

Trust ings

Powerful Practices
for Independent
Reading

Read ers

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Offices and agents throughout the world

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To my parents

–H.S.

To my favorite readers,

Lily and Charlie

–J.S.

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***For every WHAT IF,
the imagination creates a possibility,
and in that possibility
lives a story.***

—Rebecca Kai Dotlich

Introduction

[Collective teacher efficacy] is the combined belief that it is us that causes learning . . . because when you fundamentally believe you can make the difference and then you feed it with the evidence . . . then that is dramatically powerful.

—John Hattie

What if we realized the best way to ensure an effective educational system is not by standardizing our curricula and tests but by standardizing the opportunities available to all students?

—Ibram X. Kendi

Imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called “other” over the years. If those others are willing to give us clues, we can look in some manner through strangers’ eyes and hear through their ears. That is because, of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions.

—Maxine Greene

Literacy is not just about reading words on the page; it also carries some sort of action. In other words, reading and writing are transformative acts that improve self and society.

—Gholdy Muhammad

We were halfway through writing this book when the coronavirus pandemic erupted and disrupted all of our lives. Suddenly, teachers who loved seeing children every day had to jump into remote learning with little or no time to prepare. During this time, teachers quickly realized the power of staying connected. Everyone craved the oft taken-for-granted connections that were part of everyday life—the thumbs-up from the school bus driver, the smile from an administrator as children walked through the front door, and, of course, the irreplaceable connection between teachers and students and between students themselves. Although we missed conferring with readers in person, our work—harnessing the power of connections—began to feel timelier than ever.

And yet, as we begin to revalue the importance of connections, we also must confront the inequities that were made so painfully clear during this same time. The Black Lives Matter movement shines a light on the institutional racism that has plagued our country, including our school system, resulting in inequitable opportunities and uneven access to

the high-quality education that all students deserve. As educators, it is our responsibility to move beyond acknowledgment of these issues and shift toward the critical conversations and reflective honesty necessary to become agents of change. Connecting with, imagining possibilities for, and bolstering the strengths of all readers with impactful instruction is our contribution.

An Invitation to Teachers

In the rush to collect data, cover curriculum, and write report cards, all while managing a class full of unique personalities (in person or remotely), it can be easy to lose sight of the values that brought us to the classroom in the first place. Years ago, we sat with Maxine Greene in her salon as she reflected on her years of experience in education. In her eighties at the time, she stated simply, “I am who I am not yet,” positioning herself and her work in the field as always existing in a state of becoming. There is always possibility beyond where we are in the current moment. What experiences do you want to create for your students as readers? What professional goals do you want to set for yourself? What values do you want to bring into focus in your work?

We invite you to consider your own practice and imagine new spaces of possibility for your readers, the teaching of reading, and the purpose of education. Because of COVID-19 and the resulting global health crisis, education has been disrupted, creating a space for us to not just gesture toward reforming schools but start over with the power of centering trust, teacher autonomy, and equitable literacy practices. If there is to be any silver lining to this moment in history, let it be that teachers had a hand in putting education back together in fresh, powerful, and more equitable ways that inspired generations of radical dreamers.

Our Stories: How We Came to This Work

Although it is hard for us to imagine a time when we didn’t know each other, we started our lives as teachers in two different places at two different times and went on to teach in two very different schools. Despite all of these differences, both of our teaching careers were grounded in the practice of watching kids in order to let them take the lead in our instructional decision-making. We both recall hours spent in nursery school classrooms taking detailed notes on the moves and talk of children as they engaged in the messy work of learning through play. We were taught the value of sitting back to kidwatch as a way to honor and understand the ability of students to construct their own meanings, to solve their own problems, and to take charge of their learning.

Later in our work as classroom teachers in New York City public schools, we both had the opportunity to work alongside administrators, colleagues, and children who trusted us to make instructional decisions. We adjusted the timing of lessons as needed, picked read-alouds that matched the interests of our students, and made independent reading the centerpiece of our classrooms. We were trusted to watch our students closely and, after reflecting on our new understandings, put our expertise to work to make decisions. We were inspired to write this book because we were both fortunate enough to start our careers as teachers in supportive, trusting environments. We believe that all teachers and students today deserve to have that experience.

