Balanced Literacy Instruction: Principles and Practices in the Elementary Classroom

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Introduction

Literacy is an integral part of daily life. In the coming years, our students will need to be literate in ways we cannot yet imagine. It is therefore imperative that we teach our students how to think critically and solve problems, both collaboratively and independently.

Literacy instruction in the Plymouth Public Schools focuses on teaching students to construct meaning from texts and compose texts to convey meaning. For the past several years, we have been implementing a balanced literacy approach to instruction. We are moving from program as “book” to program as “best practice.” We have integrated the gradual release of responsibility through the implementation of reading and writing workshops. This approach to instruction balances the explicit teaching of skills and strategies through demonstration with ample opportunities to apply these skills and strategies to authentic reading and writing experiences. Ongoing assessment allows us to identify students’ strengths and goal areas and monitor progress and performance over time, differentiating instruction to best meet the diverse needs of our students.

As a district, we are establishing common structures, language and resources to ensure consistent literacy experiences. Our goal is for all students to achieve literacy success and to develop a lifelong love of reading and writing.
The following documents support the mission, core beliefs, and goals of our district, outlining the key principles and reading essentials that form the basis of our elementary English Language Arts program in the Plymouth Public Schools.
Recent work has produced Common Core State Standards in ELA and Literacy, and these standards have been incorporated into the new MA ELA Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy. The major principles of these documents align with a balanced literacy approach to instruction in the elementary classroom.

Anchor Standards for Reading
- Close reading of texts
- Identification of central ideas and themes
- Analysis of events and ideas
- Interpretation of how words create meaning
- Analysis of structure
- Analysis of point of view
- Integration of content from multiple sources
- Evaluation of arguments and claims
- Comparison of themes and topics
- Knowledge of literary concepts and genres
- Independent comprehension of complex texts

Anchor Standards for Writing
- Argument supported by evidence
- Information/explanation
- Narrative
- Organization and coherence
- Revision and editing
- Using technology for collaboration and publishing
- Short and sustained research projects
- Integration of information from several sources
- Use of evidence from texts, linking reading and writing
- Frequent writing for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences

Foundational Skills (PreK-5)
- Print Concepts (K-1 only)
- Phonological Awareness (K-1 only)
- Phonics and Word Recognition
- Fluency

Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening
- Effective participation in a range of conversations and collaborations
- Integration of information from multiple sources
- Evaluation of a speaker’s point of view
- Coherent oral presentations
- Strategic use of visuals and digital media
- Command of a variety of communication tasks
Anchor Standards for Language

- Command of grammar and usage
- Command of capitalization, spelling, and punctuation
- Knowledge of how language functions in various contexts
- Use of context, word parts and references to clarify meaning of words
- Understanding figurative language, word relationships, and nuances of meaning
- Academic and domain-specific vocabulary

The Plymouth Public Schools’ approach to balanced literacy instruction also prepares students for the shift in instructional emphasis highlighted in the new standards. *The eight shifts in emphasis are:*

- Vertical alignment using backwards mapping
- Focus on comprehension of informational text
- Independent reading of increasingly complex text
- Foundational reading skills in grades 4-5
- Focus on language development and academic vocabulary
- Use of oral language to communicate and collaborate
- Purposeful writing to inform and argue a point of view
- Focus on disciplinary (content area) literacy
Extensive research into the characteristics of effective literacy instruction grounds reading and writing instruction in the Plymouth Public Schools. According to the International Reading Association (IRA), it is the expertise of the classroom teacher that matters most to literacy achievement. They assert that effective teachers of reading:

- Understand reading and writing development and believe all children can learn to read and write.
- Continually assess children’s individual progress and relate reading and writing instruction to children’s previous experiences.
- Know a variety of ways to teach reading, when to use each method, and how to combine the methods into an effective instructional program.
- Offer a variety of materials and texts for children to read.
- Use flexible grouping strategies to tailor instruction to individual students.
- Are good reading and writing “coaches” (that is, they provide help strategically).

In addition, a synthesis of the research as described by Fountas and Pinnell (2006; 2008) and Allington (2002) finds significant agreement regarding the characteristics of effective literacy instruction:

- **Students need time to read.** They need to build stamina for independently reading continuous text. Supporting students with this goal begins in kindergarten.

- **Students need time to write.** They need to build stamina for independently writing varying lengths of texts in a variety of genres. Supporting students with this goal begins in kindergarten by using drawing and talking as a way to record ideas.

- **Students need access to a variety of texts.** They need opportunities to read large quantities of high-interest, high-quality texts across a wide range of genres and content areas. They need consistent opportunities to choose texts to read. Students also need plenty of opportunities to revisit texts for a variety of purposes (i.e. to support or deepen their thinking or to serve as models for their own written texts).

- **Students need to hear texts read aloud.** Teachers who read aloud regularly model what it means to be a proficient and enthusiastic reader. Reading aloud also allows students to hear the craft of writing from a writer’s perspective.
• **Students need to talk about what they read.** Students need to be engaged consistently throughout the day in meaningful talk about the books they read and the ideas they have. Talk meaningful written response.

• **Students need to write about what they are thinking.** Students need to compose written texts that reflect their own ideas and compose written texts that respond to the ideas of others.

• **Students need different levels of support at different times.** Teachers support the development of independent readers and writers through specific teaching in a variety of formats (whole group, small group, and individual interactions).

