want to be on the lookout for students who may be struggling with aspects of the unit so far. Look for kids first and foremost who have a tough time naming issues in the stories they are reading. Check in first on the reading levels of these books to be sure that, in fact, the students in question can read with fluency the books they are holding. We believe that nine times out of ten you will find that it is not that the student is unable to name a social issue in a text; they are just grappling so mightily with the language and comprehension in the tough text they are holding that there is little cognitive room for interpretation of social issues. You have a choice to make if you find this to be the case. You will either want to help that student find a book where they can more easily do the work of the unit—in most cases an easier text—or you will want to give them the strategies and supports that they may need in order to do this work in that difficult text. We know, for example, that if we want to do deeper work on tougher texts, then we are going to have to read and reread repeatedly to keep adding layers to our thinking. We might also have to do some research, to find companion texts that might help them understand the gist, and to use partners and clubs to help clarify confusing parts. When and if this work feels viable we have found it to also be invaluable—these are skills that will benefit kids for years to come. But if you are concerned that this will mean the student is going to linger in this book for too long, or if the scaffolds don't seem clear, you might opt instead to help them into an book that is closer to their level (not just any “easy” book of course—the level will be dependent on what level the student will read with some but not too many challenges).

***Bend I, Session Six: Literary Centers***

Today you may decide to introduce literary centers, as a way to invite readers to practice analysis in a different, more entertaining, more student-led structure. Some centers for Social Issues Book Clubs might include: watching short films (Pixar shorts are great, or check out award-winning animated shorts) through the lens of any of the lessons taught already and practicing that work again; Reading some nonfiction articles about power and the effects of power imbalances on social groups; artwork that highlights perspective and that might help kids grasp that concept, which is often easier to think about in visual art..

This is a placeholder—you'll decide if now is the time for this, with kids visiting just one center today, and rotating to different ones in future sessions, or if you save Centers for later in the unit, and have kids rotate through all of them in a single, longer time frame. Of course, you may decide not to do this, and to instead incorporate this kind of work into small groups that you lead. Up to you!

You will likely want to have the centers already organized and placed around the room. Usually when teachers introduce centers, they report the best success when students are gathered all in one spot (like the meeting area), and the teacher moves from center to center, ala Vanna White, as you talk, letting the students look to see the location and materials of each center.

Depending on your students and their experiences with centers, you might want to set up a few simple guidelines. One school had these written on a chart:

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1. Go to center with your group and sign in
2. Read the task card
3. Complete a task
4. Put materials back the way you found them
5. Apply what you learned with your independent reading book right away

You might want students to be in centers with their clubs, a combination of two clubs, or perhaps another configuration. You will also want to decide ahead of time if there is a set time for how long students have to work at a center, or if they can stay at the center for the entire period. Additionally, since students will try the activities out in their books, you might want to decide if students will stay at the center to do their reading, or if it would be better for them to go back to their regular seats.

Once you have done a quick (30 second) introduction to each center and its materials, you can send the students off to work. Expect that at first there will be a bit of confusion as people take turns reading the card, deciding how to best complete the task or tasks, and generally figure out how to navigate this new activity. Once the students are fairly settled, you'll want to rotate around yourself, giving lean prompts to keep them going, taking notes on the work they are doing, sharing important information as needed.

Today's work could either feel as if you're not teaching at all, or conversely, you might end each of your class periods covered in sweat because you feel like you've been working so hard. Ideally, we'd like to hope you feel like something in between!

## Bend II: Reading Critically for Power, Perspective, and Positioning

### ***Bend II, Session One: Launch and Anchor Experience Read Aloud: "Tied to Zelda" by David Rice***

In this bend, you'll build on the work your students did in Bend I to notice when characters are dealing with problems bigger than themselves, problems dealing with power relationships, then help them extend this work. You will want your read aloud to engage students in realizing that one of their roles as readers is to always question the power, perspectives and positioning within a text. Today you will teach students that critical readers don't take things at face value; instead, they challenge the text, asking themselves what questions they might ask in order to do this.

**"Today I want to teach you that critical readers don't take things at face value; instead, they challenge the text. They ask themselves what questions they might ask in order to challenge the text."**

We suggest you model with a high-interest story that feels contemporary—we use "Tied to Zelda" by David Rice. You could, of course, do this work by returning to "Raymond's Run", but if you are teaching this unit alongside *The Literary Essay* in writing, students will be returning to "Raymond's Run" there, and you may want to offer students a new text at this point. You may also find that using a contemporary, realistic story offers some advantage here; students may feel that it is easy to

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identify unequal power dynamics or stereotyping in a historical text that they can dismiss as “back in the day.” It’s harder to notice and think through power and perspective in situations that could happen on your own block.

As you read aloud, pause to briefly wonder aloud a few times. You know the sort of work that is coming up in the days ahead, so you can angle your demonstration to get students thinking about power, perspective, and stereotypes. You might model raising questions like “Hmmm, this line— ‘Whoever is Zelda’s partner will win both contests’ is interesting—sometimes people assume that boys would be better at athletic events, but here everyone knows it’s a girl who is likely to win” and “I wonder why these prizes seem to be so much more important for Zelda than for Alfonso.” Have students turn and talk, asking questions of the text as well. You could also bring back some of the work of Bend I, like the work on retelling snippets of the story from other perspectives, as that will be an important skill in this bend as well.

As students talk, listen for (and perhaps invite students to listen for) categories and kinds of questions that seem interesting. You could collect some fascinating questions, or categories, on a quick chart that will only stay up for a day or two, but that might help students notice not just what power, perspective, and positioning are, but what questions might lead you to study those things more effectively. Be on the lookout, too, for students who interpret your invitation to question the text as a request for recall questions to “test” their partners. You’ll want to prompt those students to ask questions that they don’t already know the answers to, questions that they really want to think about. Giving immediate feedback to students, either as a group or individually, based on what you observe, and then giving them an opportunity to try again, in the next turn and talk, is exceptionally powerful, and this anchor experience is an opportunity to squeeze in several “rounds” of this feedback.

Save some time—at least 15 or 20 minutes—at the end of this session for students to immediately move to their books. Right away, you’ll want to push them to read with this critical stance, asking questions of the text.

***Bend II, Session Two: Critical readers notice that, in stories and in life, someone always holds more power than others. We can always ask, “Who benefits from the power in this text?”***

Many students will take to this work of critically questioning the text eagerly, and so at this point, students will be ready to learn some specific strategies that will help them question more incisively and deliberately.

Today, then, teaching students a purposeful way to pay attention to one of the three “linchpins” of critical literacy in this unit (power, perspective, and positioning) will likely pay off for your class. You might demonstrate how you study and notice power in the read aloud text. As you demonstrate, you will tuck in close reading skills on one portion of a text and how you collect and notice the subtle details of a text. This work will be a strong support throughout this unit. You might note for students that you approach the text ready to notice that some characters have more power than others and ready to ask yourself who benefits from power in this text, so you can be the kind of reader who reads against the grain, questioning what you read in order to avoid taking things at face value. Then you’ll demonstrate doing exactly that.

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**“Today I want to teach you that critical readers pay attention to how, in stories as well as in life, someone always holds more power than others. One way they do this is to ask themselves, ‘Who benefits from the power in this text?’”**

For example, you might re-read the portion of “Tied to Zelda” on page 163 that starts “It was exactly what Zelda wanted to hear.” You might read a bit and then pause, looking up at students, ready to make your thinking visible. This might sound like, “I know I can notice power by thinking about which character benefits from the power. Hmm, so who is benefitting from power here? Well, so far it seems like Zelda has the most power. But at the same time, Zelda is using Alfonso’s parents to get some power over him. I wonder who really is putting the pressure on Alfonso—and what his parents really think. I’m going to keep reading to track Zelda’s power more.”

Read further (possibly skipping ahead to the night before the contest) and demonstrate a second time. You will want to model pushing your thinking during this point of the lesson. For instance, you might use phrases like “This is making me wonder...” to show how you allow your thinking to develop and model how you pursue questions of interest across a text.

This might sound a bit like, “So now I’m noticing that Zelda isn’t just wielding her power in a threatening way — she does that sometimes, but she also does nice things for Alfonso and supports him, like cheering him on and bringing him the cookies. But then when she shares about her family, I’m starting to wonder whether she really is as powerful as she had seemed. Maybe there are other ways that Zelda really doesn’t have a lot of power. She seems to benefit from having power over Alfonso, but then again, she is at a disadvantage because members of her family have a lot of power over her. This is making me wonder too: do adults always benefit from having power over children?”

As you move students into reading, pay attention to, and celebrate, the ways students have found to record their thinking about power. You may want to coach students, in conferences or small groups, in effective ways to record their thinking. For example, students might create a T-chart with characters’ names on the left and on the right, their power relationships—who has power over them, whether they benefit from power. Students might also benefit from placing characters on a “power hierarchy” from more power to less power and then writing about their observations from the timeline.

***Bend II, Session Three: Critical readers notice that in our books and in life people and places are stereotyped in a way that is either fair or biased.***

This session is really about the concept of positioning. Positioning, unlike power and perspective, will likely be more challenging for your students to conceptualize and many teachers have found that thinking about stereotyping was more productive for students. Therefore, in this unit we’ve chosen to describe the concept as stereotyping rather than asking your 11 year olds to wrap their arms around the full concept of positioning. Teachers, if you’re interested in exploring the literary theory behind this, you’ll find that positioning is fascinating to consider as a reader. But for your purposes in this unit, you may find that describing this concept as stereotyping meets your students’ needs more effectively.

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You might begin the third day of this bend by inviting students to share a notebook entry or Post-it note they've already jotted with a partner, before offering students another way to take a critical stance toward texts. Keeping kids socially invested in their work and their peers' work can have a huge impact on keeping energy and engagement up at this point in the year. You might tell students that as you were re-reading the anchor text, you came across a place where you felt that one character was not being portrayed fairly, was perhaps being stereotyped, based on the dialogue and actions of the other characters. Show students how, by reading with that lens in mind, you were able to develop new thinking about the text. You could demonstrate using the portion of "Tied to Zelda" where Alfonso's father is telling his son he has to practice with Zelda or else he'll lose his computer, noting that the father almost seems to be criticizing his son's interests and generalizing about what his son is like, making him seem weak or unpopular.

**"Today I want to teach you that critical readers notice that in their books, and in life, people and places are stereotyped in a way that might be fair or biased."**

In students' own books, stereotypes about places might also be fruitful avenues for good thinking. Readers might find that certain places are stereotyped as being safe and pleasant, or dangerous and unfriendly, based on the words and actions of the characters. If you were to pull a small group around this strategy, you could demonstrate with a small set of different types of photos of the same place, talking about how those places would be described in a story in more or less biased ways.

At this point in the unit, as students are reading, you will want to see your kids drawing on different strategies to reflect on power, perspective, and positioning with increasing strength and sophistication. If you took a bit of time on this day to do a survey of the class as they worked, peeking over shoulders and observing, you will want to see many students beginning to find and write long about some big ideas and themes they are pursuing in their books. Be on the lookout for students who are noticing power, for instance, when it's overt and physical, but not when it's subtler. These students might benefit from a small group teaching them to notice less obvious examples of power, or stereotypes.

***Bend II, Session Four to Five: Critical readers know that power, positioning, and perspective are all happening at the same time.***

The third linchpin in this bend is perspective. Your students worked with perspective in Bend I, and may well have entered your class having studied perspective in texts, and you will want to encourage students to bring this understanding forward into this part of the unit. If, however, you find that many of your students are having a hard time with thinking about perspective in their books and you feel that this is an urgent need right away, you might need to add a session that specifically teaches perspective, before teaching students to put all three of these pieces together. We suggest you do make time to explicitly teach students to braid together the different aspects of critical literacy that they've learned, as this is of course how they will use these concepts throughout their reading lives — not in isolation but together.

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**“Today I want to teach you that critical readers know that power, positioning, and perspective are all happening at the same time. When we read a text, we notice how all three of them affect each other. One way we can keep track of the way that power, positioning, and perspective affect each other is by looking at different events in the plot and asking ourselves: ‘Who has power, what is their perspective, and how are people positioned?’”**

In this session, you might demonstrate analyzing power, positioning, and perspective on your anchor text. Do this by creating a notebook page where you track all three in the same scene. As you are talking, be sure to point out the way that they are connected. Begin by drawing out a triangle graphic organizer and explaining your thinking. You may say something like: “So I was thinking about critical literacy and ‘Tied to Zelda’. I know that in every scene some characters have power. I also know that all of the characters are positioned in certain ways, and that each character has a different perspective. So what I wanted to do was create a way for me to capture how all three of these things are happening at once because, as you have probably already noticed this week, power, positioning, and perspective are connected to one another. One way to look at how all of these are connected is to choose an interesting scene to analyze. Pay attention to the questions I am asking and how I am tracking power, positioning and perspective, because in a bit you’ll be able to try this yourself.”

As you model your thinking process, also quickly model your jotting on the notebook page you started. Your modeling may sound something like: “So I was thinking about a part of the text where I noticed power. It’s the part where the father is telling Alfonso he will throw out his computer if he doesn’t practice with Zelda, and it seemed clear that the father has so much more power than Alfonso and also uses a different kind of power than Alfonso’s mother. It seems like the father has this power just because he’s older, and maybe because he’s the dad instead of the mom.”

“Hmmm... but when I look at it closely, that same part gives me some ideas about the father’s perspective. He says ‘All you ever do is play on your computer’ and that suggests to me that he maybe worries that his son is spending too much time doing one thing, and maybe he isn’t getting to try out other important parts of life. So maybe Alfonso sees it as mean, but maybe his dad thinks he’s helping him.”

“So now I have one part left and that’s stereotyping. I’m wondering, now that I’ve talked about this scene through different lenses, if maybe Alfonso’s dad is stereotyping boys — generalizing what they should care about suggesting that boys should definitely be interested in sports.”