Some years ago, we were visiting a third-grade classroom in which the students were reading informational articles in partnerships. We noticed one student, head bent over a scrap of paper, drawing, while his partner seemed to be doing the actual reading. “Oh no,” we thought, “what’s going on over there?” We stood near the boys, careful not to interrupt right away. One partner was reading the article aloud, methodically working his way through the description of a sea turtle. The other partner was carefully sketching a sea turtle, using his partner’s reading to guide to his work. Noticing us, he looked up and said, “We needed to visualize it.” These boys helped us to remember the surprises kids have in store for us when we take time to let them show us who they are as readers.

Since leaving our own classrooms, both of us have noticed that despite exemplary teachers and a wealth of research in best practices, reading instruction has gone awry in many school communities. We began to ask ourselves what was getting in the way. After listening to administrators, teachers, and students, we came to realize that there is a crisis of trust around the teaching of reading. From a lack of investment in texts, to scripted curriculum, to rigid schedules, to too many mandated assessments—all of these problematic classroom realities were the result of a lack of trust.

Specifically, due to this crisis of trust, independent reading is too often viewed as a luxury rather than a right of every student. Instruction is no longer grounded in kidwatching, nor does it allow spaces for students to develop a sense of agency as readers. This instruction does not provide space for children or teachers to facilitate powerful learning experiences that allow children to construct their own meanings. Under these circumstances, it is difficult for teachers to trust themselves, their students, or that independent reading is enough, and this leads to reductionist instruction that prioritizes the delivery of skills and strategies over the development of a robust reading life or agentive class. When we trust ourselves as experts in our students and in the process of reading, we can make an impact. When we trust our students to be agentive partners, we can create reading experiences that impact students’ growth and identity as readers.

How This Book Is Organized

In Part One, we define *independent reading* as based on the principles of time, choice, talk, and teacher support. We invite you to consider new spaces of possibility in order for vibrant independent reading to thrive in your classroom in visible and invisible ways.

In Part Two, we focus on the *reading conference*, inviting you to imagine new spaces of possibility for how to support your students to grow into being agentive, purposeful, engaged readers. We explore the Cycle of Conferring: the Discovery Conference, the Intention Conference, and the Impact Conference.

Throughout the book, you'll be directed to resources housed in our online resource collection. There you'll also find tips for supporting independent reading while teaching remotely (Online Resource I.1, Tips for Remote Learning).

We invite you to trust yourself to make decisions about what is best for the students in your classroom based on what you know about them. We invite you to trust your students to lead the way. We invite you to trust the beauty of naming students' strengths and using those as a jumping-off point. We invite you to trust in the power of having your own reading life. We invite you to trust that independent reading is the best way to move your students forward as readers.



Part One

Trust Independent Reading

*“Social imagination is
the capacity to invent
visions of what should
be and might be . . .
in our schools.”*

—Maxine Greene

What's Happening to Independent Reading?

The wide benefits of voluminous independent reading are well established. Independent reading develops background knowledge and comprehension while improving motivation and reading achievement (Miller and Moss 2013). Students who read more score better on achievement tests (Calkins 2001). Reading volume, which is defined as time spent reading plus the number of words read, plays a key role in the development of reading proficiency (Allington 2012). Vibrant independent reading has also been linked to a better acquisition of skills, superior grades, and desirable life outcomes such as greater income levels and professional choices (Perie, Grigg, and Donahue 2005). Independent reading has been linked to developing more empathetic and emotionally resilient children (Routman 2002). Any way you look at it, independent reading has proven to be an indispensable and indisputable foundation for solid reading instruction. Yet, in many classrooms across the country, independent reading feels like a luxury rather than a central piece of the instructional school day. Why are so many teachers still finding it necessary to argue for protected time to provide this essential opportunity to their students? What is getting in the way of trusting the power of independent reading?