References


Literacy instruction in the Plymouth Public Schools is based on the principles and practices of the Workshop Model, an approach to instruction that incorporates the gradual release of responsibility and places emphasis on structures that build independence and support differentiation. The following diagram shows the parallel structure of both Writing Workshop and Reading Workshop.

Balanced Literacy Framework

Reading and Writing Workshop Structure

- Minilesson: 10-20 minutes
- Sustained Reading/Writing: 10-45 minutes
- Group Share: 5-10 minutes
A Model for Success for All Students

Reading Instruction
Reading Workshop Format

Mini-Lesson (Whole Class) → Interactive Read Aloud → Shared Reading

Read and Confer Small Group & Independent Practice → Independent/Partner Reading/Centers
  → Small Group Reading
  → Strategy Groups
  → Book Clubs/Literature Circles
  → Inquiry Circles
  → Small Group Conference
  → Guided Reading

Group Share/Wrap-Up (Whole Class) → Share/Celebrate
  → Reinforce
  → Discuss
Expectations for Reading Workshop K-5

1. **A Meeting/Gathering Place is Established**
   - A space for the class is available where students can gather, close together, and share thinking quickly with a partner during a minilesson.

2. **A Classroom Library is Organized and Accessible**
   - Books are clearly organized and labeled in a way that is visually appealing and allows students to understand their choices in terms of genre, level, interests, authors, series, and topics.

3. **The Structure of Reading Workshop is Established**
   - Sustained Independent Reading is framed by instruction
     - Minilesson (10 – 20 minutes)
     - Independent Reading and Response (20-45 minutes depending on grade level and management structure)
       - The management structure of this time varies according to teacher and grade level.
     - Teaching Share and Reflection (5 minutes)
   - Students are reading and responding to reading through talk and written response.
   - Teachers are meeting with students individually or in groups to differentiate teaching and learning.
   - Weekly schedules allow for daily reading workshops to establish consistent routines and habits.

4. **Student Engagement During Independent Reading and Response**
   - Students spend the majority of the Independent Reading and Response time interacting with whole texts (reading books by themselves, reading with a partner, listening to books).
   - Students have regular opportunities to talk about the books they are reading with others.
   - Students have regular opportunities to keep track of their thinking while reading (in ways appropriate for the development of the reader).
   - Students have periodic opportunities to write longer responses to their reading.
   - Students have choice in the books that they read.
   - Students build stamina for reading, responding and talking for longer blocks of time across the year.

5. **Evidence of Teaching and Learning**
   - Anchor charts represent current teaching and learning, focusing on readers’ habits and thinking.
   - Students keep track of their thinking about books in a way that is appropriate to their grade.
   - Students demonstrate understanding through talk.
   - Teachers keep records of student learning to inform instruction.

6. **Evidence of Student Understanding**
   - Can students talk about the books they are reading?
   - Can students talk about what they do as readers?
   - Can students articulate the routines of Reading Workshop?
   - Can students explain or extend the thinking represented on the anchor charts?
Reading Workshop K-2
# Teacher and Student Roles in Reading Workshop K-2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the teacher doing?</th>
<th>Whole Group Opportunities for Teaching and Learning</th>
<th>What are the students doing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Providing explicit instruction through modeling and demonstration | **Interactive Read-Aloud**  
**Minilessons**  
**Shared Reading** | Participating in thinking, sharing, and discussion |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the teacher doing?</th>
<th>Small Group and Independent Practice Opportunities for Teaching and Learning</th>
<th>What are the students doing?</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Providing small group instruction and ongoing assessment (i.e. anecdotal notes and running records)  
Conducting small group and one-on-one reading conferences  
Administering Informal Assessments:  
*F&P Benchmark*  
*Words their Way Inventory* | **Small Group Structures**  
• Guided Reading  
• Strategy Groups  
• Reading Partnerships  
• Book Clubs/Literature Circles/Inquiry Circles  
**Small & Individual Structures**  
• Small group conferences and one-on-one conferences  
**Independent Activities/Centers**  
• Independent Reading  
• Buddy Reading and Discussion  
• Listening to Reading  
• Talking, Drawing and Writing about Reading  
• Word Work/ABC Center | Reading.  
Listening to reading.  
Responding to reading.  
Working with words. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the teacher doing?</th>
<th>Whole Group Wrap-Up and “Share”</th>
<th>What are the students doing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Reiterating objectives from whole group lesson & providing opportunity for reflection. Sharing examples of student work. | Whole group wrap-up in common meeting area | Reflecting upon learning  
Participating in thinking, sharing, and discussion |
Center Variations in Grades K-2