“Wow. Look, I now have a notebook page with power, positioning, and perspective all happening at the same time. When I look at this triangle it is really clear to me how power, positioning and perspective affect each other. In this case it seems like the father has the power in the situation, and based on his perspective about what’s best for his son and his beliefs about what boys should be like, that causes him to see and treat Alfonso in a way that he doesn’t really like.”

During the active engagement, you might have students revisit a different scene in the anchor text, or have each group revisit a scene in their own book that they had previously begun to analyze. As students talk, listen for students who may need support with connecting the three aspects, and

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nudge them to ask each other questions about connecting the three elements, like how power might affect stereotyping.

As you send students off today, be sure to situate this note-taking technique as one that they might use and not the “assignment of the day.” You can also encourage this by highlighting, throughout the workshop, students who find alternative ways of jotting and thinking about the intersection of these three elements.

Depending on the time you have for this unit, you may have identified some additional areas where your students could benefit from extra instruction or additional challenges. Throughout the bend, you will want to study how students are taking up this work. Look at — and talk with kids about — their notebook entries and jottings. Listen in on partner talk. You may find it particularly helpful to highlight the powerful thinking that some of your students will be doing, celebrating moments when students notice instances of power, perspective, and positioning being highlighted in their books.

You may find that some of your students are more comfortable considering a single perspective. You might see some of these students caricaturing the perspectives of other characters in their books, or simply not doing much jotting or thinking about other points of view. In minilessons or small groups/conferences, you could teach these students to use “I-Statement Charts” to identify different positions taken by characters in a book as a way to explore multiple perspectives. You might also teach students to pay attention to moments when the author interrupts the action to tell you a memory. At moments like these you can ask yourself, “Why might this memory be important?” The answers to this question may tell you more about the character, which can help you figure out the character’s perspective on what’s going on. If students are beginning to notice when characters are oversimplified and grasp how those stereotypes work in texts, you could coach them to wonder, and perhaps jot about, what would happen if certain stereotyped characters were able to act differently.

***Bend II, Session Six: Critical readers can have livelier discussions by debating in book clubs***

Often, book clubs lead to high engagement for students. However, one challenge that is always present when facilitating book clubs is keeping the conversations challenging — we don’t want to see kids having the same level of conversation that they would have been able to have last year, or even in September. If this is on your mind, you may find this session particularly helpful, as it sets kids up to have more engaging conversations by finding points of controversy in their reading and thinking and by exploring different possibilities with other readers.

**“Today I want to teach you that one way critical readers enliven discussions is by debating with other readers.”**

Many of you will find that your students are familiar with using debate as a tool. If this is the case, you might teach students that sometimes, people set themselves up to have livelier discussions by purposefully looking for points of controversy and trying out a debate structure in their club. You could suggest that clubs follow the steps of choosing a debate topic (perhaps a particular scene where the power dynamics or the stereotypes present could be interpreted differently, a character relationship or depiction that could be seen as fair or biased, or a choice of the author that could be

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interpreted in several ways). Ideally, this might be a point of controversy students already noted and planned to discuss, but it might also be something that the club sets out to look for. Then, students would plan to take on each of the two sides to the debate, and then prepare their notes, building an argument to present to each other. Finally, they could practice refuting the other side's case, regrouping and replanning before continuing the debate.

If your students are unfamiliar with using debate in the classroom, you may need to teach this structure to them. There are resources on our website that will support this work, and many teachers find that using debate across the curriculum is a great way to boost engagement and enthusiasm across the board.

You will probably want to position debate in your classroom as something literate people do, and something interesting to do - that is, sometimes we debate not to win, but to think differently and explore ideas. Though there is a time and place for "agreeing to disagree," setting out to look for provocative, debatable ideas in texts or simply seizing on differences of opinion that arise rather than bypassing them can enliven discussions.

As you coach into clubs trying this work, you may find some students trying to debate ideas that aren't really debatable. You might intervene by giving them some sample ideas from a shared text and asking them to discuss whether they are debatable or not and why, before helping them generate better debate topics within their own book. For instance, in "Tied to Zelda", it wouldn't make much sense to debate whether or not Zelda likes sports, because that's obvious in the text. But it could make sense to debate an idea like "Zelda has more power in the story than Alfonso." You might also suggest categories of debatable questions that tend to work, noting which clubs have the most difficult time with this so you can support them later.

### Bend III: Reading to Learn How Authors Craft Stories to Convey Messages

In the third bend of this unit, you are asking your students to take on one more piece of the critical literacy puzzle, this time asking them to look not just at the messages that are conveyed, but how an author conveys them. This is huge work in many ways — and it is absolutely crucial in critical literacy. It's essential that students recognize that texts don't just plop down in front of readers, fully formed — authors make choices, millions of them, throughout every book they write. Of course students know this, but it's easy to lose sight of as a reader. However, the more students are able to question and challenge a text that may perhaps portray a common stereotype, or a real-world power dynamic, knowing that another human being was at the keyboard when the text was created, then the more our students will be able to similarly challenge the human-created stereotypes and power dynamics they face in the world. That's the power of this bend, and this kind of literacy work.

#### ***Bend III, Session One: Launch/Anchor Experience: You Belong with Me* music video by Taylor Swift**

Since this bend is all about authorial choices, you'll want to start off by immersing students in this sort of thinking. We suggest starting with a music video as an anchor experience, for two reasons. First, it allows you to do a lot of close reading in a short period of time, and second, because it is an

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almost-guaranteed engagement booster! We used the Taylor Swift video “You Belong with Me,” but you could use another video that is popular with your students.

**“Today I want to teach you that critical readers pay attention to how an author conveys and shapes his or her message. They notice and reflect upon writing techniques that an author uses as well as how deliberate choices about power, perspective, and positioning shape the story’s messages.”**

You could start by asking students to watch the video one time, paying attention to what’s happening but also to what stands out for them. What scenes, moments, costumes, facial expressions, are sticking with them?

After quick conversation or jotting about this first viewing, you might replay just the first 25 seconds of the video and highlight one of the choices you, and probably many of your students, felt stayed with them — the boy and girl communicating via notepad, rather than phone or email or any other more ordinary means. You might think aloud just a bit, noting that you are wondering about why the author did that — what does it tell us about the characters, about how they react, about how their relationship is different from others? Especially in working with a video, you will want to show kids right away how the work involved in reading a video is similar to and will help them with the work of reading a book, so you could step back and generalize about what you did, saying something like “I stopped to wonder about something small like the notepads, because I know that each and every choice in a text is deliberate, so I pay attention when something jumps out at me. I know that if a detail of a scene really grabs me, there’s a good chance it’s important to think about why the author of that scene made that choice.”

As you keep going, stop at different moments to allow students the chance to speculate about the impact of different choices made in the video. You may stir up heated debate about the effect of details like having the girl wear different costumes while she’s dancing in her bedroom, or of having the boy smile when he peeks through his curtains at her — and that’s just in the first minute of the song!

You’ll want to watch the time and keep the discussion moving quickly. Though some of your students will probably be eager to unpack the video for hours, you will need to cut some conversations short to make sure that the entire anchor experience feels engaging and tantalizing, not a chore.

Keep this pattern going, of watching a bit and then prompting students to think about different aspects of the author’s choices. Having spent so much time thinking about power, stereotypes, and perspectives over the past few weeks, some students are likely to bring up some of the ways that the singer is stereotyped as isolated, even a geek. In the second scene, this is prominent, especially in comparison to the girlfriend character (interestingly, also portrayed by Taylor Swift!).

After the anchor experience, have students move back to their books and keep a lookout for moments where, like in the video, the author’s decisions feel front and center. Before you send students off, you may want to once again make a connection between the work of reading a video and the work of reading a book.

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***Bend III, Session Two: When trying to figure out how the author controls the messages in the text, critical readers consider the techniques an author uses and goals an author has.***

At this point in the unit, students have worked with several aspects of critical literacy. They have noticed social issues, power, stereotyping, and perspective in their texts and also reflected on them, naming and elaborating on the messages that are being conveyed in stories. Many of your students have probably already begun to consider, or even write and talk about, another aspect of this work — the fact that these choices about power and so forth were not dropped from above into the books they hold but were instead deliberate choices made by authors. This bend puts the author front and center, and so this session builds on the work you’ve started in the anchor experience. In this session you will teach your students to more specifically examine how it is, for example, that an author makes us see who does, and doesn’t, have power.

**“Today I want to teach you that critical readers notice important writing decisions that the author has made and then think about what goals the author was trying to achieve by making that decision, or what effect those decisions have on the reader.”**

You might demonstrate using a T-chart to identify writing decisions that an author made on the left and thinking about the impact of those decisions on the right. If you demonstrate using the “You Belong with Me” video from the anchor experience, you might put something like “Girl dances in front of the mirror in lots of different stereotypical outfits” on the left and “Video is saying she’s not any of those things — it’s like she’s trying on different personalities — but none of them are like his girlfriend” on the right, narrating your thinking as you do this. You could then invite students to think of other ideas to add to this T-chart during the active engagement.

As students are reading, jotting, and talking today, you may want to take a global look at the work that they are doing. You might ask yourself, for instance, which students are successfully drawing on multiple strategies from throughout the unit, choosing what will help them most at different times, and which students might be focusing only on the most recent minilessons you’ve taught. This might also be a good opportunity, just past the middle of the unit, to set a few minutes aside to check in on engagement and stamina in students’ reading. Many teachers jot a brief checklist of things to look for and set aside five minutes during a workshop period to read the room — not to jump in and solve problems, but just to get an understanding of what’s needed.

If in your assessment of students, one of the things you notice is that this particular session is challenging for students, you could pull together a small group of students and teach them that one way readers sometimes consider the impact of an author’s choices is to imagine that the author made a different choice and then considering how that would change the text. This can draw on work students did in bend two, and is also reinforced by center work in this unit.

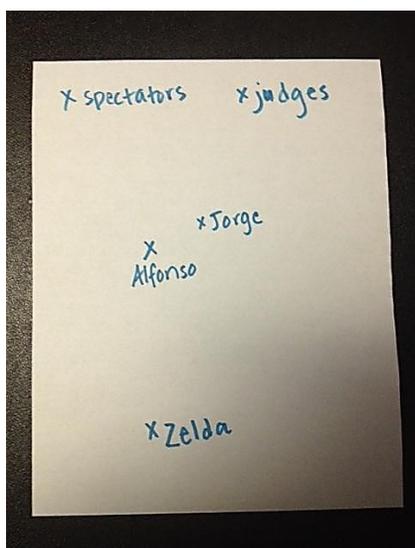
***Bend III, Session Three: Readers ask themselves who is in the spotlight, out of the spotlight, and offstage in a text***

In this session, we suggest you teach your students to consider the placement of characters in a scene as a way to study the power and perspectives in that scene.

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**“Today I want to teach you that one way to think about how an author shapes his or her message is to ask yourself ‘Who is in the spotlight in this text? Who is out of the spotlight? And who is offstage?’”**

Your demonstration might include a snippet of text, perhaps from “Raymond’s Run” or “Tied to Zelda.” Reread the text, voicing over that you’re going to ask yourself “What characters are centered by the author? What characters did the author put on the outskirts?” You might sketch a quick diagram of the scene as you model identifying where the author situates each character in the scene. For instance, in the scene in “Tied to Zelda” when Alfonso meets with Jorge to make an agreement about the contest prizes, you might think aloud, saying: “I’m seeing Alfonso front and center here, and Jorge right next to him. Zelda is farther away. And then, there are the spectators and judges - they’re in the scene too, but kind of on the outskirts.” Your fast sketch could be as simple as:



“So one thing I’m realizing from studying this scene more closely is that before, I only thought about how everyone had power over Alfonso—Zelda bossed him around, his parents told him what to do — but now I’m thinking that even though he doesn’t have as much power earlier, right now, he’s making the choices. Maybe in this scene, the author is trying to show that Alfonso ended up taking charge of his decisions, even though he didn’t seem to earlier.”

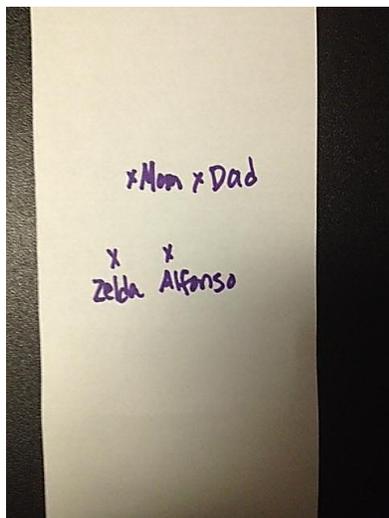
You might debrief the steps you took, saying something like “Did you see how I took a section of the story and thought about who the author chose to put center stage, to the side, and offstage, and then thought about what that tells us about how the author conveys?”

When students are reading today, you may notice that some of your students, at this stage of the unit, are trying out the content of the lessons you’re teaching, without letting that content change their thinking about the texts. You might see these students coming to the same conclusions that they came to when they first began reading, without commenting on this, or avoiding drawing conclusions at all by simply completing notebook pages. If this is the case, one way to support these students is to separate the specific note-taking or jotting strategies you’re demonstrating from the

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thinking work that those strategies are aiming toward. You could, for instance, coach a club, get them talking about the big ideas they're starting to develop, and then name the strategy that will help them capture this thinking on the page in all its complexity.

Some of your students might be ready to take this work a bit further and compare how these “spotlights” would look different in different scenes. For example, some students might notice that in the scene where Zelda comes to Alfonso's house to enlist his parents in her quest, the question of who is on stage, front and center, is trickier:



***Bend III, Session Four: Considering choices that authors make—and don't make—to convey their messages***

Your students have undoubtedly tackled the challenge of considering author's choices in previous years. If your students have come from schools using TCRWP's units, they've done similar work to this in the fifth grade unit on Interpretation Book Clubs. Nonetheless, this work is often still challenging — and is definitely powerful! You'll want to draw on what your students already know about studying author's craft and then tailor this lesson to fit that knowledge.