In a recent report, Scholastic (2019) found that 94 percent of teachers and principals believe that students should have more time to read a book of their choice during the school day, yet the average elementary school allocates only twenty-two minutes (or less) for independent reading. In the same survey, teachers who are in favor of increased time for independent reading share that the number one obstacle to this ideal is the time curriculum demands. When more emphasis is placed on fidelity to a curriculum than fidelity to the needs of students, teachers are operating within rigid time constraints, which robs them of the ability to provide time for independent reading and the flexibility necessary to be responsive to students. We believe that the time allocated to different learning opportunities reflects the value a school places on each opportunity. When time for independent reading is not protected, a greater value is being placed on mastery of curriculum than on developing vibrant independent reading lives.

The Role of Implicit Bias

A discussion of independent reading and getting to know our students as readers would be incomplete without acknowledging the role implicit bias plays in all aspects of our teaching. *Implicit bias* refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Implicit bias is activated involuntarily, without awareness or intentional control and can be either positive or negative. Everyone

is susceptible (Staats et al. 2017). As educators positioned within a historically biased system, we have a responsibility to acknowledge our own biases and how they impact us as we listen to children talk about their identities as readers. This can be uncomfortable work, yet it is vital to our practice. Bias can manifest itself in the ways we view students and their potential. In her research, Gholdy Muhammad (2020) finds that deficit-oriented perspectives lead to poor and basic instructional practices. By acknowledging our implicit bias and working to be aware of the way it can influence our interactions with students and aiming to change those interactions and decisions that further inequities, we increase our ability to approach all students knowing there are a variety of ways to value reading and incorporate reading into their lives.

Independent Reading Redefined

Historically, independent reading has taken a variety of forms and, therefore, looks different in different schools (Miller and Moss 2013). The acronyms to represent variations of reading time are like an alphabet soup: we have SSR (sustained silent reading), DEAR (drop everything and read), SQUIRT (sustained quiet uninterrupted reading time), and FVR (free voluntary reading), just to name a few. But what do these all really mean? In all these letters, how can we piece together a clear vision? Also muddled in the midst of this alphabet soup is a clear vision of the roles of both student and teacher.

What might it look like when trusting relationships honor the expertise and stories of students and teachers? In 2019, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) published a position statement that defined *independent reading* as routine, protected instructional practice that includes time for students to read, receive support within a reading community, and have access to books. It named student choice as essential to independent reading because it motivates and engages a wide variety of readers. NCTE went on to state that a primary goal of independent reading is to build habitual readers with clear reading identities. The International Literacy Association's Children's Rights to Read movement (2020), outlined ten rights children possess with regard to access and time in reading. These rights echo the position of NCTE on independent reading, maintaining that time, choice, access to text, expert support, and opportunity to share ideas are critical rights of students.

Independent reading honors these well-researched stances and creates spaces for students and teachers to engage with text in ways that encourage students to actively construct their own meanings and ask their own questions.

Building on this vision, our definition of impactful independent reading is based on four principles: time, choice, talk, and teacher support.

Time + Choice + Talk + Teacher Support = Impactful Independent Reading

1. Time: Students need and deserve long stretches of time to lose themselves and find themselves in books. There is a direct correlation between increased reading skills and the amount of time engaged in reading (Allington and Gabriel 2012). During this time, students transfer previously taught skills and strategies into independence as they make meaning from text. When students have ample time to read, they build the capacity to engage and reengage, building authentic stamina.

Teachers need and deserve long stretches of time to kidwatch and admire students' strengths as readers. Teachers use these long stretches of time to support student growth by providing feedback to each student. When teachers value independent reading, they prioritize time for it every day.

