Protests Against Racism: Resources for the ELA Classroom

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was killed by a Minneapolis police officer. Captured on video, Floyd’s death (along with the deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks, and many others) has become the impetus for nationwide protests and renewed calls for social change addressing racial injustice and white supremacy.

Teachers looking to augment their curriculum and transform their practice in response to these transformative times may find the following resources helpful.

- **Black Lives Matter, the Killing of George Floyd, and the Long Fight for Racial Justice**
- **Five Key Anti-Racism Resources for Teachers**
- **Five Things Educators Can Do to Address Bias in Their Schools**
- **Teaching About Race and Racism: Lesson Plans and Resources**
- **Creating the Space to Talk About Racism in Your School**
- **Scaffolded Anti-Racism Resources**

Write for Scribbles ‘N Bits

Scribbles ‘N Bits invites submissions from GCTE members on all manner of topics that might interest ELA teachers. Sharing struggles and successes in the classroom, tackling challenging subjects with students, teaching in a perilous time: the GCTE community needs your voice.

You can also submit work directly to Scribbles editor Karen Mitcham (at kmitcham@mgresa.us). When you’re preparing a piece, be sure to check the Writing for Scribbles: General Guidelines document for pointers and recommendations. We look forward to hearing from you.
National News
Susan Barber
The NCTE Presidential Team released NCTE Takes A Stance Against Racism in early June in response to the racial violence and brutality this past spring. While NCTE has always been committed “to apply the power of language and literacy to actively pursue justice and equity for all students and the educators who serve them,” this statement speaks specifically to the anti-racist work educators are called to do. Several resources for educators are included in this statement.

The NCTE 2020 Annual Conference has moved to a virtual format due to COVID-19. Confluencia: Song of Ourselves, this year’s theme, is described by 2020 NCTE Annual Convention Program Chair Alfredo Celedón Luján as “the reunion of ideas, genres, philosophies, songs, genders, cultures, heritage, ethnicities, regions, terrains, teachers, and students.” All efforts are being made to deliver a dynamic and interactive virtual event from November 19-22. Keynote speakers include US Poet Laureate Joy Harjo and novelist and short story author Kali Fajardo-Anstine.

NCTE has been holding weekly member gatherings to support teachers working in isolation during COVID-19. These gatherings typically feature authors speaking on relevant topics and allow members to learn and interact with others. Check out the NCTE event schedule for upcoming events.

Finally, all GCTE members are invited to participate for free in Mosaic 2020: the Unofficial AP English Literature and Language Free Slow Conference. The virtual conference runs from July 19-Aug. 17 with a variety of sessions and keynote speakers.

Susan Barber is the NCTE liaison for GCTE.

The Everyday Classroom Teacher — A Quarterly Column

The Everyday Classroom Teacher highlights literacy work I do with my students day in and day out in the fourth-grade classroom, particularly focusing on the need to be intentional with the multiple aspects of Balanced Literacy. Lucy Calkins’ model of Balanced Literacy has greatly influenced my instruction. Balanced Literacy is an approach to instruction that includes a balance of the Read-Aloud, Shared Reading, Guided Reading, Independent Reading, Shared Writing and Independent Writing.

Feel free to contact me at caandrews@effingham.k12.ga.us if you have any questions or comments.
Acknowledging Privilege and Empowering Students

Charlene Andrews

What powers your teaching? Is it well thought out lesson plans? Tips learned from a recent professional development opportunity? An aroma-rich cup of coffee? All of these things might be considered important, but what actually powers your teaching? I love my students, and that is what powers my teaching. I do not know how or why, but I have an innate love for my students of the past, present, and future. I believe that when you love your students first, then students can feel valued and achieve successes. However, love needs to be accompanied by action.

Injustice and acts of racism have been an issue in our world forever. The recent events in our country have broken my heart more than ever before. I have never considered myself racist, but recently I have reflected on my unintentional biases as a person, and more specifically as a white teacher. I decided to reach out to a teacher friend I worked with during the beginning of my teaching career. Plysheltia Drayton and I worked together at West Chatham Elementary where she taught for ten years. She now teaches at Stilson Elementary in Bulloch County, and she just finished her fourteenth year. She is the kind of teacher friend that you hate to leave when you choose to move on to another school. Mrs. Drayton was nominated by a parent and received the WTOC TOP TEACHER award. She said that one of the reasons given for receiving the award was that “I treated all students equally, met them at their level, pushed and challenged them to be their best, and they always knew I had high expectations for each of them, no matter what!” She was also nominated and selected for Teacher of the Year her very first year in Bulloch County. To say she is an amazing teacher is an understatement! I asked her the following question in hopes of learning how to better empower my students through my own reflection and actions as an educator:

What can I do better when teaching my Black students?