Although the terminology may be slightly different, the options below incorporate the same key activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential Types of Literacy Activities</th>
<th>Option A: Work Board icons from Guided Reading</th>
<th>Option B: Daily Five</th>
<th>Option C: Literacy Work Stations</th>
<th>Self-Designed Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent Reading</td>
<td>➢ Independent Reading</td>
<td>➢ Read to Self</td>
<td>➢ Classroom Library</td>
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<td></td>
<td>➢ Browsing Box</td>
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<td>➢ Big Book Work Station</td>
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<td></td>
<td>➢ Library</td>
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<td>➢ Poetry Work Station</td>
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<td></td>
<td>➢ Read Around the Room</td>
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<td>➢ Pocket Chart Work Station</td>
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<td></td>
<td>➢ Pocket Chart</td>
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<td></td>
<td>➢ Self-Created “Poetry Center”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buddy Reading and Discussion</td>
<td>➢ Buddy Reading</td>
<td>➢ Read to Someone</td>
<td>➢ Buddy Reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to Reading</td>
<td>➢ Listening Center</td>
<td>➢ Listen to Reading</td>
<td>➢ Listening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing about Reading*</td>
<td>➢ Writing</td>
<td>➢ Work on Writing</td>
<td>➢ Writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Not Writing Workshop</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC Center/Word Work</td>
<td>➢ ABC Center/Word Work</td>
<td>➢ Spelling/Word Work</td>
<td>➢ ABC/Word Study Work Station</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are many formats and structures that support differentiated instruction in the reading workshop. The key is to structure opportunities for students to read and respond to whole texts in a variety of ways.