2. Choice: Students are more motivated to read and engage with complex text when they choose texts themselves (Allington and Gabriel 2012). With choice, students have the space to explore, construct, and expand their identities as readers. As teachers and schools build classroom libraries for children to choose from, it is important to include texts that represent a diverse range of experiences and identities. To do this requires an examination of biases that may unconsciously get in the way of making certain that all students have access to books—both in which they can find themselves and in which they are given opportunities to develop empathy for others.

3. Talk: In order to expand and deepen their ability to make meaning from text, students need to have regular opportunities to talk with their teachers and peers in a variety of forms. Not only does talk boost engagement, but it aids in the development of social comprehension as students learn to listen, to imagine, and to empathize with both characters and, ultimately, classmates.

In order to feel confident in taking risks, students need to trust and expect their teacher will strive to see their entire selves, honor their reading identities, and make them feel cared for as they support their growth as readers. As students' opportunities for talk increase, teachers gain the opportunity to do more listening. Teachers listen to student talk to understand the ways in which their students contribute to collective meaning-making experiences. Teachers also listen to understand various aspects of students' reading identities and, at the same time, uncover the stories of students' whole selves.

- 4. Teacher support:** We want to be absolutely clear. Simply giving students time to read is not the same as independent reading. Supporting robust independent reading includes nurturing student reading identities, growing stamina, teaching targeted skills and strategies, establishing partnerships, and boosting students' trust in themselves. Joyful independent reading does not happen by accident; it is a conscious collaboration between teachers and students.

The Role of Trust in Independent Reading

In psychology, *trust* is defined as believing that the person who is trusted will do what is expected. The American Psychological Association's *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (2020) states that trust is considered to be a primary component in all mature relationships regardless of the context. In business, trust is defined as holding people accountable without micromanaging them. "You cultivate trust by setting a clear direction, giving people what they need to see it through, and getting out of their way" (Zak 2017).

In schools specifically, cultivating trust means that administrators are expected to create a vision for the school and to support teachers to carry out that vision. Teachers are expected to engage the whole child every day. Students should be able to bring their whole selves to their work in the classroom. When teachers, administrators, and students trust each other to do what is expected, everyone thrives. When trust abounds, administrators have confidence in teachers to make wise decisions. Teachers have confidence in themselves to provide the right teaching at the right time for all students. Students trust their peers and feel at home in the classroom. Students have confidence in themselves as learners. Trust allows both teachers and students to take risks as learners and revel in developing vibrant reading lives.

Trusting Readers: Powerful Practices for Independent Reading

We trust that students enter our classrooms already living their reading lives. Prior to entering school, students have had opportunities to interact with and make meaning from a variety of texts including oral storytelling, videos, or songs in addition to possibly being read to or reading texts themselves. Our work is to honor and nurture these reading identities by making space for students to continue to grow and expand upon the types of meaning making that fuel their desire to read.

Specifically, we trust that students already have their own purposes for reading, their own reading preferences, and their own authentic ways to respond to text. We trust that

these strengths are the best starting points for instruction. We trust that readers can lead our instruction.

We trust that all students are readers.

Trusting Teachers

We trust that teachers are reflective practitioners open to feedback from students as well as their peers. We trust that teachers have the capacity to be agentic, engaged learners alongside their students. We trust the expertise of teachers and their ability to direct their own professional development, seeking out learning communities and recent research that both supports and deepens their thinking about the teaching of reading. We trust the power of teachers having authentic reading lives, including reading lots of children's literature. We trust teachers to celebrate and share their successes.

We trust that in the classroom teachers possess an asset-minded stance toward students by creating instructional opportunities based on students' strengths. We trust that teachers value and engage in regular kidwatching to inform instructional decision-making. We trust that teachers are responsible for and capable of acknowledging their own biases and how these biases influence their understandings of children and their experiences.

We trust teachers to teach readers.

A Call to Action: Why the Urgency for Independent Reading Now?

Equity minded educators understand that education requires high expectations for all students.