Below is Mrs. Drayton’s response:

1. First and foremost, I would encourage you to check yourself for implicit biases and always make sure you have high expectations for them. Do you have the same expectations for your Black or nonwhite students that you have for your white students? Do you treat them the same? Do they have a voice? Do you listen to them? Do you think they can achieve or successfully reach desired objectives?

2. I’ve noticed that sometimes white teachers tend to feel sorry for our black kids and they don’t expect much from them because of their circumstances. It shouldn’t be that way! Always expect the best! Hold them accountable! Make them feel valued, heard, and teach them that they can make it even though society is telling them they can’t. Give them the same chances that you would give any other student, without the assumptions, biases, and doubts. Love them and speak life into their souls! Tell them they are smart and teach them how to be! Teach them to
be confident in their own skin! In summary, give them the tools they need to change their circumstances. Don't continue to let them wallow in it and participate in the generational poverty cycle.

3. I would also encourage you to always incorporate learning surrounding every race. With your black students, don't wait until Black History Month to discuss African Americans' contributions. Black History should be taught year round!

4. Empathize with your black students! Read and study various documents that depict the hardships that African Americans have endured.

5. Lastly, I would like to encourage you to take a moment of your time to view the Jane Elliot Racism Experiment, titled "Brown Eyes and Blue Eyes." I think you will find it very enlightening!

As I have read and reread Mrs. Drayton's suggestions, I see pieces I can put check marks by, but there are many areas I need to grow in and do better with. My hope is that an educator reading this will be able to use these suggestions to empower students. I am grateful for the opportunity to have complicated conversations with colleagues and friends because loving my students means perpetually finding ways to do better. I will continue to acknowledge my privilege as a white teacher and use my position to empower everyone I interact with.

Dr. Charlene Andrews teaches 4th grade ELA and Social Studies at Ebenezer Elementary School in the Effingham County School District. Plysheltia Drayton teaches 5th grade ELA at Stilson Elementary School in the Bulloch County School District.

The LIT Classroom — A Quarterly Column

Welcome to the LIT classroom where we discuss all things LITERACY, from balanced literacy to instructional strategies! Inside the LIT classroom, you will discover resources for your teacher toolbox that will be interactive, engaging, and keep your students learning!

If you’re interested in contributing to the LIT Classroom column, please contact Tokqiann Goodman at tokqiann.goodman@yahoo.com or @MsGoodmanELA

What It Means To TEACH!

Tokqiann Goodman

I walked out of my parents’ bedroom after telling them good night and heard a knock at the front door, so I went to answer it. I asked, "Who is it?" Someone on the other side of the door responded, "Police! Open up!" I opened the front door laughing and expecting to see my brother on the other side; instead, I saw shiny pistols pointed at me!

I grew up in a household full of extended family members. When I was two, my parents invited my grandmother to come to live with us. At the time, she was still working as a household domestic in our town and living in the projects with four of her other adult children, two daughters and two sons. She accepted my parents’ invitation to live with us, but she brought her other children with her. One of my aunts was going through a divorce, had a 4-year-old son, and was pregnant with her daughter. The year was 1983, and my household grew to include my parents, an older brother, my grandmother, two aunts, two uncles, two cousins, and me. After a few months, my grandfather also joined us. Twelve people under one roof. By the
summer of 1991, it increased to 13 when my parents found out my older brother had a daughter with cerebral palsy and decided to raise her to make sure she received the best medical treatment possible.

In addition to the 13 residents in our century-old house, visiting family members always stayed with us when they came to town. One of those visiting relatives is what brought the police to our doorstep that January night. My cousin had been staying with us for about three weeks when he decided to rob a convenience store and killed the owner in the process. He fled back to our house and was later arrested there as well.