**“Today I want to remind you that it can be helpful to think about the choices authors make (and the ones they don't) in order to come to new insights about the messages being conveyed.”**

As a teacher, you may have found that telling kids what is NOT a good example of a theme or what auditorium behavior does NOT look like can sometimes make a strong impression. Similarly, it is often helpful for students to consider what an author could have done, but didn't, in order to remember that everything an author does is intentional.

You might return to “Tied to Zelda”, taking advantage of the opportunities in this bend to do some close reading work on a familiar text. The scene where Zelda comes to Alfonso's house to speak to his parents would work well. Your modeling might sound a bit like, “David Rice could have chosen to have his father holding anything—a phone, a piece of fruit, or nothing at all—but instead he chose to have him holding a wrench. I wonder if that wrench means something...maybe he's trying

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to say something about what his father cares about, what he values. So that wrench might be symbolic of something bigger, to Alfonso and to his father.”

You could then push students to imagine other ways that the author of their club book could have chosen to start the story, titled the story, or written some critical scene (possibly using phrases like “He could have...” or “Instead, she might have...”). You will want to encourage students to speculate about a few alternative possibilities, and you will then want to push students to think about what the choice that *was* made might mean.

Throughout this bend, you might note students who not only notice authorial choices but also are starting to disagree with them. These students, and perhaps others, might benefit from being taught to critique the perspective of the author — perhaps noting times when a perspective that the author has omitted or silenced needs to be given a voice, needs to be given power. Other students might need to work on bringing together the different “pieces” of critical literacy that they’ve learned. You might see these students putting particular emphasis on one or two areas, to the exclusion of others, and perhaps doing very strong work in those areas. In this case, these students might be perfectly primed to learn that one way you can think more about how power, positioning, and perspective are connected to each other is to think about what would happen if one of them changed. What if the character that had all the power had no power? Would that change their perspective and the way they position people? Or what if the way people are positioned changed, would that change the power and perspectives of others? You can ask these kinds of questions and it can help you understand how power, positioning and perspective are connected.

## Bend IV: Reading Across Texts and Genres to Compare Ideas and Revise Understandings

In the fourth bend, students will take on the challenging work of reading across different texts, and even different genres, to compare themes and ideas and to develop more nuanced understandings. Drawing on nonfiction texts to inform their thinking, students will re-examine the texts they’ve studied in order to note how even a text that doesn’t seem to be “all about” gender, for instance, might nonetheless reveal some powerful ideas through the lens of gender. As the culmination of this work, students will share their work with others.

***Bend IV, Session One: Launch/Anchor Experience:***  
**“Everything Will Be Okay” by James Howe and “Tied to Zelda” by David Rice**

In this session you will want to demonstrate for students how you compare texts not just with an eye to how characters might be similar or different, but how themes, social issues, perspectives, and so forth may be similar or different. We suggest returning to familiar texts, so that students can focus on viewing texts in a new light rather than following the plot; here, we use “Tied to Zelda” and “Everything Will Be Okay”, which you may have used in your first writing unit. If you didn’t, you’ll want to choose a different comparison text or be sure to build in time for students to hear the story.

You will want to take advantage of the anchor experience to demonstrate thinking — and engage students in thinking — about ways to compare texts with a critical stance. One way to do this is to

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start with a particular social issue or critical lens and to talk across texts with that lens at the forefront.

**“Today I want to teach you that critical readers know that the critical issues in the world live in many texts. One way to read across texts is to start with a critical issue in mind and re-read through the lens of that issue.”**

You might begin by suggesting that the class take up the issue of gender roles, and demonstrating how, with that lens, you might decide to go back to some critical scenes in the two texts. The scene in “Everything Will Be Okay” where the brothers go to Dr. Milk’s office, and the scene in “Tied to Zelda” where Alfonso’s father tells him he has to practice with Zelda could work well to reread with this lens.

Your modeling might sound like “Hmmm, I notice that both scenes have a couple of male characters. Alfonso and his dad, and then the narrator in James Howe’s story and his brother. Both of the main characters are kind of being bossed around—I know that’s probably because they’re young, but if I focus on gender roles, I’m starting to think that both of them are being bossed around in a particular way. It seems like both characters have people in their lives trying to teach them about being a boy, and that both of them are being taught that part of being a boy is being really tough. Now I’m wondering if there are other scenes that show this idea...or maybe if there are places where the two characters learn really different things about being tough, or about being a boy.”

You might then continue the discussion, either by asking students to engage in discussion about some of those other scenes, or by bringing in a different lens to look at both texts through — social class would work well, as would age.

Be sure to leave 15 minutes or so for students to begin to try this work, either in the book they’re reading or by going back to books they’ve read in this unit and re-reading parts of them.

***Bend IV, Session Two: Critical readers use nonfiction to gain insight into lenses as they revisit texts***

In the anchor experience, you demonstrated a crucial, and difficult, skill— the ability to go beyond hunting in a text for references to a social issue or power dynamics and instead look for the unnamed and loosely described social dynamics that are at play within any text, or any real world community. By looking across texts, students are better able to see how these issues aren’t just one way—they appear and reappear in our lives and our books in all sorts of ways. Today is an opportunity to look across different genres of text and teach students a way to build their background knowledge about the sorts of lenses they could take up, using nonfiction.

Now is the time to invite students to bring in additional information about an issue they have been discussing - to use nonfiction to add to their thinking and conversation. The point of this is not to trump the fictional experiences that they’ve been reading about and discount them; rather, it’s to add another layer of understanding to the collage of thinking they’ve been doing together. It’s also a good opportunity to teach students that readers of fiction research issues in literature by finding informational texts to teach them more about how this issue lives in the world.

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You might start by letting students know that although yesterday you - and they - had some powerful initial ideas that were uncovered by looking at texts through a particular lens, that sometimes it's challenging to know what to look for and what kinds of questions to ask yourself as a reader in order to do this work. Demonstrate using a nonfiction text to help you.

**“Today I want to teach you that critical readers use nonfiction to gain insight into lenses as they revisit texts.”**

You'll want to find readable articles that relate to different lenses your students might use—some may need adapting to be more accessible for your students. Certainly, students might also find their own resources, including digital resources, that would add to their understanding of a given lens. You might demonstrate using the thinking you started yesterday, saying something like: “I was thinking a little more about the lens of gender that we started to talk about yesterday with the two stories, and I realized that part of what made that thinking challenging was that I needed to know a little bit more, get some new ideas. So I read this article, about how some schools are trying out single-gender classes. There were a lot of different issues raised in the article, about what people think of when they think of a typical boy or a typical girl. It gave me another perspective on how I might pay attention to gender in what I read. When I think about gender in schools, it makes me wonder how Alfonso and the narrator in ‘Everything Will Be Okay’ would fit in in other places that they go, like school. I’m wondering if the authors show us that. Maybe I need to investigate a little further, re-read some other parts, to see how these characters act in different settings.”

As students go off to read, you may find it useful to have students temporarily group themselves by the lens they want to study, so they can read some nonfiction about that lens together. You can then support groups as they consider what the article adds to their thinking.

***Bend IV, Session Three: Researching relevant social issue articles***

This unit offers a great opportunity to help bolster your students’ research skills. Of course, this will take a bit of planning unless your kids have their own iPads or smartphones. You can also choose to ask students to complete this work that night for homework if it is more viable for them to do so at home. In any case, we have found that giving students the opportunity to find their own articles will help engage them to their reading and will serve to help reinforce their research skills.

Teach students that when researching a topic, readers pick a few key words and search on reputable websites to find articles that are trustworthy. This session will be an interactive session—you’ll need to set students up either in the library or with laptops, or with hard copies of magazines, if you are confident they will find the articles they need there. Model for students entering the words “gender and schools” and then adding the term “stereotypes”: “Gender and schools” and “stereotypes.” These search strategies are important to teach, and will yield better documents. Have them try the websites you’ve picked already for a faster search experience, or have them try googling, coaching into how to spot reliable versus random articles.

For example, some of your students will print out the first article they see on a google search, hoping that it will suffice. Teach these students to pause and read through the article, paying attention to who wrote it and where it was published. Is this an article for a reputable magazine, or

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someone's personal blog? You will also have students who stop considering reading level when they look for articles online, and you will want to be ready to coach students to be sure that they can read and retell the first few paragraphs before committing to reading the whole thing. Finally you might coach students to do a quick survey of a whole bunch of articles to get a sense of what is out there before selecting one or two for deeper study.

**“Today I want to teach you that readers often deepen their understanding through research, and that when researching a topic, readers pick a few key words and search on reputable websites to find articles that are relevant, readable, and trustworthy.”**

The goal is for every student to come away with at least one article that they will then read for homework and prepare to present and discuss during the final session of the unit. To that end, you will want to preserve some time at the end of class to set students up for their work that night. For example, you could easily list out some of the strategies you've taught earlier in this unit, asking students to practice these same moves on the article they found. Your chart may look something like this:

**Critical Readers of Nonfiction...**

- Notice the structure of texts and reflect on why the author chose that structure
- Identify the main argument or central idea of the text.
- Consider the point of view of the author as well as the subjects of the text
- Look for missing perspectives in the text and wonder what they would add to the understanding of the issue.

Students might copy down these strategies to try, or you might offer them a slip or paper with these strategies printed on them in order to help students remember what their work is for that night. It will be helpful for you to suggest that their articles are covered in annotations the next day - let your class know that one or two quick notes is not enough.

***Bend IV, Session Four: Using critical literacy as an opportunity for reflection***

As you come to the end of this sequence of lessons, you may want to spend some time on a perspective that has up until now been put to the side - *their own perspective*. While it is true that in general you will want to emphasize the importance of understand the author's point of view and the characters, we do not hold to the belief that all reading should be devoted only to the four corners of the text. This idea—that reading should only concern itself with what you can glean from the words on the page, does not take into account our own experiences and ideas that shape our reading (And we can look to researchers like Rosenblatt and Beers to support our belief that personal experience has a strong part to play in any reading event) This is another way to teach into the concept of perception, and to remind students that our own points of view often affect how we're able to take in others' ideas. Teach students that readers move between their own ideas about an issue and the ideas that a text is presenting as they read. They decide if they need to change their thinking about an issue based on new ideas, or if they are disappointed in a text for presenting cliché or unrealistic ideas.

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**“Today I want to teach you that readers move between their own ideas about an issue and the ideas that a text is presenting as they read. They decide if they need to change their thinking about an issue based on new ideas, or if they are disappointed in a text for presenting cliché or unrealistic ideas.”**

For example, you may get students to write or talk about what they think it means to be a boy. How are boys perceived? What pressures do boys have? How do boys think or behave? Then you may teach an inquiry lesson: re-read the beginning of the story “Raymond’s Run” When reading aloud you’ll want to prompt the students to move between their ideas and the ideas in the story. This will help them spend time thinking about who they are, what they believe, and what they care deeply about so they read through these lenses. You might also push your students to dig deeper into the issue by asking, “Does the way this story talks about gender ring true for me?” As they answer this question, they will want to examine why the text reflects or does not reflect their experiences. They can question the values that the text is teaching. This starts to push students to a higher “Depth of Knowledge,” as described by Norman Webb: it moves them into a place where they have to make judgments and transfer their thinking from one arena into another.

As a link, have clubs meet briefly for a similar pre-reading conversation about their issue—how have they witnessed, experienced this in their lives? Then after 5 minutes, they will pick up their books and read, holding their conversations in mind and reading to test out their theories and post-it places that confirm or force them to revise their thinking.

One thing to avoid is the idea that any given book is “about” any one thing. In addition, to say that we can read texts only for issues that create dangerous or dramatic situations like abuse or sexism or homelessness also limits the kinds of interpretations our readers can make and connect to. You will want to avoid teaching that talking about gender or race or class automatically means there is an oppressor and a victim. There is value in interpreting and inferring things from these identities without necessarily always trying to find the “problem” or “issue.”

As students write about their lives and the lives of the characters in their stories, and as they become adept at noticing social issues, they’ll often become particularly interested in certain issues. You may find that they can read while searching for places in the text that fit with bullying or homelessness but struggle when asked to read with the lenses of power, gender, class, values, invisibility, democracy, and so on. If so, you can help them understand what these mean by having them write or talk about the issues as they relate to their own lives. It is probably best if you demonstrate that each of us is a member of many groups—groups determined in part by our gender, race, religion, class, and so on but also by our hobbies and our professions. We can talk about how a group identity shapes us. How does your position as, say, a Latina woman or a middle school teacher affect your response to today’s headlines in the newspaper? Ask students to think about what groups they belong to and how those groups shape who they are and how they think.

As clubs read stories through these lenses, it will be important to talk back to the text. Members might ask one another: “Are we okay with how this group is being represented? Does this fit with what we have seen in the world? Is there something the author seems to want us to know about being a member of that group? Does this fit with our lives? What kind of community is this? What causes people to act this way? What would happen if the character’s group was ‘flipped’—if a girl

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character was a boy or a poor character rich? Would that change their choices or reactions? What does this say about what we believe?"

***Bend IV, Session Five: Readers share their thinking with others.***

To celebrate this unit, we suggest setting up an opportunity for your readers to share their thinking with others. Depending on the time you have available to you, this could be a gallery walk of notebook pages or short roundtable presentations in your classroom, or this could look like a critical literacy symposium where your students share with, perhaps, a 7th grade class. The seventh graders who may be familiar with some of the books that your students read could be a terrific audience for your students to test their ideas on. As your students are getting closer and closer to being seventh graders themselves, this can be a good chance for the seventh grade teachers to meet some of their new students, too!