—Sheldon Eakins

If we want our students to be active participants in their own reading education, we need to model this sense of agency for them by building in time to read with targeted teacher support. When we allow the schedule to dictate how we spend our time, we are not showing students how to be agents in their own learning. When we leave reading time out, we are perhaps unconsciously making harmful assumptions about students' equitable access to texts outside of school. In this age of accountability, being agentic teachers and cultivating agentic readers is a radical act that pushes back against standardization.

A seminal study conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (Hernandez 2012) shows that reaching reading proficiency by third grade is a clear predictor of academic success. And yet Scholastic's *Kids and Family Reading Report* (2019) finds that third-grade

children’s frequency of reading books for fun begins to drop; only 35 percent of nine-year-olds report reading five to seven days a week, compared with 57 percent of eight-year-olds. Further, despite statistics that link reading proficiency to future success in school, there is overwhelming evidence that it is specifically children in lower-income communities who tend to have far less access to texts than children in higher-income communities (Krashen 2004). Independent reading should not be a luxury for any child. Educational equity demands that we do what we know works best for all students rather than some students. Independent reading is every student’s right.

A Moment for Reflection

We invite teachers to flip the question from “What should I do?” to “What does the research suggest and what do my students need me to do?” When we place more trust in teachers, we empower them to define and grow their own practice in response to the evolving needs and interests of students.

Take a moment to reflect on your current reading practice and the place of independent reading in your classroom. Reconsider the following core principles of independent reading as a way to reflect.

Principles of Independent Reading			
Principle	What is it?	Why?	How?
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students need 30 minutes a day to read. • In the younger grades, build up stamina over time. • Reading can occur at different times of day as students build stamina. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volume of reading is key to growth. • Students need time to read in volume. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start by including 30–60 minutes in your schedule for students to read. • Add in 15 minutes for whole-group instruction. • Even if your students are not yet reading for that amount of time, the time is protected. • Prioritize independent reading when planning by putting it into your plans first, not last. • Celebrate where students already are in their stamina and build from that point.

continues

Principles of Independent Reading, *continued*

Principle	What is it?	Why?	How?
Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The classroom library is well stocked and managed by the students. • Students read a variety of books: some books are on students' independent level; some are of high interest to the students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are more motivated to read and engaged in their reading when they get to choose what they read. • Engagement is necessary for deep learning to occur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students have access to all the books in the library. • Support students in choosing books that both honor and stretch their reading identities. • Conduct class discussions about considerations when choosing books. • Advertise books and invite students to advertise books.
Talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk occurs during student partnerships, book clubs, book talks, and regular opportunities to share. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk leads to improved comprehension and empathy and builds community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include partner time in independent reading. • Conduct inquiries into purposeful talk. • Confer with partners and clubs about talk. • Read aloud throughout the day to encourage talk.
Teacher support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher support can come in a variety of forms: whole-class lessons, conferences, and small-group lessons. • Teacher support builds upon established student strengths. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback is one of the most impactful tools we have for raising student achievement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze big and small data to imagine next steps. • Design a schedule that includes conferring and small-group work. • Take notes during conferences and small-group work. • Be prepared to teach.

As you move through this book, keep these principles in mind. We invite you to imagine new spaces of possibility for yourself and for your students. What is the best that could happen if you trusted yourself, your students, and the power of independent reading?

1

All Roads Lead to Independent Reading

Independent reading is far from the entire reading curriculum, but what children do during independent reading should affect, and be affected by, the entire curriculum. Too often in the teaching of reading, the separate components of the reading curriculum exist independently of each other.

—Lucy Calkins

Imagine this: You are visiting a first-grade classroom during independent reading. Children are scattered throughout the room, some curled up on their own, some reading alongside partners. A few children are talking quietly to one another; others are reading silently. The teacher is not easy to spot at first; they are sitting alongside a reader, their heads bent over a book. Your eye is drawn to the library as one child walks over and offers their book to another student who is looking for something to read. The many baskets of books all have labels created by students. Some are predictable—“Books About Animals” or “Stories About School”—while others are less so, such as “Books That Make You Laugh” or “Scary Books About Animal Attacks.” There are displays of books around topics the class has studied: realistic fiction, cultural traditions around the world, and winter. When you walk over to a child and ask what they are doing as a reader, the child says, “I’m working on



retelling the stories I read from beginning to end to see which ones have a happy ending. I want to make a new basket for our classroom library.”