### Components of Reading Workshop K-2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>When and How?</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Interactive Read-Aloud | The teacher reads aloud to the whole class or small groups. A carefully selected body of children's literature is used; the collection contains a variety of genres and represents our diverse society. Favorite texts, selected for special features, are reread many times. The teacher pauses periodically to think aloud and/or to give students an opportunity to turn and talk to a peer. | • Occurs daily–several times each week as part of mini-lesson  
  *Teacher:*  
  • May read part of the book in one sitting.  
  • May reread book several times for different purposes.  
  • Focuses on key teaching point.  | • To engage children in meaningful children's literature  
  • To model fluent, phrased reading  
  • To model thinking processes  
  • To demonstrate active reading strategies  
  • To build background knowledge  
  • To build vocabulary  
  • To provide opportunities for children to apply strategies through “turn and talk” |
| Shared Reading  | Using an enlarged text that all children can see, the teacher involves children in reading together following a pointer.                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | • Occurs daily–several times each week.  
  *Teacher:*  
  • Explicitly demonstrates concepts about print and early reading strategies  
  *Teacher and Students:*  
  • Reread big books, poems, songs  
  • Reread retellings  
  • Reread alternative texts (e.g. Morning Message)  
  • Reread products of interactive writing | • To build fluency through repeated readings of familiar texts with support of teachers and peers  
  • To provide opportunities for building word identification and decoding in continuous text |
| Guided Reading  | The teacher works with a small group of students who have similar reading processes. The teacher selects and introduces new books and supports children in reading the whole text to themselves, making teaching points during and after the reading. Children read the text simultaneously (not “round robin” reading). | • Daily–several times a week depending on the needs of the students  
  *Teacher:*  
  • Focuses on one or two key teaching points.  
  • Listens in and supports individuals with strategy use.  
  • Takes anecdotal notes/running records on a regular basis to inform instruction.  
  *Students:*  
  • Simultaneously read whole texts at their | • To provide opportunities for reading for meaning and applying multiple reading strategies when reading authentic texts.  
  • To provide differentiated instruction and practice with words and their patterns |
| Strategy Group | The teacher works with a small group of students to explicitly teach a specific strategy the students need to learn. Students may be reading at different levels and reading different texts. They apply the strategy learned to their own text. | • Groups are pulled as needed for as many times as the students need to work on that particular strategy. A particular group may meet just once.  
**Teacher:**  
• Offers support to the student as he/she applies a strategy to a text he/she is already reading.  
**Students:**  
• May be part of strategy groups and guided reading groups.  
• Apply strategy taught to their independent level text and observe other students applying the same strategy to different texts.  
• To provide opportunities for students to learn a strategy to apply to many texts. |  
| Independent Reading | Children read on their own or with partners from a wide range of materials, including but not restricted to “just right” books at their instructional level. | • Daily self-selected reading of books at students’ independent reading levels, either in a separate block or in several centers.  
**Teacher:**  
• checks-in and confers with students to be sure students are reading appropriate books and reading for meaning.  
**Students:**  
• Read for increasing amounts of time throughout the year.  
• To apply reading strategies independently in reading self-selected “Just Right” books.  
• To build stamina for reading independently.  
• To engage students in lifelong reading enjoyment and habits. |  
| Word Study | The teacher explicitly teaches students principles of word study through word and picture sorts in which students are engaged in the active process of searching, comparing, contrasting, and analyzing. | • A few brief mini-lessons weekly followed by independent practice and differentiated small groups  
• Based on needs of students (i.e. some students will need more explicit word study than others)  
• To explicitly teach phonics and word analysis |
Reading Workshop
Grades 3-5
# Teacher and Student Roles in Reading Workshop: 3-5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the teacher doing?</th>
<th>Whole Group Opportunities for Teaching and Learning</th>
<th>What are the students doing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing explicit instruction through modeling and demonstration.</td>
<td><strong>Interactive Read-Aloud</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Mini-Lessons</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Shared Reading</strong></td>
<td>Participating in thinking, sharing, and discussion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the teacher doing?</th>
<th>Small Group and Independent Practice Opportunities for Teaching and Learning</th>
<th>What are the students doing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing small group instruction and ongoing assessment (i.e. anecdotal notes and running records).&lt;br&gt;Conducting one-on-one reading conferences.&lt;br&gt;Facilitating and/or observing literature circle discussions.&lt;br&gt;Administering Informal Assessments: <em>F&amp;P Benchmark or QRI Words Their Way</em> inventory</td>
<td><strong>Small Group Structures</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Guided Reading&lt;br&gt;• Strategy Groups&lt;br&gt;• Reading Partnerships&lt;br&gt;• Book Clubs/Literature Circles/Inquiry Circles&lt;br&gt;<strong>Small &amp; Individual Structures</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Small group conferences and one-on-one conferences&lt;br&gt;<strong>Independent Activities/Centers</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Independent Reading&lt;br&gt;• Written response to reading (i.e. in reader’s notebooks)</td>
<td>Reading.&lt;br&gt;Discussing reading.&lt;br&gt;Responding to reading.&lt;br&gt;Working with words.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>What is the teacher doing?</th>
<th>Whole Group Wrap-Up and “Share”</th>
<th>What are the students doing?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reiterating objectives from whole group lesson &amp; providing opportunity for sharing and reflection.</td>
<td>Whole group wrap-up in common meeting area</td>
<td>Reflecting upon learning.&lt;br&gt;Participating in thinking, sharing, and discussion.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Components of Reading Workshop: Grades 3-5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>When and How?</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read Aloud</td>
<td>The teacher reads aloud to students choosing from a variety of genres.</td>
<td>• Daily</td>
<td>• To foster a love of reading&lt;br&gt;• To model fluent reading&lt;br&gt;• To build background knowledge and vocabulary&lt;br&gt;• To build familiarity with different genres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Read-Aloud</td>
<td>The teacher reads aloud to the whole class or small groups. A carefully selected body of children’s literature is used; the collection contains a variety of genres and represents our diverse society. Favorite texts, selected for special features, are reread many times. The teacher pauses periodically to think aloud and/or to give students an opportunity to turn and talk to a peer.</td>
<td>• Occurs daily-several times each week as part of mini-lesson&lt;br&gt;Teacher:&lt;br&gt;• May read part of the book in one sitting.&lt;br&gt;• May reread book several times for different purposes.&lt;br&gt;• Focuses on key teaching point.</td>
<td>• To engage children in meaningful children’s literature&lt;br&gt;• To model fluent, phrased reading&lt;br&gt;• To model thinking processes&lt;br&gt;• To demonstrate active reading strategies&lt;br&gt;• To build background knowledge&lt;br&gt;• To build vocabulary&lt;br&gt;• To provide opportunities for children to apply strategies through “turn and talk”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Reading</td>
<td>The teacher works with temporary small groups who have similar reading processes to explicitly teach effective reading strategies for processing a variety of texts. The teacher selects and introduces a text and the students read it independently. The teacher selects teaching points based on readers’ needs and sometimes assigns oral and/or written response tasks. Word work may follow.</td>
<td>• Simultaneous silent reading; a student may read aloud a page or two to the teacher while the other students in the group are reading silently in their own books&lt;br&gt;• Can be used for students who need support in reading a new type of text (a different genre, a more difficult text, a more sophisticated structure)&lt;br&gt;Teacher:&lt;br&gt;• May listen in and support individuals with strategy use while reading&lt;br&gt;• Focuses on one or two key teaching points.</td>
<td>• To provide opportunities for reading for meaning and applying multiple reading strategies when reading authentic texts&lt;br&gt;• To provide differentiated instruction and practice with words and their patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy Groups</strong></td>
<td>Takes anecdotal notes/running records on a regular basis to inform instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy Groups</td>
<td>The teacher works with a small group of students to explicitly teach a specific strategy the students need to learn. Students may be reading at different levels and reading different texts. They apply the strategy learned to their own text.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Groups are pulled as needed for as many times as the students need to work on that particular strategy. A particular group may meet just once.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Students may be part of strategy groups and guided reading groups.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The teacher offers support to the student as he/she applies a strategy to a text he/she is already reading.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To provide opportunities for students to learn a strategy to apply to many texts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To apply strategy to their independent level text and observe other students applying the same strategy to different texts</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Literature Study/Book Clubs</strong></td>
<td>Students select book to read among choices offered and read/listen to the text independently.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literature Study/Book Clubs</td>
<td>The group decides how much to read between meeting times.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The focus is on the discussion of the book in order to develop a deeper understanding of the text.</td>
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<td>As students read or reread the book, they may mark, note, draw or write in preparation for discussion.</td>
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<td>Students ultimately learn to facilitate their own conversations with teacher as observer/evaluator.</td>
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<td>The goal is to discuss books with authentic “natural” conversations.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To increase students’ enjoyment of reading</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To expand reading comprehension strategies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To develop critical thinking skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To help students appreciate the aesthetic qualities of literature</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To develop communication skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To extend writing skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To provide a context for learning how to talk about texts with others</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To provide a large amount of practice in talking about texts with others</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To create a shared language for talking about texts</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Reading and Response</strong></td>
<td>Daily self-selected reading of books at students’ independent reading levels.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent Reading and Response</td>
<td>Students may be reading a “book club” book, an independent reading book or possibly both.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To apply reading strategies independently in reading self-selected “Just Right” books</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To build stamina for reading independently</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Time for independent reading given priority. | To build fluency  
*Teacher:*  
- Checks-in and confers with students to be sure students are reading appropriate books and reading for meaning  
*Students:*  
- Read for increasing amounts of time throughout the year.  
- Respond to books in readers’ response notebooks, logs or journals using a variety of response formats.  
  