**“Today I want to remind you that readers share their thinking with others.”**

Remember to save a day at the end of this bend for centers work! In many classrooms, the celebration and last round of centers will take place on the same day.

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## Appendix A: Bend IV Nonfiction Article Suggestions

### LENS OF RACE:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/26/education/black-at-stuyvesant-high-one-girls-experience.html?pagewanted=all>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/13/education/at-explore-charter-school-a-portrait-of-segregated-education.html?pagewanted=all>

<https://www.newsela.com/articles/teachers-diversity/id/3846/>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/01/19/scholastic-pulls-childrens-book-starring-george-washingtons-happy-slaves/>

### LENS OF CLASS:

<https://www.newsela.com/articles/homeless-kids/id/27/>

<http://www.citylimits.org/news/articles/4936/class-in-the-classroom-the-income-gap-and-nyc-schools#.U2vyPK1dWuo>

<http://www.villagevoice.com/news/inside-a-divided-upper-east-side-public-school-6428826>

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/majority-of-us-public-school-students-are-in-poverty/2015/01/15/df7171d0-9ce9-11e4-a7ee-526210d665b4\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/majority-of-us-public-school-students-are-in-poverty/2015/01/15/df7171d0-9ce9-11e4-a7ee-526210d665b4_story.html)

### LENS OF GENDER:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/02/magazine/02sex3-t.html?pagewanted=1&r=1&emc=eta1>

<http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/04/14/are-toys-too-gender-specific/>

<http://thinkprogress.org/health/2014/08/07/3468380/gender-roles-health-risks/>

<http://sociology.about.com/od/Current-Events-in-Sociological-Context/fl/Full-Transcript-of-Emma-Watson-s-Speech-on-Gender-Equality-at-the-UN.htm>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/07/education/edlife/in-oakland-building-boys-into-men.html>

### LENS OF IMMIGRATION:

<http://indykids.org/main/2014/09/the-child-migrant-crisis/>

<http://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2015/09/10/immigration-demagogues-like-donald-trump-are-hurting-children>

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<http://www.kidsdiscover.com/shop/issues/immigration-for-kids/>

<http://time.com/4050914/1965-immigration-act-pew/>

<http://ww2.kqed.org/news/2016/04/03/new-app-helps-undocumented-immigrants-find-college-scholarships>

**LENS OF RELIGION:**

<http://indykids.org/main/2016/03/salam-i-come-in-peace-muslims-stand-up-against-islamophobia/>

[http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/tt\\_debunking\\_misconceptions\\_0.pdf](http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/tt_debunking_misconceptions_0.pdf)

<http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-43-spring-2013/religion-locker-room>

<http://www.colorlines.com/articles/study-trump-effect-gives-children-color-alarming-level-fear-and-anxiety>

**LENS OF LANGUAGE:**

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/dual-language-classes-for-kids-grow-in-popularity-1459535318>

<http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/education/bilingual-education-nyc-set-big-expansion-article-1.2587215>

[https://www.ted.com/talks/jamila\\_lyiscott\\_3\\_ways\\_to\\_speak\\_english?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/jamila_lyiscott_3_ways_to_speak_english?language=en)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/28/travel/making-language-immersion-fun-for-the-kids.html? r=0>

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## Appendix B: Bend IV Nonfiction Research Resources

### News

IndyKids <http://indykids.org/>

NewsELA <https://newsela.com/>

NYTimes <http://www.nytimes.com/>

US News & World Report <http://www.usnews.com/>

Colorlines <http://www.colorlines.com/>

Scholastic <http://magazines.scholastic.com/>

Upfront Magazine <http://upfront.scholastic.com/>

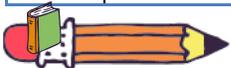
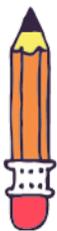
Dogo News <http://www.dogonews.com/>

Time for Kids <http://www.timeforkids.com/>

See the following pages for an example of how instruction and club work might go for Bends I and II.



Bend One: Reading Thoughtfully to Deepen Interpretation		Anchor Text: Raymond's Run	
Session/Minilesson	Conferring and Small Group	Mid-Workshop Teaching	Share
1 	Readers think about how characters are dealing with issues bigger than themselves. (Interactive Read Aloud)	Social Issues Chart (could launch independent reading or come in the middle)	Clubs quickly name issues they predict will become big for a character(s). They make a reading plan for the week.
2 	Readers ask: What does this text teach us about an issue?	Keeping up with the work of a club: conferences and small groups to support students in taking their club work seriously.	Get ready for club talk by post-iting or jotting page numbers of when a character faces the issue, when it gets worse, etc.
3 	Readers consider how issues lead to themes by thinking, "What lessons is the character learning (or not learning...in dealing with this issue?"	Finding the universal in the story.	Some ways to track multiple themes (coding, webs, grids)
4 	Readers consider how the story would be different if told from a different character's point of view.	Being purposeful in reading – choosing from a repertoire of interpretive work and staying with a line of thinking.	Thinking about how the narrator that IS telling the story affects the story – whether it's first or third person.
5 	Readers reflect on their writing about reading and study others' to set goals.	Gearing up to talk well in a club.	Club Talk – a little longer today, like 10 minutes. Work with clubs includes: Coaching clubs to stay in one idea longer, finding more examples; whispering in to students to play a role in the club, like "turning a corner;" modeling participating actively and voicing over tips.
6	<b>CENTERS (Optional)</b>		



## 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading Unit Two

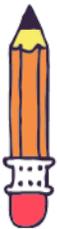


Bend Two: Reading Critically for Power, Perspective, and Positioning      Anchor Text: Tied to Zelda			
Session/Minilesson	Conferring and Small Group	Mid-Workshop Teaching	Share
<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">1</p>	<p>Critical readers challenge the text. (Interactive Read Aloud)</p>		<p>Chart the questions that helped to challenge the text – like “Why is one character stronger than another?” “How are girls versus boys positioned in this story?” “What does this story have to say about class differences?” Students read with these lenses.</p>
<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">2</p>	<p>Critical readers notice that, in stories and in life, someone always holds more power than others. We can always ask, “Who benefits from the power in this text?”</p>	<p>Supporting readers in tracking for power differences. T-charts, webs, flow charts, double time lines, and bar graphs might help to visualize power hierarchies and how they shift across the text.</p>	<p>Jotting to quickly synthesize thinking about power in the story they’re reading. Use tracking system to refer to details.</p>
<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">3</p>	<p>Critical readers notice that in our books and in life people and places are stereotyped in a way that is either fair or biased.</p>	<p>Considering stereotypes about places: which places are typically “safe” or “happy” and which places tend to be portrayed as “scary” or “unfriendly?” Why?</p> <p>Continuing to track theories about characters – adding in thinking about whether the character fits or breaks a stereotype for one or more groups.</p>	<p>Preparing to write long: Gathering an idea about a character with some supporting points. Re-read to collect clear evidence as support.</p>
			<p>Clubs meet to pick a challenge question or questions to focus on and track for their next conversation.</p> <p>Club Talk #1: short time today – 5 minutes max. Choose one power relationship to explore in conversation.</p> <p>5 minute flash draft – Write long to explore an idea about a character, with evidence gathered during the last part of workshop time.</p>

## 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading Unit Two



Bend Two: Reading Critically for Power, Perspective, and Positioning		Anchor Text: Tied to Zelda		
Session/Minilesson	Conferring and Small Group	Mid-Workshop Teaching	Share	
<p><b>4</b></p>  <p>Readers can keep track of the way that power, positioning, and perspective affect each other by looking at events in the plot and asking: ‘Who has power, what is their perspective, and how are people positioned?’”</p>	<p>Helping students to clarify how one character’s perspective is developed; and pushing to think through other characters’ points of view. Noticing when this is limited, perhaps due to some stereotyping or thin character development. (See p. 20 in Unit 2 for more.)</p>	<p>Introduce debatable questions – for clubs to debate tomorrow. Chart some predictable kinds of debates in literature.</p>	<p>Clubs talk briefly to plan for tomorrow’s debate work. Which question will they debate? Which people will take on which positions?</p>	
<p><b>5</b></p>  <p>Readers debate to commit to and hear from different positions about a text.  (See p. 20 in Unit 2 for ideas on how to set this up.)</p>	<p>Debate Protocol. Clubs caucus with same-side partners, then debate against opponents, then caucus to gather rebuttal material, then debate again to rebut.</p> <p>Share: Position C. Clubs develop a statement that is acceptable to both sides of the debate, then share out to the class. Chart these statements as examples of more nuanced character claims. Example: Position A: Zelda is more powerful than Alonso. Position B: Alonso is more powerful than Zelda. Position C: Zelda uses her physical power to try to make up for the fact that her family’s situation makes her feel powerless.</p>			
<p><b>6</b></p>	<p><b>CENTERS</b></p>			



Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Reading Curricular Calendar, Sixth Grade, 2016-2017  
Nonfiction: A Study of Text Complexity

## Nonfiction: A Study of Text Complexity

January - February

### Welcome to the Unit

The major goal of this reading unit is to sharpen students' ability to read more complex nonfiction, with a particular focus on their fluency with summarizing texts, citing the texts accurately and with information that is relevant to central ideas, and reading to discern more than one idea in the text. A second goal is to inspire your sixth graders to *read a lot* of nonfiction! In this unit of study, we aim to channel sixth graders' natural curiosity toward the academic subjects which they are immersed in.

We recommend that this unit either precede or parallel the writing unit of study titled "Research-Based Information Writing: Books, Websites, and Presentations." See the User's Guide to that writing unit in the 2016-2017 writing curricular calendar for suggestions on how to build some extra reading time into the writing unit if you do not have block scheduling.

Note that the readings for this unit begin with a class study of a topic. In this write-up, we use the topic of rats as an example. However, if you have less time to devote to this reading unit and want to streamline students' entry into the writing unit, you may prefer to begin this reading unit with the class studying teen activists, the topic that is the shared focus of that writing unit. We recommend, however, that by Bend Two of this unit, students are reading about topics they themselves select—probably from a menu of text sets. You may wish to set this up to allow for students to explore other subjects in more depth: in this case, you'd want to set up text sets with content from social studies, science and math. See the "Getting Ready" section for more on this.

Students will practice using note-taking in a variety of ways: to gather and sort incoming information; to process information and develop ideas about what they're learning; and to prepare for talk and writing about topics. Partner shares will take on a teaching tone in this unit as readers practice sharing what they've learned in an instructional mode, thereby supporting their own prioritization and summary skills, as well as practicing the kind of writing work they are doing or will soon do in writing workshop.

While students are reading nonfiction, we encourage you to keep up students' fiction reading as well, especially at home, so that they keep up their reading rate, fluency, and level. You most likely will not have enough informational texts to send home anyway, unless you are the rare and lucky school that has a dazzling library of high quality informational books. After all, we're hoping that your students are the kind who read forty to sixty pages a day in books like *The Hunger Games*—it's very unlikely they will be able to match that pace and volume in informational texts. So decide how to devote some time to supporting your students reading of novels. You may want to dedicate a class period per week to checking in on students' progress in their independent reading lives.

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**Nonfiction: A Study of Text Complexity**

## Overview

**Essential Question:** *How can we read to learn intentionally and effectively? As we do this work, how do we learn to tackle more dense nonfiction, synthesizing ideas and details while increasing our knowledge and broadening our interests?*

- **Bend I: Ratcheting up our nonfiction reading practices to read more complex informational texts**

*How can I determine more than one central idea across a text? How can I use narrative and expository text structures and features as a way to help navigate the ideas and information in a text? How can I keep track of many central ideas about a topic while reading across texts, sorting and synthesizing new information as I read it?*

*Option One: Class Study - Rats*

*(or another class topic of your choice—see text set suggestions in Appendix for more options)*

*Option Two: Class Study - Teen Activists (to streamline entry into Research-Based Information Writing)*

- **Bend II: Reading closely, writing and talking to learn about a topic**

*How can I use writing and talk to think through and question what I'm learning? How can I re-read closely to be sure I'm understanding complicated concepts? How can I analyze the author's use of craft to help better understand key points about the topic?*

### **Recommended Anchor Texts:**

- *Oh Rats! The Story of Rats and People* by Albert Marrin & C.B. Bordan
- OR "How to Become an Activist" (<http://www.wikihow.com/Become-an-Activist>)
- *Who Was Julius Caesar?*  
*Julius Caesar: Dictator for Life* (Wicked History)

## CCSS/LS Standards Addressed in this Unit

- **RI 6.1:** Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly and well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **RL 6.2:** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is developed through particular details.
- **RI 6.3:** Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text.

## Getting Ready

To prepare for this unit, get every possible nonfiction text into your classroom, and have kids do their best to sort them into some baskets/collections that make sense. Put 'sports' in one basket, 'space' in another, 'fascinating random stuff' in another. Include books, magazines, websites.

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Definitely include great nonfiction series, like the *Wicked History* and Matt Christopher's *On the field with...* It's okay if you have nonfiction that doesn't entirely go together—this is a unit where students will read a lot about a lot. We suggest you gather all the informational texts on hand, and that you supplement these with every possible journal that addresses special topics that students might pursue in their studies—from political events (*Junior Scholastic*), to archaeology (*Dig*), to history and science topics (*Scope*), to investigative journalism (*Sports Illustrated* and *Upfront*). Send kids to the public library, ask them to bring in books and magazines from home on those crazy topics they are expert on, and buy used books.

We have also compiled many text sets in the form of lists of books and links to articles, grouped by topic. These can be found on our website, in the folder titled “Non-Fiction Text Sets” at <http://readingandwritingproject.org/resources/text-sets>. We referred to both books and articles in these lists, and we recommend that for this first experience with nonfiction reading, you try to amass sets that include some books, not just articles. The craft and research that go into the writing of a nonfiction picture or chapter book far exceed that of a typical article for young people.

