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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Teachers College Reading and Writing Project
Reading Curricular Calendar, Sixth Grade, 2016-2017
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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.

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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Reading Curricular Calendar, Sixth Grade, 2016-2017
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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 serves 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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Reading Curricular Calendar, Sixth Grade, 2016-2017
Turn Every Kid Into a Reader – and a Character Analyst

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

"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 ¾ 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 the 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 or 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 is 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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