| To build vocabulary and background knowledge  
- To build written response skills  
- To build comprehension and metacognitive skills |

| Word Study | The teacher explicitly teaches students principles of word study through word and picture sorts in which students are engaged in the active process of searching, comparing, contrasting, and analyzing. |  
| A few brief mini-lessons weekly followed by independent practice  
- Based on needs of students (i.e. some students will need more explicit word study than others)  
- Students in grades 3-5 typically focus on word analysis—how to break apart multisyllabic words into meaningful components such as suffixes, prefixes, roots and bases.  
- When students move beyond phonics lessons and focus on word analysis, the meaning of words (vocabulary) and spelling are often intertwined. | To explicitly teach phonics, word analysis, spelling and vocabulary |


Lacroix-White and Yaeger, 2011
Word Study Instruction
Overview of Word Study Instruction:
Phonics, Vocabulary and Spelling

Word study involves “doing” things with words—examining, manipulating, comparing and categorizing—and offers students the opportunity to make their own discoveries about how words work. When teachers use this practical, hands-on way to study words with students, they create tasks that focus students’ attention on critical features of words—sound, pattern, and meaning.

The Plymouth Public Schools has adopted *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction* beginning in the 2011-2012 academic year as our primary word study resource and guide. The authors of *Words Their Way* define word study as the integration of phonics, spelling, and vocabulary instruction. Word study teaches students how to look closely at words to discover the regularities and conventions of English orthography, or spelling. It takes the place of traditional spelling and vocabulary approaches, such as skill instruction, scope and sequence, or repeated practice.

*Words Their Way* is a developmental approach to phonics, vocabulary, and spelling instruction. Using a systematic approach, guided by an informed interpretation of spelling errors and other literacy behaviors, *Words Their Way* offers a teacher-directed, child-centered plan for the study of words from kindergarten to high school. Step by step, the chapters explain exactly how to provide effective word study instruction. The keys to this research-based approach are knowing your students’ literacy progress, organizing for instruction, and implementing word study.

**Purpose of Word Study**
The authors of *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction* determined that the purpose of word study is twofold:

First, students develop a general knowledge of English spelling. They learn how to examine words through active exploration using a hands-on, manipulative approach. Students also discover generalizations about spelling, instead of just spelling rules. They learn the regularities, patterns, and conventions of English orthography needed to read and spell.

Second, word study increases students’ specific knowledge of words. Specific knowledge relates to the spelling and meaning of individual words.

**Basics of Word Study**
Word study evolved from over three decades of research that explored the developmental aspects of spelling. These researchers, including the authors of the text *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction*, examined the three layers of English orthography—alphabet, pattern, and meaning. In their research, they found that each layer builds on a previous layer.

The alphabet layer is based on the relationship between letters and sounds. For example, in the word *cat*, a single letter represents each sound. Students blend the sounds for /c/, /a/, and /t/ to read the word *cat*. In the word *chip*, students still hear three sounds even though there are four letters, because the
first two function as one sound. These examples show how to create words by combining letters, either singly or in pairs, to form sounds from left to right.

The pattern layer overlies the alphabet layer because there’s not always a single sound for each letter. In the English language, single sounds are sometimes spelled with more than one letter or are affected by other letters. When students look beyond single letter and sound match-ups, they must search for patterns. For example, a final e will often make the preceding vowel stand for the long vowel sound, like in the word *cape*. It follows a pattern of *consonant-vowel-consonant-silent e*.

The meaning layer focuses on groups of letters that represent meaning directly. Examples of these groups or letters include prefixes and suffixes. Here is a specific example of how meaning works in the spelling system. Take the prefix *re*—. Whether students pronounce it as *ree* like in *rethink* or *ruh* as in *remove*, its spelling stays the same because it directly represents meaning.

**What is the synchrony of literacy development?**

Dr. Donald R. Bear, one of the authors of *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction*, found in his research that when teachers conduct word study with students, they address the learning needs in all areas of literacy, because development in one area relates to development in other areas. This harmony in development is described as the synchrony of reading, writing, and spelling development.

| **Look for what students use but confuse.** | Teach developmentally, based on what students know (Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development). Develop the spelling features that students are using but confusing, rather than what they totally neglect. |
| **A step backward is a step forward.** | Build a firm foundation by contrasting new spelling features with a known feature when developing sorts. Begin word study activities where students will experience success. |
| **Use words students can read.** | Learning to spell requires students to match spoken language with orthography. Select words that students can read out of context. |
| **Compare words that “DO” with words that “DON’T.”** | Use students’ spelling errors to help determine contrasts for sorts to help students figure out their confusions. |
| **Sort by sound and sight.** | Some sorts can be visual pattern sorts and sound sorts. Students need to integrate both patterns in their orthographic knowledge. |
| **Begin with obvious contrasts.** | New sorts should contain obvious contrasts. Work toward finer distinctions. Start with general, gross differences and move toward more specific discriminations. |
| **Don’t hide exceptions.** | As students make generalizations, exceptions will emerge. Sometimes words in the “oddball” category present a pattern of their own. |
| **Avoid rules.** | Allow children time to discover consistencies and to make generalizations. Teachers can include specific words to provide opportunities for student to discover consistencies. Rules may be useful once students understand the underlying concepts. |
| **Work for automaticity.** | Sorting with accuracy and speed (automaticity) is an indicator of mastery, which leads to the fluency necessary for proficient reading and writing. Students should keep sorting until they move from hesitancy to fluency. |
| **Return to meaningful texts.** | Reuse meaningful texts for a variety of word hunts or to encourage students to extend a spelling feature from a one-syllable word to a two-syllable word. |
Writing Workshop
Writing Workshop Format