If you're interested in ordering books in text sets, we have created some order forms with Booksource, which can be found on our website. See the folder titled “Middle School Nonfiction Order Forms” at: <http://readingandwritingproject.org/resources/book-lists>. Don't despair if links are broken—this happens far too frequently for us to keep track of! If you send a friendly note, we will fix it. Better yet, if you find a working link to the same article or a better one, send that along as well.

Of course, we encourage you and your students to add to these sets with additional topics and/or texts, including links to articles and/or titles of books. Please send any additional sets that you find useful to [audra@readingandwritingproject.com](mailto:audra@readingandwritingproject.com) and we will add them to our repository! Many teachers decide to put together texts that will allow students to go deeper into topics they are studying in math, science, or social studies. This way, students not only get stronger as nonfiction readers, but they deepen their content knowledge in a content area topic. You'll notice that we use social-studies-themed anchor texts such as *Wicked History* focused on Ancient Rome, but if your sixth graders are studying China or Ecosystems in content area classrooms, you may want to change up your demonstration texts to align with and support your colleagues' teaching.

Several professional texts can support you in approaching nonfiction reading with your students, including Chris Lehman's *Energize Research Reading and Writing* and Laurel Schmidt's *Social Studies that Sticks: How to Bring Content and Concepts to Life* as well as Kylee Beers and Bob Probst's *Reading Nonfiction*.

### ***Consider your anchor chart***

The points on this example anchor chart are not meant to document all the teaching you'll do in this unit, and may not be in the order in which you eventually teach them, but these points represent habits of nonfiction readers that you will want your students to take on. They incorporate minilesson teaching points as well as some suggested mid-workshop teaching.

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**Readers often rely on a repertoire of strategies when reading challenging expository nonfiction.**

**Bend One**

- Readers often find they need to call on a repertoire of strategies to orient themselves, including reading any abstracts or covers, figuring out how the text is structured, using any text features, rereading the opening paragraphs, and teaching others what they've learned.
- Readers are careful to think before taking notes, stopping to ask: what's really important? How will I organize my notes to best represent what I'm learning?
- Readers record a few big ideas and supporting details as they read, instead of trying to memorize all the information.
- Readers come to a text expecting to infer more than one central idea.
- Readers read between the lines to pull out big ideas or concepts that aren't often explicit and easy to spot.
- Readers interact with new vocabulary by actively trying to figure out what new words mean—through studying text features, reading across the text and asking: how does this word fit with what I'm learning about this?
- Readers write summaries that clearly record the ideas an author advances in a text, as well include the evidence and specific details an author uses for support that's gathered from across the whole of the text.
- Readers make sure that they read across the page and incorporate all the information given in a variety of text features.
- Readers teach all that they've learned about a topic to a partner. They sum up key points about the topic and give supporting details, including visual supports, and cite their sources.

**Bend Two**

- Readers orient themselves to a topic by building background knowledge. One way to do this is by finding easy texts on a topic and reading to understand key concepts and vocabulary.
- Readers notice when a nonfiction text or part of a text is structured as a narrative, and read to think about the story elements and themes of that text or section, as well as to gather information about the topic.
- Readers accumulate and sort knowledge as they read across texts, working to figure out where new information belongs—as more about a concept or subtopic that has already been explored, or as a revision to prior knowledge or a brand new central idea or concept.
- Readers synthesize narrative nonfiction by finding big underlying ideas, and then they support these ideas with small moments and details from the text.
- Readers write long to think about their topic. They use the structure of essay to push their thinking to be logical and evidence-based.
- Readers analyze the craft nonfiction writers use when teaching others through writing.
- Readers not only call on all they know to read harder nonfiction, they also expect to do some rapid rereading to make sense of parts.
- As readers become passionate about a subject they find more stuff—they find websites and videos, they borrow books from the library and each other—they keep going!"
- Readers pay attention to particular details authors have chosen to include and ask

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- themselves what tone the author develops.
- Readers develop a technical vocabulary as they learn more about a topic, and they incorporate it into their writing and conversation.
  - Readers celebrate their learning by teaching others what they've learned, by creating annotated bibliographies to help future researchers, and by reflecting on their progress as readers and thinkers.

## Assessment

In every reading unit, you'll want to identify two or three aspects of reading to focus on. In this unit, for example, you may want to focus on students' abilities to grasp what is most important about the texts they read, seeing what information is most key to supporting main ideas of the text. You may also want to focus on their abilities to synthesize information across texts and determine the meaning of unfamiliar words.

You have options for how to collect this data and we encourage you to vary the types of assessments that you give across the units. As a grade team, you can make an assessment plan for each unit, one that feels manageable to you.

You may decide to give a pre-assessment that can then be mirrored in a post-assessment, using similar question stems and different texts. Find a text at an appropriate level, and ask questions that match the key teaching points of the unit. You may opt to use your own scoring system for this, to align your scoring with a learning progression, such as TCRWP's learning progression for Informational Reading, or to treat each question as a short response question in the style of the New York State ELA.

Other options to do this assessing and gathering of data include collecting and studying student work. You might make a child friendly rubric and assess how well students are doing this sort of work in their independent reading. Or you might stick some questions in your read aloud which address this kind of work and collect students' jotting : *What are the central ideas of this text? Remember to support your answer with details from the text; How does this part seem to connect with the rest of the text? Back up your thinking with text evidence.*

For example, when looking to assess how students determine importance, you might read a section of the text which seems to relate to a major point of the text, stop, and ask students to jot about what this text seems to be mostly about so far. Later, as the text unfolds, you'll want to ask a question that assesses students' ability to infer and support that inference with text details.

Your teaching can become much more responsive based on what you glean from this assessment. Are most of your children determining importance by just jotting down a topic and a few supportive details? Or do they see ideas within the text, instead of simply topics. Do children see the structures of the text to help them figure out what is most important or do they seem to ignore the way the text is organized?

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Throughout the unit, you will want to provide opportunities for your students to use reading checklists to reflect on their synthesizing and summarizing work, set goals, and create action plans for how they will reach these goals. A checklist might include items such as:

I stated at least two central ideas.
--------------------------------------

I supported each idea with evidence that truly matches that idea from the text.
---

I used specific quotes or details.
------------------------------------

I included ideas and information from across the text.
--

As the unit proceeds, you'll ask students to pause, from time to time, in order to reflect on their work, revising and setting new goals, if needed. Push students to hold themselves accountable to growth, and to think about growth in reading as the result of effort and resolve. Guide your students to develop their own action plans outlining the steps they will take to reach their goals.

## Bend I: Readers Ratchet Up Their Nonfiction Reading Practices to Read More Complex Informational Texts

Students will come to you ready to learn how to tackle more complex topics and the denser syntax and layout of middle school texts. They have likely learned to think about “main ideas” in nonfiction, and know how to connect detailed information to broader ideas—especially ideas that are explicitly stated, but also more implicit ideas. In this bend, you'll focus on teaching your students to read more complex nonfiction with agency, especially reading for “central ideas,” (which are generally more implicit and conceptual than “main ideas,”) and sorting information to help elaborate on these central ideas with details from multiple sources.

***Bend I, Session One: Readers call on a repertoire of strategies to orient themselves to challenging texts as they tackle denser nonfiction.***

This session will be a shared experience, where you launch nonfiction reading work, stirring the kids up to read harder and more fascinating nonfiction, and to do more thinking work in these texts, just as they are doing with fiction. We suggest *Oh Rats! The Story of Rats and People*, as an expository read aloud text that is sure to engage. On this day, you'll entice your readers by explaining that as they begin to read more challenging nonfiction, one way it becomes more difficult is that the text gives a lot of information right away—informational authors dive right into a lot of content and readers often need to work to orient themselves early on.

[Note: If you are beginning right away with the topic of teen activism, you might instead choose to read the article “How to Become an Activist,” using the same read aloud moves and asking the same kinds of research questions. <http://www.wikihow.com/Become-an-Activist>]

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Your overall teaching point might sound like: Readers often find they need to call on a repertoire of strategies to orient themselves, including reading any abstracts or covers, figuring out how the text is structured, using any text features, rereading the opening paragraphs, and teaching others what they've learned.

**Readers often find they need to call on a repertoire of strategies to orient themselves, including reading any abstracts or covers, figuring out how the text is structured, using any text features, rereading the opening paragraphs, and teaching others what they've learned.**

Your read aloud, then, might begin by demonstrating how you look across the text to see what it's mostly about, how you notice that a lot of information will be given in sidebars, captions, and graphics, and how there will be different chapters, each about a different aspect of rats and people. Then, as you read, show the kids how you are moving across pages and sections, as well as how you pause at the end of a section to restate what you've learned so far—that will set kids up for returning to that work tomorrow. You won't finish the whole book, so figure out ahead if you want to read the first three or four chapters—you probably do want to read half the book, in order to show students how important it is to read whole books, not little sections.

As you model casting a wide net, gathering lots of information about a topic, be on the lookout for students who might be demonstrating a narrower way of reading. That is, during a turn and talk, listen for students that either hold onto an original idea, not revising it as new information is gathered or perhaps students only holding onto one kind of information about the topic. For example, instead of talking widely about all the aspects of rats, you may find a partnership that perseverates on the fact they carry disease. Use this opportunity to coach, perhaps asking, "what other information did the author include in the sidebar? And what other idea is the author advancing in this section?"

You'll also want to model how you might set up your notebook to hold onto what you've learned. For example, you might notice from the chapter headings that there seem to be good and bad things about rats, and you might therefore arrange a "pros" and "cons" chart in your notes. You might notice that the title says "Rats and People" and so you might set up a page with that heading, knowing that it's bound to be important.

Make sure you save some time for partners to practice teaching each other what they've learned so far. Coach them to think 'what are the big ideas?' You'll want to set up a ritual that we read to learn, and then write and talk to teach. Notice which students brought their notebook to the read aloud, and do a shout out for how specific they are when they go to teach. Call out how some students are really focusing on big ideas. Notice when students are also able to say what's fascinating. This ritual will be one you'll want to institute every day, so that as you wrap up reading workshop, partners have time to teach each other what they learned that day.

Today you will give students opportunities to continue this work in additional text sets about rats. See the appendix for recommended texts. Your goal is for them to practice the work of synthesis with the support of a common topic, but with the challenge of taking in new information. You might set partners up to choose the text they want to read independently and then talk about.

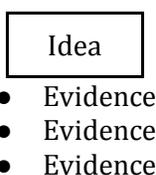
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As a mid workshop, you can remind students that teachers are careful to think before taking notes—stopping to ask: “What’s really important? How will I organize my notes to best represent what I’m learning?” Today is a great day for us as teachers to research how are students are using their pencils to keep track of new information.

For share today, give students time to teach their new learning to their reading partners. They can also show off how they took notes to represent their learning.

***Bend I, Session Two: Summarizing nonfiction as a few important ideas and examples and using the internal structures of the text to help us along the way***

Teach students that we can read nonfiction in a variety of ways. We could, for example, read simply to find cool facts, or we could read to skim to locate a specific bit of information we need, or we can read to develop expertise on the topics we are studying. Tell students that during this unit our goal will be the third way, to read carefully and thoroughly to really hold onto what we are learning and become experts ourselves. They are probably familiar with ‘boxes and bullets’ as a way to organize ideas and supporting evidence, and you might have a blank chart up that will let you point to the idea box and the supporting bullets as you do this work. When we first start this work, we tend to start with ideas and evidence. If your students are already fluent with that kind of summarizing, you can move them into ideas—*reasons*—evidence.



Your teaching point might sound like: Reading nonfiction is like taking a course in which a person is told a whole lot of new and detailed information. Instead of trying to memorize all that information, it helps to synthesize what we’re learning as some big ideas and supporting details.

**“Today I want to teach you that reading nonfiction is like taking a course in which a person is told a whole lot of new and detailed information. Instead of trying to memorize all that information, it helps to synthesize what we’re learning as some big ideas and supporting details.”**

Your demonstration might sound like: “A way we can hold onto what we are learning is that when we come to the end of a part of text—or when our mind is full—we can pause and say to ourselves, ‘What did I just read?’ Then we can come up with summaries of the important ideas and information. This helps us to recollect what we’ve learned. What’s important, here is that we are not reading just to accumulate random bits of information, we are reading to say out big ideas, and details that are examples of those ideas. Sometimes we may use Post-its to write headings over big parts of the text—and those headings are the significant ideas. Then we try to retell the text as ideas and examples. For example, watch how I read some of Chapter 4, “Rats and People,” (pp. 19-21) then pause to think about a larger idea the details I have read could fit underneath.” Read a bit and then stop and demonstrate: “I am thinking that a large idea of this might be... NOT ALL PEOPLE HATE RATS. Then I can think of what information and facts fit below it. A supporting detail, for

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instance, would be SOME PEOPLE BREED RATS AS PETS, so I'll write that on a Post-it and put a bullet point next to it."

During the active engagement, listen and gauge the proficiency students have with this work as they work with their partners. For instance, some partnerships may confuse evidence with ideas momentarily. Others may cite supporting details that don't quite match up with the idea at hand. Embrace these teachable moments with urgency—the performance of partnerships during the active engagement forecasts their performance during independent reading. Quickly coach partnerships back on track as you monitor the class.

Today, as you send them off to read, remind students that as they prepare to talk to a partner later, a boxes and bullets outline will help them hold onto what they've learned so that they can compare their findings with their partners. Watch for how students work—are they tending to only summarize the most recent page of their text? Are they reading big enough chunks of text before summarizing? One goal here is to keep the reading volume up, so keep an eye on how much reading kids are really doing, and help them monitor the time they spend jotting or talking, so that they get a lot of reading done.

**A mid-workshop lesson** today might remind or teach students that they should expect to find many central ideas in their topics and texts. Push to make sure they have multiple boxes, corresponding to multiple central ideas about rats, and that these ideas and details supporting them cut across the *Oh, Rats* selections and the additional texts.