This classroom is built on trust; students are clearly trusted to be in charge of their reading lives. The teacher trusts that when they give students time and choice, students are more likely to become engaged in their reading. The students trust their teacher to support and guide them, and they take her feedback seriously. The students trust each other to recommend books, to understand one another as readers, and to share their learning with one another. By relying on the principles of time, choice, talk, and teacher support, the teacher trusts that these children will grow as readers who will be able to make meaning from increasingly complex and varied texts.

In this chapter, we address how all of the parts of the literacy block, punctuated with invitations for engagement and talk, weave together to lead students to read independently. If you are using a balanced literacy approach, this means that all the components of balanced literacy tie together in support of independent reading. If you are teaching

using a different model, you can still prioritize independent reading time, creating connections between all reading experiences across the day. Regardless, we invite you to flip the question from “How can I fit it all in?” to “How are all of the parts of the literacy block and all of my teaching methods working together?”

Crafting Instruction That Inspires Independent Reading

Each day, teachers have the opportunity to craft relevant learning experiences that inspire their particular group of students. This privilege requires that we trust ourselves as experts in our field as well as experts in our students to make decisions that contribute to joyful, agentive, routine independent reading. Teaching has the potential to be a radical act if teachers act with agency themselves by seeking out spaces of possibility within the school day and imagining what ought to be, rather than simply accepting what is (Greene 1995). When daily literacy opportunities are crafted with the goal of creating independent readers, rather than delivering instruction related to a list

of skills and strategies, instructional decision-making originates with students themselves at the center. In addition, the collective reading experiences throughout the school day hold the potential to build the foundation of trust needed as students work together to take risks and construct meaning from complex texts both together and independently.

Each day, students need the opportunity to engage in relevant learning experiences. Students need equitable access to research-backed structures and practices, such as independent reading and read-aloud, that are proven to contribute to their growth as readers and thinkers (International Literacy Association 2018). One way to create equitable instruction is to work to understand the story of each student so that you can tailor learning opportunities to build upon and be relevant to their strengths and experiences.



All the components of robust literacy instruction work together to create relevant instruction. The structure of the school day sometimes forces us to divide our time into blocks. Each component on its own can be both joyful and impactful, yet no one component can stand completely on its own. While *we* are clear about the purpose of each block, our students may see them as unrelated to each other and to their independent reading unless we clearly communicate the ways in which all parts of the literacy block work together in the service of independent reading.

In planning these individual components with the needs of independent readers in mind, consider these guiding questions:

- How do these learning experiences honor and respond to the identities of all my students?
 - How does each part of my instruction today grow the skills, knowledge, and identities of independent readers?
 - What are the strengths of my students? How can I highlight and build upon those strengths during instruction?
 - What are the next steps for my students? How can I model or facilitate practice with these next steps?

See the chart on page 12 for some sample responses to these questions.

A Balanced Literacy Perspective

Balanced literacy has been interpreted to mean the balance between direct and dialogic instruction, the balance between whole-group, small-group, and individual instruction, the balance between phonics and authentic reading, and the balance between reading and writing (Fisher, Fry, and Akhavan 2019). While the term can encompass all of these definitions, at its core, it is an approach that supports the development of independent readers and writers through a variety of teaching components. We refer here specifically to the components of literacy instruction: read-aloud, shared reading, small-group reading instruction, phonics and word study, and writing.

Typically, within a balanced literacy framework, teachers work within reading units of study. These units of study might be purchased from an outside resource or created in-house by teachers. In order to provide consistency, units of study fit within a pacing calendar that guides reading instruction across the year. Generally, some units are based on genre while others are based on process or skill.