**Mini-Lesson**
(Whole Class)

- Demonstration Writing
- Oral Storytelling
- Interactive Writing
- Shared Writing

**Write and Confer**
(Small Group and Independent Practice)

- Guided Writing
- Independent Writing

**Group Share/Wrap-Up**
(Whole Class)

- Share/Celebrate
- Reinforce
- Discuss
1. **A Meeting/Gathering Place is Established**
   - A space for the class is available where students can gather, close together, and share thinking quickly with a partner during a minilesson.

2. **Mentor Texts are Available**
   - Texts used in minilessons to demonstrate specific writing techniques or to inspire young writers are easily accessible to students.

3. **The Structure of Writing Workshop is Established**
   - Sustained Independent Writing is framed by instruction
     - Minilesson (10 – 20 minutes)
     - Independent Writing (20-30 minutes depending on grade level)
     - Teaching Share and Reflection (5 minutes)
   - Students are engaged in all stages of the writing process.
   - Teachers are meeting with students individually or in groups to differentiate teaching and learning.
   - Weekly schedules allow for regular writing workshops (as close to daily as possible) to establish consistent routines and habits.

4. **All Students Maintain a Writing Folder or a Writer’s Notebook with Entries**
   - A folder/notebook is a place to collect the writer’s work over time.
   - The kindergarten writer will maintain a Drawing and Writing Book early in the year and a writing folder later in the year, as appropriate.
   - Folders in grades K – 2 house writing booklets focusing on different genres (some will be more developed than others.)
   - Entries in notebooks (grades 3-5) may be stories, pieces of stories, a portion of the writer’s knowledge about a topic, a poem or part of a poem, etc. Folders house longer drafts of entries taken from the notebook.

5. **Student Engagement During Independent Writing**
   - Students choose their own topics within the genre being taught.
   - Students are given extensive opportunities to draft before a piece is taken through the writing process. Not all pieces are taken to publication.
   - Students have regular opportunities to talk about their writing with others.
   - Students build stamina for writing for longer blocks of time across the year.

6. **Evidence of Teaching and Learning**
   - Anchor charts represent current teaching and learning, focusing on writing habits, techniques, and strategies.
   - Students have pieces of writing in their folders/notebooks that reflect instruction.
   - Teachers keep records of student learning.

7. **Student Understanding**
   - Can students articulate the purpose of the Writer’s Notebook/Writing Folder?
   - Can students articulate the rituals and routines of Writing Workshop?
   - Can students explain how they use the anchor charts?
   - Can students point to examples of particular writing techniques in their own pieces?
## Teacher and Student Roles within Writing Workshop K-5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the teacher doing?</th>
<th>Whole Group Opportunities for Teaching and Learning</th>
<th>What is the student doing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Providing explicit instruction through modeling and demonstration. | Modeled Writing  
Interactive Writing  
Shared Writing | Participating in thinking, sharing, and discussion. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the teacher doing?</th>
<th>Small Group and Independent Practice Opportunities for Teaching and Learning</th>
<th>What are the students doing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Conducting one-to-one and small group writing conferences | Independent Writing  
Peer Review  
Small Group and Individual Writing Conferences | Writing  
Reviewing writing with peers  
Conferring with teacher |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the teacher doing?</th>
<th>Whole Group Wrap-Up and “Share”</th>
<th>What is the student doing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Reiterating objectives from whole group lesson & providing opportunity for sharing and reflection. | Whole group wrap-up in common meeting area. | Reflecting upon learning.  
Participating in thinking, sharing, and discussion. |
## Components of Writing Workshop K-5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Demonstration Writing**        | The teacher demonstrates how she/he thinks about an idea and then writes it down on the page in front of the children. | • To model how writers go about thinking about an idea  
• To demonstrate the process of writing down one’s thoughts |
| **Shared Writing***              | Teacher and children work together to compose messages and stories; teacher supports process as scribe. | • To support students in composing ideas  
• To demonstrate how students’ thoughts can be written on the page  
• To provide students with opportunities to notice letters, words, and sounds  
• To provide written language resources in the classroom |
| **Interactive Writing***         | Teacher and children compose messages and stories that are written together using a “shared pen” technique that involves children in the writing of the message. | • To support students in composing ideas  
• To demonstrate how students’ thoughts can be written on the page  
• To engage students in applying a skill/strategy to text  
• To demonstrate concepts of print, early strategies and how words work  
• To provide opportunities to hear sounds in words and connect with letters  
• To provide texts that children can read independently  
• To provide written language resources in the classroom |
| **Guided Writing (Small Groups or Conferences)** | The teacher pulls together small, temporary groups of writers to provide explicit teaching based on the writers’ needs at a particular point in time. Sometimes the teacher has noticed students’ needs and forms the groups; at other times, students request group help with some aspect of writing. | • To help writers develop their voice  
• To provide a chance to use writing for different purposes across the curriculum  
• To develop an understanding of the writing process  
• To develop writing skills and strategies  
• To learn how to write in different genres |