***Bend I, Session Three: Nonfiction readers read between the lines to pull out big ideas that are implicit in the text***

You might find it important to teach students that as nonfiction gets more complex the ideas are often not explicit, so the reader has to read between the lines to determine ideas. You might demonstrate: "Readers, just as when we read novels we read between the lines to determine important themes and ideas, we also read nonfiction by reading between the lines. We push ourselves to talk about important ideas and concepts, and tuck the information under those ideas as examples. We can draw on our character work from the last unit to help. Whether your nonfiction topic is a person (like Julius Caesar), or a subject or concept (like rats), we can read to find not just the big, obvious ideas, but the ones that are more implicit. In the nonfiction you're reading, for instance, the headings aren't usually the big idea—you have to pull out the big ideas.

**"Today I want to teach you that as nonfiction gets more complex the ideas are often not explicit, so the reader has to read between the lines to determine ideas."**

Then you might return to the chapter, 'Rats and People,' to show how by thinking 'what are these details examples of / what does this all add up to?' you come to two big ideas—that tame rats can be helpful to people, while wild rats can be dangerous.

We suggest you demonstrate on one chapter or section, and then have students practice in the active engagement on a second chapter or section. Some students may face trouble when pulling ideas out of a complex text. Give them time to practice and rehearse here during the active engagement - encourage them to read a piece of evidence from the text and then think together

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with their partner, “what does this evidence make you think the author is trying to teach about the topic here?” or “what does this evidence make you think?” Pulling out big ideas from any text from a complex work is a rigorous task—one that students will need multiple opportunities to practice, perhaps fail, and eventually succeed in.

Ask them to jot their summary so that you can collect it, and compare their responses to the Information Reading Progression, or a simple checklist you use, that might look something like:

1 pt.	1 pt.	1 pt.	1 pt.	1 pt.
I stated more than one big idea.	I backed these up with evidence.	I quoted or included specific details from the text.	I included evidence from across the parts of the text.	I sorted the details by significance—what’s most important.

**Small group work or a mid-workshop lesson** today might support students’ interaction with domain-specific and Tier II vocabulary as they read. Teach students to use features as well as other parts of the text to help understand vocabulary that is specific to this topic. The chapter “Getting Rid of Rats” offers some words (“exterminator,” “anticoagulant”) that could be opportunities for teaching students to use the context to develop their own understanding of new words. For Tier II vocabulary, words that are more general, but academic rather than social, teach students to pay attention to prefixes and suffixes as a way to get a sense of the tone of the word—positive or negative, if applicable—and to internal root words that give a clue to meaning. Words like “responsible” “outbreak” and “vigilant” in the chapter “Rats and Disease” could be used as demonstrations and/or practice cases.

***Bend I, Session Four: Readers assess their ability to summarize nonfiction, and set goals for being accurate, detailed, and idea-based***

By session four, you should notice students jotting and writing about a series of ideas paired with supporting evidence and details across their reading about the class topic. If you notice a small amount of students not yet writing about their reading and thinking by this point, make sure to coach them to actively read, pencil in hand, as they read and think. Perhaps you provide extra support by creating ‘mentor jots’ and post them around the classroom—large examples of jots that students can use as exemplars when trying this work on their own.

In this session, you might have students assess their summaries from the day before against some exemplars and samples. So, using a checklist, in your lesson you and the students can practice evaluating some sample summaries (which are either from students or which you create). Typically, we might include some samples that mention lots of interesting details, but no big idea, as well as a sample that has a compelling idea, but no specific text details to support it. Don’t use real students for these low level examples—just make some up. Then set students up to assess their own summaries, and fix them up right there. You might then begin to ask students to jot a summary of what they’ve read, either for homework if they are taking the books home, or at the end of the period if the nonfiction books have to stay in school.

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**“Today I want to teach you that readers use checklists and mentor jots to reflect on their summaries and set goals for being accurate, detailed, and idea-based.”**

**Bend 1, Session 5: Reading across the page**

Today you can teach students that readers make sure that they read across the pages and incorporate all the information given in a variety of text features, to synthesize dense nonfiction. You might demonstrate: “Today, I want us to push ourselves to include all the text as we determine important ideas and supporting details. Sometimes we have to pause and really figure out why a chart, diagram, or illustration is included, and what it teaches, and how it fits. We wonder if the chart, or map, etc., introduces an important new idea, or if it adds evidence for an idea we are already tracing in the text.”

**“Today I want to teach you that readers make sure that they read across the page and incorporate all the information given in a variety of text features, to synthesize dense nonfiction.”**

Every day, after your lesson you want to send students off to read/jot/talk. Watch your balance of time so that students read for about thirty minutes, then jot for five, then talk for five, or some balance like that, that maximizes reading time.

***Bend 1, Session 6: Readers teach others what they’ve learned***

By this point, you will have been able to see what students are succeeding in and what they are struggling with through their writing about reading and partner talk. It’s critical here that you record observations of the students’ work to help you plan for moving students into text set groups for the next bend. Across the rest of your sessions, your teaching will be based on what you find out as students are summarizing and teaching each other what they’ve learned. Because you are still in a common topic, it will be easier to listen for students’ misconceptions, and to determine which students are reading for complex concepts and which students are stuck in simpler terminology and thinking. Use today to listen carefully, to take notes, and to plan for small group lessons when students move on to other topics. You may also be thinking about steering students to text sets with more support, should they need it, or text sets that connect to truly complicated issues, should students be ready for that.

**“Today I want to teach you that when people read nonfiction books and articles on a topic, they become experts on that topic, and so teach others what they know. They sum up key points about the topic and give supporting details, including visual supports, and cite their sources.”**

To raise the level of partnership work, teach partners that when people read nonfiction books and articles on a topic, we become experts on that topic, and so teach others what we know. To teach someone, we need to determine the central ideas and the supporting details—and we need to make it fascinating! Also teach partners that if it is a struggle to remember the important points the nonfiction text taught, we can point to significant pages or illustrations, and use our Post-it headings to guide our conversation. Partners can also add-in, to co-author understanding.

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Additionally, partners might benefit from sentence starters to keep their academic conversations going:

**Often we focus on one idea and several examples:** ‘One significant idea is...’ Then we might use starters such as *for example, also, in addition, furthermore*. Or ‘and a fascinating detail that supports this idea is...’

**Other times, we make comparisons:** ‘One significant idea in this text is.... which is similar to/different from...’ Then we might use starters such as *On the one hand...on the other hand*.

**Other times, we notice how our thinking has changed:** We might use starters such as *I used to think...because...for example. But now I think...because...for example*.

## Bend II: Reading Closely, Writing, and Talking to Learn about a Topic

In this bend, we suggest moving to a different topic for your read alouds and demonstration teaching. And crucially, we recommend that students now depart from a class study, and instead are reading in groups organized by topics so that they are navigating the topic on their own. The text sets for these groups should include texts at a variety of reading levels, as one point you will make is that when learning something new, it’s best to start by reading some easy texts to get some quick background knowledge. You will also want the text sets (and your demonstration texts!) to include some expository and some narrative nonfiction, so that you can teach into students’ recognizing and using these structures as they read. See examples of text sets in the appendix and on our website.

The teaching in this bend focuses on practicing all students just learned in the first bend, with an added attention to writing and talking about information texts as a way to process and understand them. A 2010 report by Steve Graham and Michael Hebert concluded that the act of writing about reading (personal reactions, summaries, and/or analysis) improves reading comprehension. This was true across grades, content areas, and student abilities. (Graham, S. and Hebert, M.: 2010. *Writing to Read: Evidence for How Writing Can Improve Reading*. New York, NY: Carnegie Corporation) It will also be helpful for students to have planned time to talk to each other about the topics they are studying. Setting students up in consistent topic-based clubs is a way to make this talk consistent and purposeful. They can swap around the texts in their text set, and talk to come to consensus on central ideas across the texts, raise questions and confusion that require further research, and generate co-created artifacts to chart their growing understanding of the topic.

Because the class will no longer be steeped in the same content study, you’ll want to change up how you structure shares at the end of class. Some days you might want to share out the work of a specific student or group, and ask other groups to try a similar strategy. Other days you may dedicate 5 minutes at the end of class for groups to teach each other what they’ve learned, and allow others to ask questions to stimulate further research. You will also want to plan for a celebration at the end of this unit—some way for each group to pull together what they’ve learned and display it for an audience, complete with citations. This is likely not a major research writing project, as that will be the purview of the writing unit to come. See the end of this unit for some ideas for projects and potential audiences.

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***Bend II, Session One: Building background knowledge by reading easy texts on a topic first***

In this session, you will kick off students' studies of new topics by launching a new shared study. You'll want to teach students today that one of the most powerful ways to approach a topic is to do so with some background knowledge. These days, background knowledge is easy to get - google searches, TED talks, YouTube videos: all of these offer opportunities to learn a little about a subject before delving into it in earnest. But it's important, when dealing with truly new content, to seek out the easiest texts possible as a first step. Often google searches turn up hard articles: even Wiki sites can be too full of complex vocabulary to be much help.

But looking on Amazon for very early readers on a topic can be truly helpful! And often you can purchase these books used for as little as \$.01 plus shipping. Encourage students to seek out these kinds of books when then can—through this kind of online shopping for used books, or by visiting a library and spending time reading around the subject area in the children's book section. This is a life skill, not just a school skill! Model this through first reading an easy book about the class topic you will take up. Here we recommend the topic of Julius Caesar—more generally, Ancient Rome, starting with the Kingfisher Readers L3 book, *Ancient Rome*, by Philip Steele (New York: Kingfisher, 2012).

**Readers orient themselves to a topic by building background knowledge. One way to do this is by finding easy texts on a topic and reading to understand key concepts and vocabulary.**

You will want to be sure to keep your read aloud short today, as the concept of reading to develop big categories of information about a topic is no longer new, and the teaching point is one that will transfer easily to students' own work. So you will want to leave as much time as possible for them to get started reading the easy texts in their own text sets.

Model reading over the table of contents to get a sense of the categories you will learn about. Also look for any overarching graphic organizers that the book might offer as an overview to the topic, such as a time line, map or glossary (the book we recommend includes a timeline and a glossary). Prompt students to turn and talk to say big things they notice and wonder already about this topic.

Read a chapter to show how you quickly gain a sense of what's important in this topic. Model creating categories on chart paper that show what you've learned. For Ancient Rome, you might jot:

- Becoming an Empire - ruling many parts of the world
- Trading for goods
- Keeping up an army
- Government - who ruled in addition to the emperor

Note that you have many questions that are unanswered, especially by this simple introduction. Jot some questions down that you and the students will continue to research. Some might be:

- How did people become powerful in Ancient Rome?
- Why was Rome so powerful in the world at that time?

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- What was it like for people living there to be part of an Empire? Did everyone benefit?

For your link, invite students to get started right away in their clubs, reading an easy text and creating start-up notetaking categories and preliminary research questions. You may want to have multiple copies of the easier texts available for clubs, so that everyone in the club starts with the same basic information.

Coach into students' reading, talk, and notetaking. Be sure that all three of these are happening! Prompt for students to practice their summary skills from Bend One, and to create meaningful categories for research based on what they've read so far. By the end of class, groups should be able to look through the other texts in their text set and plan for reading they will do the next day, based on the questions they've raised and their initial understandings of the topic.

***Bend II, Session Two: Identifying narrative nonfiction and adjusting reading to include narrative skills about ideas and themes***

This session will be a shared experience, with an interactive, instructional read aloud again. For the purpose of demonstrating how to powerfully read narrative nonfiction, we recommend using *Julius Caesar: Dictator for Life*. This is part of The Wicked History series (This text: Lexile 1030. Choose a text with higher or lower complexity based on the data you have collected about your students.) There is a whole range of fascinating and horrible histories in this series—sure to engage. The text is engaging both viscerally and intellectually, one part violent and another complex. You could, of course, choose to use any other narrative nonfiction text that is appropriate for your students—just choose something fascinating.

The overall goal is to show that when approaching narrative nonfiction, whether this is a whole text or a section of a text, we do double work: we pay attention to the narrative parts of the text (thinking about characters, motivations, problems, and solutions) and we also pay attention to the informational parts of the text (the main ideas, concepts, and facts) to gather ideas about both. One way we do this is to ask ourselves 'what is this story starting to be about?' and we develop central ideas and themes.

**“Today I want to teach you that when readers realize that the nonfiction they are reading is narrative nonfiction they draw on all they know about reading narrative and reading expository text to organize their thinking and notebooks to gather ideas about both.”**

We suggest demonstrating by reading the opening chapter plus excerpts from Chapters 1-4 of *Julius Caesar: Dictator for Life* and show how you stop to think, “what is this story starting to be about? What are some character traits, motivations and obstacles that we are learning about?” and then reread to consider what information you are learning as well—what central ideas are you gathering about life in Ancient Rome, or about Caesar's rise to power? One way we have structured this read aloud successfully is by handing out copies of the graphic organizers that the book offers in the form of a map of the relevant areas and a web of people relevant to Caesar's life. Ask Partner 1 to listen especially for information about geography—where all this was taking place, and Partner 2 to listen especially for information about social and political connections. Ask them to use the handouts as notetaking supports, pointing out that when they read nonfiction and are given such

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supports, they should use them!

Note who is having difficulty so you can meet them in small groups during the next sessions. Look for indicators of difficulty, such as students demonstrating trouble balancing the reading work of both fiction and nonfiction. For instance, you may listen into a partnership and hear students sharing ideas, motivations and traits of the people, but not sharing bigger ideas the author is advancing about the times or culture. If this is the case, tether students back to helpful tools from bend one, such as the boxes and bullets outline.