In the following sections, we describe each component of balanced literacy, highlighting how each supports independent reading. Each component presents opportunities for explicit transfer talk. If you are teaching in a different framework or using a set

curriculum, this section can help you think about multiple ways to support independent reading throughout the day, within your own context. Independent reading plays a vital role in every literacy curriculum and program. Trust yourself to plan so that all of your instruction is in the service of independent reading.

Tailoring Learning Experiences to Student Skills, Knowledge, and Identity

Reflection Question

Sample Response

How does each part of my instruction today grow the skills, knowledge, and identities of independent readers?

The skill we are working on is determining the main idea in informational text. I am teaching the strategy of reading a chunk of text and thinking, "What is this mostly about?"

I plan to grow students' knowledge of our science unit of study on the water cycle by using one of our read-alouds to model this strategy.

I know, through kidwatching, that most of my students prefer fiction, specifically graphic novels. I plan to use an informational text that uses similar features to connect to that aspect of their reading identity.

What are the strengths of my students? How can I highlight those strengths during instruction?

The data shows me that Yuko is a student who prefers informational text and is already doing this work with independence. I can ask her to share her thinking with the class in a text of her choosing.

What are the next steps for my students? How can I model or facilitate practice with these next steps?

The data shows me that a majority of my students need to practice with this strategy. After this lesson, I can determine if we are ready to incorporate the use of visual features to determine the main idea.

I can have students work in partnerships to practice so I can listen in to their conversations. They can choose any informational book that interests them or use familiar informational read-alouds, select a section, and give this a go. I might have them write and post their thoughts on sticky notes.

Students can then continue to read informational texts for the entirety of independent reading time, or they can decide to read other independent reading books.

How Curriculum Can Support Independent Reading

Rigid or set curriculum is often cited as the number one roadblock to including more independent reading time in classrooms. Curriculum might feel irrelevant to the students in front of you, too filled with tasks and activities to allow space for independence. For teachers, curriculum might feel too time-consuming to cover. However, when we move to using relevant curriculum to *uncover* and build upon what our students already know, it can serve to expand the work of independent readers. It can offer new possibilities; it can inspire readers to try a new genre or strategy or grow their knowledge about the world around them.

Here's a typical scenario: when a class is immersed in a unit on informational texts, fiction-loving students who might be in the middle of an exciting series may acutely feel the lack of choice, and their engagement may decrease. By recognizing this, we can act purposefully to reframe the choices. For example, you might ask students to read informational text for the first few minutes of independent reading and then open up choice, or you could provide familiar engaging read-aloud texts as an option, or you might place students in interest-based partnerships. Flip the question from “How can I fit in the work of the unit and independent reading?” to “How can I bring this unit to life in ways that support independent readers?” New possibilities then come to mind. Units of study turn into a way of expanding reading identity. The chart on page 14 provides examples of how various units of study can be reframed to support independent reading and readers.

How the Read-Aloud Supports Independent Reading

The read-aloud provides limitless joyful possibilities for meaning making. When we open up the invitation for students to respond as we read a carefully chosen text, we find that students do not need us to prompt them; rather, they authentically respond to actively construct meaning from the text, just as they do while reading independently. Their eyes might widen, giggles might ripple across the rug, or, in particularly juicy moments, children might exclaim out loud.

As with independent reading, the research on the role of the read-aloud is vast. According to a recent International Literacy Association brief, “reading aloud is undoubtedly one of the most important instructional activities to help children

Curriculum and Independent Reading

Curriculum	How It Supports Independent Reading
Units at the beginning of the year focus on routines and expectations for the reading block.	These units provide space to explore reading identity and the classroom library.
Genre-based units of study introduce students to the genre and to related skills and strategies.	These expand reading identity and promote an opportunity to practice actively reflecting on book choice.
Process-based units of study introduce students to essential skills and strategies that apply across genres.	These add to a student's sense of self-efficacy, growing a list of what each reader can do.
Units that utilize book clubs encourage students to study a particular author, genre, theme, or identity.	These promote opportunities for specific instruction to support talk and how it can expand meaning making.

develop the fundamental skills and knowledge to become readers” (2018, 2). Research has shown read-alouds improve comprehension (Duke and Pearson 2009), vocabulary (Massaro 2017), and fluency (Trelease 2001). Further, the read-aloud is one of many opportunities to grow students’ knowledge of the world around them, their social comprehension (Ahmed 2018), and their ability to be critical consumers of text.