I still remember this night so vividly. It was 1995, and I was 13, almost 14 years old. It was a weeknight, and I had school the following morning. The police would not allow any of us to go to sleep as they searched our home for evidence to link my cousin to the robbery and murder on the other side of town. Eventually, it all ended, and I was allowed to go to bed around 3:30am. My mom reminded me that I had to be up for school in a few hours.

Regardless of the trauma I had just experienced, attending school was still my best bet to improve my life. Not one of the 13 household members held a college degree. My mom was the only person in my household to even attend college, but she dropped out after her sophomore year.

I benefited from having teachers that believed in me beyond what my home life looked like. The entire ordeal was reported in the local newspaper for everyone to see. My cousin’s name appeared alongside my parents’ name since they owned the house. The next school year, I remember walking into the assistant principal’s office where I worked during third period and seeing the front page discussing the upcoming trial on his assistant’s desk. She knew my mom. Teachers in my school knew my mom. No one judged me—they embraced me. They showed me compassion and empathy that I will never forget.

2020 has shaken the entire world the way that night in 1995 shook my world.

Students will return to schools that look a lot different than they did a year ago. They have missed their teachers, peers, and other educational leaders for months. While I am very clear that teachers must focus on maximizing instructional time, teachers must be TEACHERS and TEACH! TEACH tolerance, empathy, appreciation, compassion, and humanity!

**Teach Tolerance**

Create a space where students feel safe! Safe to raise their hands and ask questions or answer questions. Safe to share their emotions with you. Safe to let you know when they feel teased or bullied by anyone. Safe to tell you they witnessed something that needs to be reported. Safe to be themselves. It starts with you. How do you respond when a student teases another student for asking a question? Do you have encouraging words of affirmation on your walls? How often do you check in with your students about how they are doing outside of the academic world?

We are experiencing some deeply emotionally charged times in 2020. Students have thoughts about what is happening in the country and the world. Your role as the educator is not to share your personal feelings, but to remain non-judgmental and give them space to safely express themselves.

**Teach Empathy**

It is fair to agree to disagree with one another, but students should be taught to try to understand what someone else is feeling. As a Black woman in America, I do not have any expectations for any of my non-Black friends or colleagues having sympathy for me. However, their empathy, or ability to
listen to and understand my emotions, is something I appreciate. Not only does every child learn differently, but they also live differently. Understanding the differences and educating yourself about them is vital to you educating them.

**Teach Appreciation**

Not only do students need to understand what makes us all different, but they need to be taught to appreciate those differences. First, conduct a check-in with yourself; do you appreciate the differences in people? With appreciation, comes the desire to learn more about the differences and not just accept them, but be grateful for the opportunity to learn from someone unlike you.

**Teacher Compassion**

Plain and simple, teach students to care by showing them that you care. Help them care about themselves. Care about their peers. Care about the world. I remember my first year of teaching; I heard a student refer to a homeless person as a “hobo.” It was so shocking. The next week, I taught a lesson about homelessness and asked students to write an argumentative essay to the city arguing ways to solve the problem of homelessness in our community. At the end of the assignment, that student came to me and said he never knew so much about being homeless and wanted to make care packages for them. I never embarrassed him about his initial comment or even told him not to say it. I just gave him a different perspective that led to him wanting to show homeless people more kindness.

**Teach Humanity**

Despite being a lover of books, I grew up reading very few books or stories about people that looked like me. Did that mean I could not learn anything from *The Babysitter’s Club* or *Sweet Valley High*? Absolutely not! I learned a great deal from those books. At every conference I have attended in the last few years, I hear presenters saying we need to add diverse books to classroom libraries, so students will see themselves in the stories they read. I wholeheartedly agree, and I would take it a step further and say we need to encourage all of our students to read diverse stories. What better way to expose them to cultures outside of their own than through literature?

No matter how you greet students this upcoming school year, face to face or online, be sure to TEACH!

*Tokqiann Goodman is an Academic Coach at Carver Road Middle School in Griffin, GA.*
Voices from New Teachers — A Quarterly Column

“Voices from New Teachers” provides a forum for novice teachers to voice their experiences, concerns, struggles, and triumphs. Acclimating to the education profession can be both stressful and rewarding. By listening to new teachers’ voices, we might better understand their perspectives and serve as a community of support. If you would like to contribute to this column, please contact Erinn Bentley at bentley_erinn@columbusstate.edu. As this column focuses on new teachers, authors with five or fewer years of classroom experience are encouraged to submit.