*These components are most appropriate in the K-2 classroom.*

Excerpted from:
| **Independent Writing** | Primary children write their own pieces, such as stories, informational pieces, retellings, labels, speech balloons, lists, etc. Grade 3 – 5 students engage in the writing process, sometimes using a writer’s notebook and at other times drafting, revising, editing, or publishing a piece of work. Topics are usually self-selected. The teacher confers with individuals to support and address needs. | • To develop an understanding of what writers do and how they make a place for writing in their lives  
• To provide opportunity for the independent production of written text  
• To provide the chance to use writing for different purposes across the curriculum  
• To increase writers’ abilities to use different forms  
• To learn how to write in different genres  
• To build the ability to write words and use punctuation  
• To foster creativity and the ability to compose  
• To develop an understanding of the writing process  
• To develop writing skills and strategies |
### Writing Workshop Curriculum Calendar Overview (Grades K-5)

**Updated 2011-2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>K</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>September</strong></td>
<td>Launching The Writing Workshop</td>
<td>Launching the Writing Workshop</td>
<td>Launching the Writing Workshop with Small Moments</td>
<td>Launching the Writing Workshop</td>
<td>Launching the Writing Workshop</td>
<td>Launching the Writing Workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>October</strong></td>
<td>Telling and Recording Personal Narratives</td>
<td>Small Moments</td>
<td>Craft of Revision</td>
<td>Raising the Quality of Narrative Writing</td>
<td>Raising the Quality of Memoir or The Art of Writing Well</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>November</strong></td>
<td>Writing for Readers</td>
<td>Authors as Mentors</td>
<td>Raising the Quality</td>
<td>Breathing Life into Essays</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>December</strong></td>
<td>Small Moment Personal Narratives</td>
<td>Craft of Revision</td>
<td>Nonfiction: Informational Texts</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>January</strong></td>
<td>Writing for Readers</td>
<td>Nonfiction Writing: Reports or Expert Projects (See A Quick Guide to Teaching 2nd Writers)</td>
<td>Breathing Life into Essays</td>
<td>Nonfiction: Feature Article</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>February</strong></td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>March</strong></td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Persuasive Writing: Persuasive Letters and Reviews (See A Quick Guide)</td>
<td>Test Preparation: Comparison of Genres</td>
<td>Essay: Opinion Editorial</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>April</strong></td>
<td>Poetry</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>May</strong></td>
<td>Nonfiction (Procedures)</td>
<td>Authors as Mentors</td>
<td>Writing and Revising Realistic Fiction (See A Quick Guide)</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>Non-Fiction</td>
<td>Response to Literature: Book Reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>June</strong></td>
<td>Personal Narrative Writing</td>
<td>Independent Projects: Writers Choose a Genre</td>
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</table>

**Kindergarten and Grade One Teachers:** Students should have the opportunity to express their opinion in writing about books they are reading and topics they are studying. This can be done in response to their reading and content area studies and is not listed as a separate unit of study during the writing workshop.
Assessment
Effective reading assessment must be linked to a construct of reading or a belief about what is important to measure. The Reading Framework for the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) conceptualizes reading in the following manner: “Reading is an active and complex process that involves understanding written text, developing and interpreting meaning, and using meaning as appropriate to type of text, purpose, and situation” (NAEP, 2008). The assessments given to elementary students in our schools follow from this belief that reading is a dynamic and goal-oriented process.

The Plymouth Public Schools’ ELA Department believes in the use of formative and summative assessment to monitor and document progress and performance. The three assessment periods (September, January and June) designated throughout the year provide a standardized mechanism for assessing student progress toward grade-level standards. Anecdotal notes and running records, however, provide the teacher with the essential information needed during the intervals between assessment periods to inform daily instruction as well as report card decisions.

A garden analogy helps to show the importance of both formative and summative assessment. If we imagine students as plants in a garden, summative assessment is the process of measuring the plants. It might be interesting to compare and analyze measurements, but, in themselves, these do not affect the growth of the plant. Formative Assessment is the equivalent of feeding and watering the plants appropriate to their needs – directly affecting their growth.

Peter Afflerbach (2010) states that reading assessment should, “tell the story of developing readers’ learning and mastery of the mechanics of reading and of their ability to construct literal, inferential, and critical understandings…” (p. 1). The following section provides a brief description of some of the key assessments currently utilized by elementary teachers in our schools. Descriptions are taken from the program or resource author or publisher.

**Benchmark Assessment System (BAS)**

*K-3*  
The Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) is a formative reading assessment comprised of high-quality, original titles or “little books” divided evenly between fiction and nonfiction. The assessment measures decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills for students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The set of books, recording forms, and other materials serve as an assessment tool for teachers, literacy specialists to use in determining students’ developmental reading levels for the purpose of informing instruction and documenting reading progress.

**Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)**

*K-1 for all students; Grades 2-3 as appropriate*  
DIBELS are a set of standardized, individually administered measures of early literacy development. They are designed to be short (one minute) fluency measures used to regularly monitor the
development of pre-reading and early reading skills. DIBELS are comprised of seven measures to function as indicators of phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, accuracy and fluency with connected text, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. DIBELS were designed for use in identifying children experiencing difficulty in acquisition of basic early literacy skills in order to provide early support as needed.

**Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI)**

**Gr. 4 & 5**
The Qualitative Reading Inventory-4 is an individually administered informal reading inventory designed to provide diagnostic information about conditions under which students can identify words and comprehend text successfully and conditions which appear to result in unsuccessful word identification, decoding, and/or comprehension. It is designed to provide a variety of opportunities to observe a student’s reading behavior and interactions with both narrative and expository text.

**Words Their Way Spelling Inventory**

**K-5**
The Primary Spelling Inventory, Elementary Spelling Inventory, and Upper-Level Spelling Inventory consist of lists of words specially chosen to represent a variety of spelling features at increasing levels of difficulty. They include orthographic features that are most helpful for identifying a stage and planning instruction. The inventories are administered to the whole class or to students in small groups. The results are analyzed to obtain a general picture of each student’s orthographic development and form instructional groups based on their designated stage.


Using Assessment Data to Inform Instruction

What are the strategies good readers use?

What does the focus lesson look like? What text will I use?

Ongoing Assessment
Running Records
Conferences
Student Work

What strategies do the students need to learn?

How many students need to learn that strategy? What component of the Balanced Literacy Model will I teach through?
Support for Teachers
Professional Development in the area of literacy in the Plymouth Public Schools also follows a gradual release model:

- **District-Inservice Sessions** (“Whole Group Instruction”): Throughout the year, a number of the district in-service sessions (held on half days) are designed with a literacy focus. Just as with whole group sessions with students, these large sessions with teachers are useful in creating a common language and a common set of experiences. These sessions are intended to lay the groundwork for the critical work of professional development that occurs in buildings.

- **School-Based Professional Development Sessions** (Differentiated “Small Group Instruction”): School-based professional development sessions support the literacy initiatives of the district but are tailored to meet the needs of teachers in individual buildings. These sessions bring together grade-level colleagues and are designed and facilitated by the district literacy coaches. On average, teachers will participate in half-day sessions with grade level colleagues three times a year (fall, winter, spring).

- **Individual Coaching and Support** (“Independent Practice”): Individualized coaching is a model of professional development that is based on the idea that one size does not fit all. No “training” or workshop will address the different needs of each teacher in a community. While the coaching model has many different facets and variations in terms of support, coaching works best under the following conditions:
  
  o Teachers identify a focus area for study, reflection, inquiry and feedback.
  o The coach provides the setting, resources, facilitates discussion and inquiry, shares best practices/common pitfalls/suggestions and helps to plan for next steps in the classroom. This model is based on the understanding that teachers know themselves best—they know their strengths, they know where they need support—they just need the time, resources and support to continue to grow as teachers. The coach is not “the expert”, but rather a resource.

Specifically, coaches are available to support teachers by:

  o Working side-by-side in the classroom (i.e. modeling, co-teaching, co-planning, conferring together with the teacher and his/her students)
  o Helping teachers implement new initiatives and curricula
  o Helping teachers streamline assessment systems and prioritize planning
  o Modeling lessons to help teachers visualize what the new approaches or curricula look like in action
  o Offering study groups based on teacher-identified topics (e.g. implement a management system within Reading Workshop)
  o Arrange for cross-school visits to encourage sharing across buildings
  o Share resources between schools and classroom teachers
  o Find, research and locate resources requested by teachers
  o Share ideas and strategies across schools
• **Consultation with Consulting Teachers of Literacy (CTLs):** CTLs are building-based reading specialists. While their primary role is in providing direct instruction to select groups of students, they also serve as an important resource to teachers. CTLs recommend classroom instructional models and techniques for meeting the needs of diverse learners (including struggling and accelerated students) and provide job-embedded professional development by modeling the use of effective literacy instruction.


**District Resources**

**Reading:**
*The Primary Comprehension Toolkit: Language and Lessons for Active Literacy* by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis

*The Comprehension Toolkit: Language and Lessons for Active Literacy* by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis

*The Continuum of Literacy Learning, PreK-8* by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell

*Houghton Mifflin Reading* (2005)

*Houghton Mifflin Invitations to Literacy* (2001)

*Spaces and Places* by Debbie Diller

*Do-Able Differentiation* Michael Opitz and Michael Ford

*The Interactive Read-Aloud* by Linda Hoyt

**Assessment:**
*Benchmark Assessment Systems 1 and 2* by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell

*Qualitative Reading Inventory-4* by Lauren Leslie and JoAnne Caldwell

**Word Study:**
*Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary and Spelling Instruction* by Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton and Johnston

**Writing:**
*Talking, Drawing, and Writing* by Mary Ellen Giacobbe

*Teaching Kindergartners to Love Writing Poetry* by Regie Routman

*Units of Study for Primary Writing*, by Lucy Calkins (Teachers College Reading & Writing Project)

*Units of Study for Teaching Writing, 3-5* by Lucy Calkins (TC Reading & Writing Project)

*A Quick Guide to Teaching Second-Grade Writers with Units of Study* by Lucy Calkins

*6 + 1 Traits of Writing: The Complete Guide, Grades 3-6* by Ruth Culham

*Write Traits Classroom Kits (3-5)* by Great Source