The read-aloud is a key piece of literacy instruction, as it supports and inspires independent reading and response to reading in the classroom. The following are examples of read-aloud charts from first- and fourth-grade classrooms.

During the READ ALOUD, we can **TALK** about...

• new words



• favorite parts



• favorite characters



• What it makes us **think** about?



• How it makes us feel...



• What did we learn?



What do we still wonder?



• What surprised us?



During the READ ALOUD, we can **TALK** about...

- characters and their relationships
- characters and how they change

• What does the author want us to learn?

- What does it make us THINK about?
- How does it make us FEEL?
- How does it impact your BELIEFS?
- What does it make you want TO DO?

- What surprised you?
- What do you still wonder?

• What beautiful language stands out?



What is worth talking about?

Read-Aloud Chart from a First-Grade Classroom

Read-Aloud Chart from a Fourth-Grade Classroom

The chart below captures some of the ways in which the read-aloud inspires the work of independent readers.

Read-Aloud and Independent Reading	
Read-Aloud	How It Supports Independent Reading
Teachers model aspects of the reading process including fluent reading and comprehension strategies.	Students read more expressively and apply those comprehension strategies to make meaning in their own texts.
Teachers read from a wide range of books and discuss book choice, using the read-aloud to get students excited about new topics, series, and authors.	Students reflect on and expand their book choices.
Teachers teach, model, and facilitate talk moves that lead to lively, authentic class discussions. This may include translanguaging.	Students can practice these talk moves in their discussions with partners and book clubs. This may include translanguaging, the practice of encouraging students to use their complete language repertoire to interact with text (España and Hererra 2020).
Teachers can select read-alouds to build a sense of community, tackle various obstacles that may arise across the year, and work to develop social comprehension.	Students can use the read-aloud as a place to think about and process common classroom issues or larger social issues that may also play out in the classroom. Students can then bring this thinking work into their independent reading. In this way, independent reading can become a vehicle for learning about the lives and experiences of others.
Teachers direct attention to new vocabulary and how readers might determine the meaning of and utilize newly acquired words.	Students grow their vocabulary and background knowledge to support their comprehension in various content areas.

Trust yourself, your students, and the power of independent reading.

Independent reading is the right of every student. It is an indispensable foundation for solid reading instruction—and yet is too often viewed as a luxury. Overly prescriptive, culturally irrelevant curriculum does not provide spaces for students to develop a sense of agency as readers or for teachers to make decisions that reflect the needs of their students.

When teachers trust themselves and their students to create reading experiences that matter, they positively impact student growth.

Trusting Readers is an essential and accessible guide that puts the independence back into independent reading—and bolsters that independence with collaboration. Jen and Hannah help teachers craft reading experiences for students that are centered around their engagement, instructional needs, and identities as readers. They outline practical steps for teachers to implement independent reading time or to enrich their current practice with multiple entry points. In addition, they provide a model for reading conferences that support tailored instructional choices and keep students at the center.

Consider new possibilities for independent reading to thrive in your classroom. **What is the best that could happen?**



Dr. Jennifer Scoggin has been a teacher, author, speaker, curriculum writer, and literacy consultant. Jen's interest in the evolving identities of both students and teachers and her growing passion for children's literature led her to this work.

Hannah Schneewind has been a teacher, staff developer, curriculum writer, keynote speaker, and national literacy consultant. Hannah's interest in student and teacher agency and her belief in the power of books informs her work with schools.

Together, Jen and Hannah are the co-creators of *Trusting Readers*, a group dedicated to collaborating with teachers to design literacy opportunities that invite all students to be engaged and thrive as readers and writers.

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