This month, I am proud to shine the spotlight on a teacher who is already planning ahead for fall by developing a virtual classroom of resources for her students and their families.

How COVID-19 Made Me a Better Teacher

Amber Dumbuya

We all know how COVID-19 turned the education sector upside down this past spring. In essence this past spring was pure chaos, even more so for us first-year teachers. With this chaos came questions that I posed to myself. What will next year be like? How can we avoid chaos like this in the future? What can I do to be flexible with students and hold them accountable? With these questions and many more swirling in my head I looked up resources, brainstormed, completed professional development, read books, and then researched some more. I concluded that I would have to not only make things accessible to all students, but I would still need to offer differentiation even if we were in a virtual setting.

I began to create my own class website with sections on colleges, scholarships, the military, our after-school fitness program, and community resources. I also had a section for test prep which I password protected, and did the same with my multi-cultural literature course. I set up the outline for all of this content and then set to work on other platforms. I used the Anchor app to create a class podcast where I uploaded audio lectures, and I recorded video lectures and uploaded them privately on YouTube. I used Common Curriculum to create in-depth detailed lesson plans. I found the Talking Points app that will allow me to communicate with students and parents in the fall without them having to register or sign up.

As I was creating all of this, I kept my original questions in mind. I offered visual, audio, and written materials for each unit and I built out each assignment so I could accommodate different students’ needs. All of my content is downloadable and available each nine weeks, so students only needs internet access for one day each quarter to download everything. After that they can text their completed assignments to me if they do not have online access.

I think the important thing for all teachers is to focus on being proactive instead of reactive. If we all helped one another to set up secure systems and to educate one another and students on technological literacies, then I think that situations like COVID-19 would not have thrown us completely off the track and into the abyss. Instead we would merely switch tracks. Without COVID-19, I feel like I would have done the bare minimum this summer and would have fallen back into chaos should we need to switch to virtual teaching again in the future. I have increased my skill set and knowledge and have found a way to support students, even at a distance. I am hoping...
that I can work with other educators to help one another, whether we are seasoned veterans or new to the profession. It is important that we work together to create a new learning vision for our students and to alleviate the chaos.

**Out Yonder: Teaching in Rural Georgia — A Quarterly Column**

*Out Yonder* is a quarterly column by Gena Brown about the concerns and strategies of teaching English in a rural school setting. She would love to hear your stories about rural education in Georgia. Contact her at browng@pike.k12.ga.us. Find her on Twitter @mrsbrownpchs and #piratesread220

**Teaching Remotely When You Are Remote**

*Gena Brown*

Our worlds changed in March of this year. I left school on March 12, 2020, just like normal, and about an hour later, I received an automated call saying school was canceled for March 13 to allow for a deep sanitizing of the buildings. Little did we know that we would not return for the 2019-2020 school year. Across the country and the state teachers and schools rallied around our students. Words like “remote learning,” “distance learning,” and “crisis learning” crept into everyday vocabulary. We saw videos where teachers were bringing choral students together via platforms like Zoom to uplift the rest of us. We saw posts about managing an online classroom and how to create meaningful assignments remotely.

But, what about the ones we didn’t see?

It should be no surprise to anyone that Internet services are not doled out equally, and as a business model, it makes sense, even if I don’t like it. Why would a business put services in rural areas where there are not a lot of people? According to Broadband Now, an internet guide to services, 84.9% of Georgia has access to wired broadband internet service, but that service varies in speed and reliability. An area like Lawrenceville averages 90.5 MBPS where an area like Blakely averages 11.4 MBPS only by satellite. Many areas in the state do not have access to wired services and must rely on satellite or cellular service. At my house, I only have satellite or cellular service, so even if my students have reliable internet service, I don’t.

My rural district put together learning packets that parents or students could pick up from in front of the school or download if they had access, and while it wasn’t perfect, it worked for this crisis situation. I wasn’t able to send out lessons to my students, but I still wanted to interact with them, so I used this time to cover things that are not in our curriculum. Each year I ask my students what they wished they had learned in school, and they always come up with the same topics: household skills, budgeting, automotive care, and survival skills. Enter Life Skills with Mrs. Brown!