Link to students' own work by asking them to plan for the reading and notetaking work they will do next. (You may have some more time today for this, or you may have to ask them to plan for the next class period depending on how long the shared experience lasted.) Ask them to look at the texts they have and to figure out: which texts are narrative nonfiction, and which are expository? In the expository texts, which include chapters that are narrative? Ask groups to plan for who will read which texts next, and to make plans for that reading and notetaking based on the structures that they are noticing.

***Bend II, Session Three: Generating headings and subheadings to help navigate a complex text, and to structure group conversations and collective notetaking***

In this session, you may teach students to recognize and track multiple ideas that an author advances in a text by self-generating headings and subheadings that help navigate a text. For instance, we can teach that sometimes texts are complex because they have no headings and subheadings, so we can supply our own headings and subheadings for different chunks of text. Then we look back over these, after several pages, and see if the text is mostly about one central idea or if there are a few important ideas. This is critical work for our students, as complex nonfiction will often move between a few ideas—sometimes even opposing ones—and having a bird's eye view of a text can help students develop more text specific understandings.

**“Today I want to teach you that when encountering complex texts with no headings or subheadings, readers supply their own for different sections of text. Readers also continually revise their understanding of a topic by sorting information into familiar categories, and making new categories when necessary.”**

You may also need to teach students that as nonfiction gets more complex, it is helpful to read across longer chunks of text, aiming to trace more than one idea and making connections across them. We push ourselves to figure out one or two important ideas, and then we gather evidence for those ideas, so that we are summarizing the most important ideas and information the author is teaching. We often pause longer before taking notes. Sometimes a new section will be about a whole new idea. Additionally, you may find students would benefit from other strategies and tools such as 'chunking' the text, talking to a partner about parts, jotting in the margins or on Post-its to hold onto ideas that seem important, looking up hard words in glossaries.

In a share at the end of today's session, you may prompt groups to come up with the most important headings that they have discovered up to this point, and to document them in some way. Ideally, they will have access to chart paper, to colored pens and pencils, and to Post-its for this so that they can decide how best to represent the multiple subtopics and ideas they are generating.

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Ask them to practice arguing for the importance of their heading, by talking about its relevance to 1) key factors in the topic, 2) its presence across multiple texts, or 3) its attention to an important counterpoint or overlooked perspective. In this way, you support the groups' ongoing consideration of what's important to know about in their topics—and why.

***Bend II, Session Four: Readers synthesize narrative nonfiction to the big underlying ideas, and then they support these ideas with small moments and details from the text***

Often readers want to read many pages of text and then synthesize, so they don't get caught up in minute details that may not turn out to be important. In this session, you'll return to your anchor text, *Julius Caesar*, and you'll teach your students that readers often synthesize narrative nonfiction across many pages of text, which means they read a lot, and then think about the big underlying ideas. For students to do this kind of reading, you might reread part of the text aloud, or you might have parts of it copied for them—say a chapter. Show how you think back over a whole chapter, and summarize it, using the small moments and details in the narrative as examples of ideas.

**“Today I want to teach you that readers often synthesize narrative nonfiction across many pages of text, which means they read a lot, and then think about the big underlying ideas.”**

Then, for the active involvement, ask students to jot a summary of another chapter, so that you and they can assess their narrative nonfiction skills. Often you'll find that students who are avid fiction readers need to be reminded to apply analytical lenses to narrative nonfiction—to read to learn, not only get swept up in the story.

If you notice students struggling to determine places in the text to stop and think, guide them to find predictable places to stop and think when reading narrative nonfiction. For instance, at the end of a chapter; when noticing a change or shift in the character, person or subject you are reading about; when a conflict arises or gets resolved; during an unexpected turn-of-events; when the setting or place changes and so on.

***Bend II, Session Five: Readers write long to think about their topic. They use the structure of essay to push their thinking to be logical and evidence-based***

**“Today I want to teach you that readers can write to think more about their topic. They can use the structure of an essay to push their thinking to be logical and evidence-based”**

This would be an excellent moment to prompt students for some informal essay writing as a way to process what they are learning so far. If your students are simultaneously writing information books in writing workshop, you might plan to prompt for this after the first bend of that writing unit, when they will have learned to draft informational essays. If you are not teaching that unit at this time, you might borrow from the unit (especially the examples of student writing) to teach into this here. Teach students that writing long in an essay format can help to solidify thinking about a topic, and can also lead to new research questions. As an example, you might take up a central idea from your reading about Julius Caesar and Ancient Rome, such as “In Ancient Rome, ruthlessness was a way to gain power.” You might plan for how that essay would go in a box-and-bullets outline:

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In Ancient Rome, ruthlessness was a way to gain power.

- Ruthlessness created fear, which could make people afraid to cross you.
- Ruthlessness made people trust that you would always be in charge.
- Being ruthless could help you get rid of any enemies through violence.

Give students time to quickly plan for their essays, coaching into their work (Try to get to as many of them as possible in 30-second sound-byte tips, like: make sure your points are not redundant! Make sure you have evidence for each point! Make sure every point supports your central idea!). Then, have them spend time in class doing this writing. The end of class can serve as a quick share time among clubs. Collect these drafts as a way to quickly sort for small groups on use and analysis of evidence, logical thinking, and, most importantly, a group for students who are clearly not understanding what they are reading (in this case, you will need to do more diagnostic work—is it the reading level of the materials, or confusion about the content, or a writing issue?)

***Bend II, Session Six: Readers analyze the craft nonfiction writers use when teaching others through writing***

At this point of the unit, you'll notice students writing about reading dense with ideas and evidence, which is a big goal of this unit, as well as the emphasis of the Common Core Reading Standards 1-3. This session pushes students to also consider reading for author's craft and intent when exploring nonfiction (Reading CCSS 4-6). Consider a session where you push student to analyze the craft of narrative nonfiction writers, 'analyzing the craft, such as vivid images, symbolism, literary devices' across their reading.

**"Today I want to teach you that readers analyze the craft nonfiction writers use when teaching others through writing."**

The opening chapter of *Julius Caesar* serves a helpful example when demonstrating this work. Your demonstration might sound something like: *Students, as I've been studying your independent work, I'm impressed with how many ideas you are gathering, both obvious ideas and more subtle ideas, as well as collecting evidence that supports this thinking. Today, we are going to add another layer of our reading work when reading nonfiction. Today I want to teach you that readers also study the way writers communicate all they know about a topic. Specially, we study the way writers write—the craft of their writing—and how that affects how we learn about the topic. Check out what I mean. Here's an excerpt of the first chapter of Julius Caesar. As I read this, be thinking how the author is writing, what moves the author is using in their writing, in order to teach you about the subject.*

You may highlight the words Rinaldo uses and then think about how those words contribute to a portrait of Caesar as ruthless—or as determined. Or perhaps you pop out the choice to use a comparison and what effect that produces. You may decide to use the author's craft and techniques cards for informational writing as a way to make this work concrete.

As students go off to read their own texts, invite them to notice what parts of their own texts have some great author's craft, and suggest that they do some of this same work (noticing some of the author's craft) as they read that day. When it's time for the club to reconvene, either today or

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another day, be sure they fold into their conversation comments like — ‘and the way the book teaches is by...’ or ‘this author does this cool thing where...’

***Bend II, Session Seven: Readers carry forward their whole repertoire of strategies so they are undaunted by texts they really want to read***

By this point, you may want to talk frankly to your students about tackling complexity, showing your readers how to make sense of harder texts. Given that the benchmarks for grade level reading in middle school are quite high—from either a Lexile or a Fountas & Pinnell standpoint—it’s likely that students will be faced with texts that are dense and conceptually complicated. It’s important to let your readers know that it’s not surprising that sometimes texts will not make sense on a first read. But that it’s not ok to give up easily! Or to pretend that something is making sense when it’s not yet doing so.

We suggest that you choose a new section of your read aloud to model this work, choosing a part that demands a lot of attention both to detail and to central ideas that have been building. For example, in Julius Caesar, any of the chapters from Part 2: Path to Power. (These chapters ask readers to follow Caesar’s particular rise to power, while also teaching readers all the terminology and underlying conflicts of Rome’s political systems. Quite challenging!)

**“Today I want to teach you that readers not only call on all they know to read harder nonfiction, they also expect to do some rapid rereading to make sense of parts.”**

*As you begin reading, you might say, Listen, readers, one of the goals of holding you to reading across a text when there are lots of features, and summarizing across denser chunks of text—reading for underlying ideas and supporting details, and reading to learn even when the text is narrative, or sounds like a story—has been to get you ready to read harder nonfiction. A lot of harder, really good nonfiction, that I want you to be able to read, asks the reader to do all of this work at one time. Part will be story, part will be expository. Some pages will have pages of text with no headings, and others will have maps, and diagrams. Let’s tackle this together —and before we do so, can you turn and tell your partner some of the important strategies you’ll use?*

Listen for the strategies students name, and then say them back—you might even chart them. You might say, ‘I love the way you’re expecting to...’ and then list some of the repertoire of what they’ve learned. If they leave out an important one, tell them ‘There’s one more that’s going to help a lot...’

As you read, prompt readers about the parts: ‘This part is going to sound like a story, so think about what you’ll pay attention to...’ ‘this part is going to give you a ton of information, so you’ll want to jot some boxes and bullets—even if you start with bullets and then have to think about a box for the idea...’ ‘this part has some really interesting craft—writerly moves—I’ll be curious what you notice the author does that you think is effective.’ That is, rather than you modeling, this is a chance for you to prompt students, listen to them, and give them feedback.

As you do this work, you’ll undoubtedly need to reread parts. As that happens, teach students that readers not only call on all they know to read harder nonfiction, they also expect to do some rapid rereading to make sense of parts.

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Have students make a plan for the text set reading they intend to tackle next, purposefully moving to texts that are more challenging, and naming what they already predict those challenges to be.

A predictable mid-workshop at this point in the unit will be to encourage readers to take up their topic further by looking for additional texts.

**“Today I want to teach you that as readers become passionate about a subject they find more stuff. They find websites and videos, they borrow books from the library and each other. They keep going!”**

If you notice students needed a boost in their reading volume, encourage them to create personalized reading plans to continue reading about a topic of interest. You could say, “As readers become passionate about a subject they find more stuff—they find websites and videos, they borrow books from the library and each other—they keep going.” Or if you notice readers becoming heavy or light in either fiction or nonfiction, consider teaching, “Readers often balance different kinds of reading in their lives. That means they’ll usually have some novel they are reading, that they love, while also reading other texts to learn information—which is also fascinating. Readers also keep an eye on their reading logs, and reflect on how reading is going for them, especially when they make changes in their reading lives. One way to reflect is to give a partner a tour of your reading life, using your log or records as data.”

***Bend II, Session Eight: Reading for tone***

**“Today I want to teach you that as readers pay attention to the particular details authors have chosen to include and ask themselves what tone the author develops. Thinking about how it seems the author feels about the subject, or how the author seems to want the reader to feel about the subject, can be a way to consider the tone.”**

You may choose to return to the Julius Caesar read aloud today as a way to read closely for the tone of a passage. The chapter “Blood in the Streets” is a good one for showing how the author’s choice of details helps to establish a feeling of desperation, which can in turn help make the reader more accepting of Caesar’s calculating choice regarding his marriage. You may instead choose to use a digital text (these are often fun and also an excellent way into the concept of tone, as you can comment on the actual tone of voice of the readers/actors, as well as any musical choices, lighting, etc.). This Biography.com video would work—pause often to allow kids to comment on the seriousness of the narrator’s voice, the foreboding music in the background, and the shadowy lighting over the images. All of this adds up to help us understand the horror of Caesar’s murder. (Note that links can die! We apologize if this link is no longer active in the future, but you can of course find another example!) <http://www.biography.com/people/julius-caesar-9192504>

As kids go off to read, encourage them to notice tone in their nonfiction as well. Ask them to share with their partners, not just ideas and information, but also to reveal how the author seems to feel about this subject. Does she make you worried for our water supply? Does she make you angry at people who over-fish?

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***Bend II, Session Nine: Readers develop technical vocabulary and use it in their conversations and writing***

In this session you'll return to any of your anchor texts, which students will need a copy of, so they can highlight and circle new technical words and concepts. You'll want to read parts of the text again with this lens—of what vocabulary this text teaches the reader. A lot of nonfiction explicitly intends to teach readers vocabulary. For instance, in *Oh! Rats* and parts of *Julius Caesar*, the author explains many technical terms directly. In other texts or parts of texts, the reader has to infer new terms from the text. Teach your readers, therefore, that readers develop technical vocabulary and use it in their conversations and writing. One way they do this is they are alert to when the author is explicitly teaching new terms, and when the reader needs to infer from context clues.

**“Today I want to teach you that readers develop technical vocabulary and use it in their conversations and writing.”**

Demonstrate by showing some different sections of the texts, showing how sometimes the vocabulary appears in text boxes, or sidebars, or bolds and a glossary. Other times it is explained in the text itself. And still other times, the reader is expected to know or find out the meaning of the terms.

This time, when you set students the task of summarizing the text, prompt them to use expert terms:

1 pt.	1 pt.	1 pt.	1 pt.	1 pt.
I found multiple central ideas.	I backed these up with evidence, including specific quotes and details.	I included evidence from across the parts of the text.	I analyzed the author's craft - parts where the author stirred up emotions.	I used technical vocabulary.

You can see how, as your students become more adept at this work, you can change what's on a checklist.

As you watch students try this work independently, be on the lookout for students who just drop in technical vocabulary, but don't necessarily explain or define the terms. Guide them back to the texts they're reading. Prompt students, "How does this author explain the technical vocabulary important to this topic? Does she create a comparison? Add a definition? Pair it with an illustration or photograph?" Then, remind students to try a similar move in their writing.