I used Remind and scheduled lessons for five days a week for students (listed below). The lessons were generally videos or “how to” sites. There was no expectation that students would complete any activity unless they wanted to do so. However, something happened that I didn’t expect:
parents started messaging me suggesting topics for their children to learn. **I came to realize that it does take a village to raise children, and that includes educating them. We were, and still are, in a crisis situation, and all three groups--teachers, parents, and students--are invested in the outcome.**

No, this was not ideal, and it wasn’t a long term solution for educating students in the midst of a pandemic. It still didn’t solve the lack of internet service in rural areas, and obviously the list below is just a starting point of ideas. But, it gave me a real world connection to the families I serve, and that connection in a time of remoteness was just as important as any lesson I teach.

**Mrs. Brown’s Life Skills:**

**Automotive Care**
- Change a flat tire
- Check your oil
- Check and add washer fluid

**Civic**
- Register to Vote
- Find out where to vote

**Household**
- Do your laundry
- Change the filter in your HVAC
- Iron a dress shirt
- Scramble Eggs
- Fold a fitted sheet
- Clean a toilet
- Hammer a nail
- Read a recipe
- Set a table

**Personal**
- Wrap a gift
- Shuffle cards
- Write a check
- Sewing a button
- Writing a thank you note
- Addressing an envelope
- Tying a tie
- Introducing someone
- Writing a resume and cover letter

**Survival**
- Identify poisonous plants
- Wrapping a sprain
- Camping meals

*Gena Brown (@mrsbrownpchs) teaches at Pike County High School in Zebulon, GA. She is an Ed.D student at Kennesaw State University and a 2019 NCTE High School English Teacher of Excellence. She lives on her small farm where she raises vegetables and chickens, feeds stray cats, and practices mediation with her three children.*
Our Love Knows No Boundaries: Why Diverse Literature Matters

Darius Phelps

As a child, I discovered my “home” in the world of writing and who I was destined to be life. As both an educator and a writer, I have vowed to make it my duty to ensure that, to the best of my ability, children are able to find some sort of solace in various works of literature, just like I was fortunate to do growing up. I feel that children must be taught to think, not how to think; I want for them to know that they can break down every single barrier and barricade that stands in their way of walking in their truth and shine in their own light, no matter how bright they are destined to shine. This statement alone represents the vision that I would bring to the world as both a writer and a teacher:

You are the captain of my sea of dreams
Let me drown in your sweet decadence
You bring silence to my violent truth
Clarity to my roots;
Encouraging me to embrace my past to start anew
My heart is home with you.

My ultimate goal is to become a children’s book writer and illustrator, to bring my words to life and be able to paint visuals for my words where the interpretation is my own. I want my students to be able to look at my work as a source of strength and guidance. That is always my general goal when working on any project, especially one that comes from the heart. As of July 2020, I have been teaching for eight years and my goal is to always target students’ individual strengths and weaknesses. I want them to learn to embrace every single part of themselves.

Through my undergraduate and graduate years at UGA, I learned that diverse children’s literature could provide me with the necessary resources to aid my students in the best way possible but could also be a way to strengthen my connection with the community. As both an educator and a writer, I am determined to never become stagnant and crave each opportunity to increase my knowledge, experience, and love.

I spent most of my childhood and even adult life feeling misunderstood and an outcast. All my life I’ve heard nothing but the words, “There’s a slight percent chance you’ll make it out alive,” but that has and never will stop me from fighting until the very end. After losing my grandfather almost three years ago, I suffered a dramatic drop in my GPA and for a brief moment, felt like giving into my trials. But through my daily interactions with my students and losing myself through the flow of my pen and most importantly, through the pages of a book, I found the strength to carry on while fighting even harder than before. When I am gone, I want people to say I showed the world, regardless of your past or how unprivileged you are, that impossibility is an illusion that your own doubt casts on you. You have the power to train your thoughts and words to echo the kind of life you hope to lead.

Through literature from diverse cultures such as the Notable Books for a Global Society list (including Drum Dream Girl, Red, This Day in June, Grandfather Gandhi, and The Last Stop on Market Street) teachers can address issues of gender equality, freedom, love, bullying, leadership, courage, and confidence. Utilizing these resources could broaden teachers’ and students’ horizons. They can find comfort, reflection, and solace within the pages of literature. I argue that as long as love knows no boundaries, diverse literature teaches us to embrace our authentic selves, including our
flaws. By tackling this pedagogical approach, teachers are allowed to better educate their students, empower their communities, dismantle supremacy, recognize their own biases, and create new chapters. Together, we are invincible.

We can rewrite history for the better, for our sons, daughters, and unborn grandchildren. Our true strength resides in our ability to show up and be open even on the darkest days. To show up with your heart on your sleeve, absolutely refusing to waste a moment of your life hidden behind your armor, we must broaden our horizons beyond hatred; our love knows no boundaries.

Darius Phelps teaches 5th Grade ELA/SS at Dunwoody Elementary in DeKalb County Public Schools District. He gave a TEDx talk titled, “Fingerprints Upon My Heart” and received “Georgia Child Caregiver of the Year” for 2016. His dream is to become a children’s book writer and illustrator, focusing on subjects such as anxiety, depression, and grief.

“The Case of…” — A Quarterly Column
Welcome to “The Case of…” a quarterly column presenting a snapshot of a teacher’s personal story about either an instructional or relational moment in their professional career that significantly impacted their identity as a teacher.

This column is a component of a larger project called the Teacher Casebook—an online, public, and open access platform for teachers to share their experiences while framing those experiences with educational research. As you read this, consider sharing your own classroom story either here or as part of the Teacher Casebook. You can learn more about the project at https://teachercasebook.com.

The Case of “Reading is a Waste”
Shervette Miller-Payton

“Reading is a waste of time. Why do you have them just reading in class? They can do that at home!”

These words from my administrator pierced me as a novice teacher. The administrator had glanced into my room and saw 36 teen faces buried in books. Seeing me silently reading as well and not saging on the stage was peculiar to him. Why would kids spend precious class time merely reading? “You should be teaching!” the administrator admonished.

Silent independent reading was not normal in my school. I was still fairly new and eager to learn from veteran teachers. Most of the teachers in our school told students to buy assigned books, read them at home, do daily quizzes, take notes about the teacher’s interpretations, then finish with essays.

This was the reading cycle I engaged in as a student a decade before, and it was the cycle that I followed as a teacher. Surely, the cycle had value, because I turned out okay and some of the most beloved teachers operated this way. Yet, after a couple of years teaching in this cycle,
something felt out of place. I taught in a large, suburban, diverse school. My classes had a wonderful variety of abilities, interests, native languages, family incomes, and ethnicities. Delivering trivial quizzes about the color of Gatsby’s car and grading stale plot summaries that students pulled from Spark Notes felt like a waste.

I began to search for alternatives. Through social media (in the early days, it was Yahoo groups, NCTE email lists, Ning forums, and then Twitter), I connected with teachers around the world to see how they engaged students in reading. I found teacher-authors such as Donalyn Miller and Penny Kittle whose classes were audaciously reading hundreds of books per year. They cited independent, student-selected reading as a way to foster this sort of reading culture with students. I found research such as Guthrie, et al. (2006) that suggested that students’ reading comprehension can improve when they are motivated by the text’s topic, and NEA (2007) research that said independent, leisure reading had significant career and civic benefits. I found that if structured well, silent independent reading did not have to be a waste. It could, in fact, be the missing piece for my students’ achievement.

I reserved the first ten minutes of my 50-minute class for silent reading. Students chose books from the school library, responded to the books in their notebooks or blogs, and selected passages to read aloud and discuss with their peers. It was a routine I had to teach to students and one that they came to cherish. When that administrator briefly saw my students gazing at books, she did not stay to see the follow-up discussions they had with each other in class and online. As researchers such as Edmunds, Hairrell, Simmons, & Vaughn (2010) suggest, “readers benefit optimally from silent reading when provided adequate preparation, instructional support during reading, and extended time for expression (oral and written) with teacher feedback about their reading” (p. 275).