As kids go off to read and then teach partners, remind them that one of their jobs as readers is to learn that vocabulary, which means they may want to jot down important terms before talking to a partner. Because some students will be reading texts they'll use in their persuasive essays, you might also remind them to mark vocabulary they want to teach the reader in their essays.

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*Bend II, Session Ten: Synthesis, reflection, celebration*

**“Today I want to teach you that readers celebrate their learning by teaching others what they’ve learned, by creating annotated bibliographies to help future researchers, and by reflecting on their progress as readers and thinkers.”**

For the end of this unit, be sure to save a day (or perhaps two—one for planning!) for clubs to present to each other. They should plan for a group presentation: each member will talk through some part of their topic, using visuals and other supports. This is not a writing unit, so the point is not for the group to draft and revise their presentation many times, but instead to use the act of presenting as a last chance to synthesize the central ideas and the key details from all of their reading and to teach others what they now know. A supporting document that would be appropriate would be for each group to create an annotated bibliography of the texts they read—a document with a brief (one to two lines!) summary of the text, plus an analysis of how the text fits into the bigger topic, including possible limitations. For example, for the Julius Caesar book, the line item might read: “This engaging book offers an in-depth overview of Caesar’s rise to power and his downfall. The tone of the author makes it clear that this was a dangerous time, and that Caesar’s ambition was necessary for him to survive. It does not offer much of an analysis of how ordinary Roman people were affected by Caesar’s rule.”

You may also have readers reflect not only on what content they’ve learned, but what reading growth they’ve noticed within themselves. For instance, students might reflect on what they’ve learned as a learner of new content and a reader, then share that with a classmate or peer group. Students might display their strongest summary writing or series of jots as a visual celebration. They also might give mini-speeches on the content they’ve learned across the unit. This way, you’ve created a celebration that not only highlights getting smarter about content—but emphasizes getting smarter as readers.

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## Appendix

Note that there are some narrative, some expository in each set. Of course you could compile different lists for different topics. If you do, please send to [audra@readingandwritingproject.com](mailto:audra@readingandwritingproject.com) and we will add to our digital lists of resources. You can also find supplemental or replacements sets of articles recommended in our “Resources/Text Sets” part of our website ([www.readingandwritingproject.org](http://www.readingandwritingproject.org)). We highly recommend, however, working towards collecting sets of high-quality nonfiction books in your school. These can be shared at different times of the year if necessary. It is hard to read for craft when the text has not been well-crafted - and books are generally more well-crafted than articles. (not always, of course!) See the TCRWP website under “Resources” for order forms for recommended text sets of nonfiction books for middle school.

### **Text Set to accompany *Oh Rats!* by Albert Marrin**

#### **Friends -**

*Time and time again rats help their own—this article looks at a study showing their compassionate instincts.*

Rats to the Rescue in Cage Experiment by Sindya N. Bhanoo

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/13/science/observatory-rats-have-empathy-study-finds.html? r=0>

*Studies show that rats are loyal companions—this Scholastic article focuses on studies that show just how friendly rodents can be.*

Why Rats Make Good Friends by Sara Goudarzi

<http://www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3756851>

BBC reports that rats great sense of smell and are able to detect gunshot residue and drugs. They are training rats to be able to fight crime.

“Holland’s ‘Sniffer Rats’ Have a Nose for Crime Fighting” - VIDEO

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24071303>

*This Scholastic article looks at ways rats are being used to discover and disarm dangerous landmines.*

Putting Rats to Work by Tyrus Cukavac

<http://www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3756765>

PETA published a public service video “Who Cares?”

<http://bit.ly/hfnyXK>

#### **Foes -**

*Hurricane Sandy flooded the sewers and brought more rats out to the streets. This article looks at how the city plans to address the problem.*

“The Post Sandy New York City Rat Invasion Everyone Said Wouldn’t Happen Has Begun” by Adrian Chen

<http://gawker.com/5982573/the-post+sandy-new-york-city-rat-invasion-everyone-said-wouldnt-happen-has-begun>

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*Exterminators in New York City struggle to keep up with the massive infestation of rats following Hurricane Sandy according to this NY Times article.*

Storm's Toll Creep Inland, 4 Tiny Feet at a Time by Cara Buckley of the NY Times

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/07/nyregion/after-storm-rats-creep-inland.html>

*CBS New reports on rats that have overtaken a NYC park.*

Neighbors: Fearless Rats Have Commandeered Park in Woodside, Queens - VIDEO

<http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2013/07/31/neighbors-rats-have-ruined-park-in-woodside-queens/>

*Time for Kids takes a closer look at the rat infestations in Florida cities and why it has become such a problem.*

Giant Rats Have Invaded the Florida Keys by Stephanie Kraus

<http://www.timeforkids.com/news/rats/34351>

*This article, published by the Associated Press takes a close look at dog owners make a sport out of rat-hunting with their dogs.*

"Rat-hunting Dogs Take a Bite out of New York City's Vermin Problem" - AP article on The Daily News

<http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/rat-hunting-dogs-bite-new-york-city-vermin-problem-article-1.1331191>

**Nuanced -**

*New York City has found a way to reduce the rat population that doesn't involve killing or hunting - this "birth control" plan could have many effects on the cities rat population.*

"The Surprisingly Gentle Plan Behind New York City's Plan to Sterilize Its Rats" by John Metcalfe

<http://www.theatlanticcities.com/technology/2013/04/surprisingly-gentle-science-behind-new-yorks-plan-sterilize-its-rats/5148/>

*Researchers study the brain science in rats.*

Rodent Mind Meld: Scientists Wire Two Rats' Brains Together by Greg Miller

<http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2013/02/rodent-mind-meld/>

*This Scholastic article looks at the brain science of rats and how this might help researchers looking to repair or treat human brain damage.*

Rat Mind Meld by Jennifer Marino Walters

<http://sni.scholastic.com/news/2013/03/Rat-Mind-Meld>

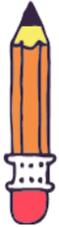
**See the following pages for an example of how instruction and club work might go for Bends I and II.**



## Bend One: Ratcheting up our nonfiction reading practices to read more complex informational texts

### Anchor Text: *Oh Rats! The Story of Rats and People*

<i>Session/Minilesson</i>	<i>Conferring and Small Group</i>	<i>Mid-Workshop Teaching</i>	<i>Share</i>	
<b>1</b> 	<p>Readers call on a repertoire of strategies to orient themselves, including any abstract or covers, figuring out how the text is structured, using any text features, rereading the opening paragraphs, and teaching others what they've learned. (<i>Read at least three or four chapters.</i>)</p>	<p>Introduce the text set to students. Readers are careful to think before taking notes—stopping to ask: What's really important? How will I organize my notes to best represent what I'm learning?"</p>	<p>Partner talk: Nonfiction readers teach each other the big ideas they are learning. They also show their partners how they used their notebooks to hold onto their learning.</p>	
<b>2</b> 	<p>Readers hold onto what we are learning by pausing at the end of a part of text—or when our mind is full—and asking, “What did I just read?” Then we record a few big ideas and support details.</p>	<p>Readers make sure to take notes in our own words. We can read the text, cover the words, and then take notes to make sure we are thinking before we write.</p>	<p>Readers should find many central ideas in their topics and texts.</p>	<p>Partners can use their box and bullets to make sure they are talking about big ideas and relevant details. This will help organize their thoughts.</p>
<b>3</b> 	<p>Readers read between the lines to pull out big ideas or concepts that aren't often explicit and easy to spot</p>	<p>Coaching Conferences- Coach in as students read independently by asking: “What are these details an example of? What does this all add up to? What does this evidence make you think the author is trying to teach about the topic here?”</p>	<p>Readers interact with new vocabulary by actively trying to figure out what new words mean- through studying text features, reading across the text and asking: how does this word fit with what I'm learning about this?</p>	<p>Partner talk- Partners share their new learning, trying to talk across multiple texts. In addition, they try to incorporate new vocabulary in their teaching.</p>
<b>4</b> 	<p>Readers reflect on their summaries and set goals for being accurate, detailed, and idea-based.</p>	<p>Readers study mentor jots as exemplars and use these jots when trying this work on their own.</p>	<p>On Demand: Jot a summary of what you've read.</p>	<p>Partners can share and assess this summaries using the checklist and their partner.</p>



<p>5</p> 	<p>Readers make sure that they read across the page and incorporate all the information given in a variety of text features.</p>	<p>Readers make sure that their summaries match the way their texts are structured.</p>	<p>Readers reflect on their summaries to make sure they include ALL of the page.</p>	<p>Partners can share and assess this summaries using the checklist and their partner.</p>
<p>6</p> 	<p>Readers teach all that they've learned about a topic to their partner.</p>	<p>Readers prepare for conversations by looking over all of their jottings.</p>		<p>Partners use sentence starters when needed when sharing all of their learning.</p>



<b>Bend Two: Reading Closely, Writing, and Talking to Learn about a Topic</b> Anchor Text: <i>Text Set – Julius Caesar (option)</i>			
<b>Session/Minilesson</b>	<b>Conferring and Small Group</b>	<b>Mid-Workshop Teaching</b>	<b>Share</b>
<b>1</b> 	Readers orient themselves to a topic by building background knowledge. One way to do this is by finding easy texts on a topic and reading to understand key concepts and vocabulary. <i>After the read-aloud send students off to read in their clubs.</i>	Readers create meaningful categories for research based on what they've read so far.	As clubs, readers can look through their text sets and plan for reading they will do the next day, based on the questions they've raised and their initial understandings of the topic.
<b>2</b> 	Read-aloud: <i>Julius Caesar: Dictator for Life</i> Chapters 1-4  Readers notice when a nonfiction text or part of a text is structured as a narrative, and read to think about the story elements of that text or section, as well as to gather information about the topic.		Clubs can look across texts and note which texts are narrative and which are expository. Make plans for reading and note taking based on the structures they are noticing.  <i>Start reading if time.</i>
<b>3</b> 	Readers recognize and track multiple ideas that an author advances in a text by self-generating headings and subheadings. Readers also sort information into familiar categories and make new categories when necessary.	Possible conferences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Readers chunk the text</li><li>• Readers jot in the margins or on Post-its to hold onto ideas that seem important</li><li>• Readers look up hard words in the glossaries</li></ul>	Readers read across longer chunks of text, aiming to trace more than one idea and making connections across them.  Clubs can document the most important headings they have discovered so far and document them in some way. <i>(Provide chart paper, markers, Post-its so students can decide how to best represent multiple subtopics and ideas they are generating.)</i> Readers can practice arguing for the importance of their heading.

<p>4</p> 	<p>Readers often synthesize narrative nonfiction across many pages of text, which means they read a lot, and then think about the big underlying ideas.</p>	<p>Readers pause at predictable places when reading narrative nonfiction- such as at the end of chapter, when noticing a change or shift in the character/person, when a conflict arises or gets resolved, during an unexpected turn-of-events, and when the setting or place changes.</p>	<p>Readers get ready for clubs by looking over their jottings, preparing to share bigger ideas in the text.</p>	<p>Club talk- readers share out big ideas they are learning, making sure to categorize details as they teach their club.</p>
<p>5</p> 	<p>Readers write long to think more about their topic. They can use the structure of an essay to push their thinking to be logical and evidence-based.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essayists include text evidence to back up their claim. One way they do this is to ask themselves, “What part of the text made me think this?” Then, they return to that part of the text in order to find a part to quote.</li> <li>• Essayists choose only the most compelling pieces of evidence. One thing writers do is they reread each piece of evidence and underline the parts that really, truly support their claim. Then, they cut the rest.</li> </ul>	<p>Clubs can share out their essays, giving feedback around structure and elaboration. Checklists can be used to help with this process.</p>	
<p>6</p> 	<p>Readers analyze the craft nonfiction writers use when teaching others through writing.</p>	<p>Possible conferences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tracking central ideas across texts</li> <li>• Using structure to get ready to learn from an author</li> <li>• Figuring out which details are worth remembering</li> </ul>	<p>Readers prepare for clubs by getting ready to share their noticings of author’s craft. Readers might write in their notebook using the prompt: “The author does _____ in order to ____.”</p>	<p>Clubs make sure to include their noticings of authors’ craft in their conversations. Readers can use phrases such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “the way the book teaches is by...”</li> <li>• “this author does this cool thing where...”</li> <li>• “The author does _____ in order to ____.”</li> </ul>
<p>7</p> 	<p>Readers not only call on all they know to read harder nonfiction, they also expect to do some rapid rereading to make sense of parts.</p>	<p>Possible conferences: Same as yesterday! But maybe some are ready for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considering how craft helps readers understand more deeply.</li> </ul>	<p>Readers take up their topic further by looking for additional texts. They find websites and videos, they borrow books from the library and each other—they keep going!</p>	<p>Readers keep an eye on their reading logs, and reflect on how reading is going for them, especially when they make changes in their reading lives.</p>

<p>8</p> 	<p>Readers pay attention to the particular details authors have chosen to include and ask themselves what tone the author develops.</p>	<p>Possible conferences: Same as Session 7, but some may be ready for a small group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certain words signal tone – let’s study how authors choose words that give us a feeling along with information.</li> </ul>	<p>Readers prepare for clubs by finding parts of the text that reveal tone.</p>	<p>Clubs share not just ideas and information, but also reveal how the author seems to feel about the subject.</p>
<p>9</p> 	<p>Readers develop technical vocabulary and use it in their conversations and writing.</p>	<p>Possible conferences: Same as prior sessions, but some students might be ready for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We can use our notebooks to keep track of and group technical vocabulary so we can find it easily.</li> </ul>	<p>Partners can quickly share new noticings of how authors are including and teaching technical vocabulary.</p>	<p>Clubs teach each other making sure to include technical vocabulary.</p>
<p>10</p> 	<p>Readers celebrate their learning by teaching others what they’ve learned, by creating annotated bibliographies, and by reflecting on their progress.</p>			