Opponents of independent reading suggest that it is frivolous because it does not involve direct instruction from the teacher and the books may be shallow. Yet, when that bell rang, the door closed, and the hustle and bustle of the hallway melted away into a serene, almost meditative moment of silent reading, I knew that there was an irreplaceable life-long habit forming that was far from frivolous.

If reading instruction in my classroom only consists of me explaining interpretations of books that I love, then, then yes, reading is a waste. If reading instruction only consists of students sludging through chopped up excerpts from complex books, yes, it is a waste. If reading instruction never involves choice or student agency, it is indeed a waste. Independent reading is a vital part of a robust reading culture that helps develop students into readers for life.

References


**Shervette Miller-Payton has served students as a high school English teacher, an assistant principal, and a curriculum coordinator in Georgia. She is also a wife, mother, and reader.**

So what’s your story? What moment in your lesson planning or relationships shaped your teacher identity? Members of GCTE want to hear your story,
Using Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas: The Benefits of an Interactive Read Aloud

Katlyn Stanley

“Content area literacy has an important role in helping students understand and interact with various disciplines” (Armstrong, Ming, & Helf, 2018, p. 1). Integrating literacy in the content areas allows students to deepen their understanding and engage further in the content being taught. One strategy teachers can use to integrate literacy in the content areas is through interactive read alouds. An interactive read aloud is an effective strategy teachers can use to expand students vocabulary, model reading fluency, and can grow student’s thinking. McClure and King Fullerton (2017) said that

The goals of interactive read-alouds are to expose students to a wide variety of texts, model fluent reading and meaning-making strategies, encourage discourse to facilitate understanding, lift the level of student thinking and demonstrate behaviors students will be able to use independently in texts. (p. 52)

Teachers can ask questions during reading or wait until the end of reading to facilitate high-level thinking and to allow the students to be more engaged with the text. Teachers can also use technology to read the text to students. An interactive read aloud is an important strategy teachers can use in the content areas to benefit students reading fluency, expand their vocabulary and comprehension, promote higher-level thinking, integrate technology into the classroom, and more.

When asked the question, “why is it important to do interactive read alouds in the classroom?”, Ms. Erin Dougherty (personal communication, November 26, 2018) said that,

It’s important because we want the students to understand of taking their time to read the story and looking at all the aspects of a story. We also model different comprehension strategies during this time so then the students can apply those strategies when they are reading independently.

An interactive read aloud is also important because it “encourages the student to become an active participant in discussing the text.” (Delacruz, 2013, p. 21)

An interactive read aloud should be conducted often in the classroom so students can receive the benefits of this strategy. This can be done by using interactive read alouds across the content areas. When asked “What are the benefits of using interactive read alouds in the content areas?”, Mrs. Sherri Ireson (personal communication, April 20, 2020), shared that, “they often engage the learners by providing needed background knowledge, providing review, and sometimes stimulating curiosity”. For example, reading a book about the history of Ruby Bridges can provide students with needed background knowledge before completing an activity revolved around Black History Month, or reading books about rocks and minerals can spark curiosity as the class begins a unit on rocks and minerals during their science block of the school.
day. During personal observation, the second-grade class that was observed did an interactive read aloud every day. The classroom teacher used interactive read alouds for reading, math, science, and social studies. “Even though interactive read-alouds take up a short amount of the school day, with a few considerations and precise planning, this brief time can provide multiple opportunities for students to collaboratively engage in productive literacy practices.” (McClure and King Fullerton, 2017, p. 52)

An interactive read aloud in the content areas can also benefit students who are English language learners and/or struggling readers. Giroir, Grimaldo, Vaughn, and Roberts (2015) said that “when teachers take a linguistically and culturally informed approach to read alouds, learners are challenged to use and practice new language by making meaningful text-to-self and text-to-world connections” (p. 640). When reading on their own, English language learners and struggling readers may miss important details in the text or read only surface level. When teachers engage students in interactive read alouds in the content areas, they are able to make deeper connections they wouldn’t have caught on their own. When asked “what do you do to help English language learners read?”, Ms. Erin Dougherty (personal communication, November 26, 2018) said that “I have them practice their sight words, I have them read out loud to me, I will also put them on a website called Imagine Learning that the ELL teachers put them on in their classroom”. Practicing sight words and having them read aloud to the teacher or to someone else can benefit an English learner as well as listening during an interactive read aloud. Dutro and Moran (2003) said that it could also benefit an English learner if the teacher teaches vocabulary ahead of time for “text comprehension” (as cited in Giroir, 2015, p. 641). An interactive read aloud allows teachers to model reading fluency for English language learners and struggling reads as well as introduce new vocabulary words and build reading comprehension.

A very critical part of an interactive read aloud is allowing students to discuss the text with their peers as well as stopping to ask questions throughout the reading. Asking questions during an interactive read aloud is important for many reasons, like keeping the students’ attention, getting them to think deeper about the text, as well as to be able to make inferences on what might happen next in the text. Fountas and Pinnell (2017) said that “teachers frame questions and talk in such a way that promotes thinking beyond and about the text in an effort to extend students’ thinking” (as cited in McClure and King Fullerton, 2017, p. 52). Teachers can also allow time for students to share their thinking with their peers. When teachers allow this time, prompts should be open-ended (AMNH, n.d.). Allowing students to discuss the text with their peers during an interactive read aloud in the content areas can allow students to “engage in conversation with one another (and possibly brief, informal written responses)” (AMNH, n.d.). When teachers ask questions throughout an interactive read aloud and allow students time to discuss with their peers, they are promoting higher-level thinking.

Through personal observation in several elementary classrooms, interactive read alouds were being used across the content areas. In a Kindergarten classroom, the students picked out sight words during an interactive read aloud of a text about community helpers, relating to the social studies standard, “SSKE1 Describe the work that people do such as: police officer, fire fighter, soldier, mail carrier, farmer, doctor, teacher, etc.” and were asked a few questions at the end of the book. Through personal observation in a second-grade classroom, the teacher asked questions and made comments throughout the reading process of a science-related text. Through personal experience, in a third-grade classroom, the students participated in a math-related interactive read aloud. The students were read the book The Greedy Triangle by Marilyn Burns. They were asked questions about the characters and had a chance to discuss with their peers shared attributes of shapes in the book throughout the read aloud to engage them further in the story.
Ms. Erin Dougherty (personal communication, November 26, 2018) answered the question “why is it important to ask questions throughout the read aloud?” with “It’s important because we want to check for understanding, making sure the students are understanding what we are reading. We also ask questions to get the students to practice how to draw conclusions and make inferences”. Ms. Erin Dougherty (personal communication, November 26, 2018) also said that as teachers we should

Ask higher-order questions, these questions allow students to use not just what is in the story but using their background knowledge and drawing conclusions to come up with an answer. We also ask questions where students have to explain their answer, not just a yes or no question.

Teachers can also use technology to do interactive read alouds. When observing a second-grade class, the teacher would let the computer’s voice read the story instead of reading it herself. When asked “why do you use technology to read a book when doing read alouds?”, Ms. Erin Dougherty (personal communication, November 26, 2018) said

I use the technology to read a book because I know at this age the students get easily distracted and can just start turning pages looking at different stories in the book while we are reading. I also use it because there are times students ask questions about objects they have never heard of or may not know what the animals are like so while we are reading and a question like that comes up, I can quickly look up a picture, so they have a better understanding of what the author was talking about. For example, in one of our stories the author was talking about a typewriter, most of the students had no idea what it was so I went on the internet and pulled up a picture of a typewriter. I did the same thing when our one story was talking about a certain jellyfish that the students have never heard of.

Technology is a great way to keep distractions to a minimum throughout the read aloud and to look up new information that may have peaked the student’s curiosity.

An interactive read aloud is a literacy strategy that can be used across content areas to benefit students learning. It can help English language learners and struggling readers to expand their vocabulary and build their reading comprehension and fluency. An interactive read aloud promotes higher-level thinking when teachers asking questions and allow students to have discussion about the text with their peers. This strategy can also provide background knowledge, promote content review, spark curiosity among students, and integrate technology in the classroom. In conclusion, interactive read alouds are beneficial to use as a literacy strategy in the content areas because they have the ability to facilitate new learning and thinking among students in the classroom.

References


Katlyn Stanley is a recently graduated from Middle Georgia State University with a B.S. in Early Childhood Special Education. She will begin her teaching career as a 3rd grade teacher in Houston County.

**Check out all the photos from the 2020 GCTE Conference at Jekyll Island.**

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